

Chapter 10

Women's Representation in Selected Ethiopian Electronic Media and Its Implication for Sustainable Development

Wubalem Arefaine Hagos
Ethiopian Civil Service University, Ethiopia

ABSTRACT

There are many dynamics for women misrepresentations in Ethiopian electronic media. This chapter contributes to exploring how Ethiopian electronic media report and present women's issues. The chapter focuses on selected broadcast media mainly on three FMs in Addis Ababa predominantly on their news pieces and women's program. Accordingly, media gave much emphasis to the categories under which women are mostly depicted as victim, dependent, involved in small-scale activity, etc. Thus, women are not portrayed in a way that shows their diverse contributions to the society and also the media portrayed the image of women in a more stereotypical way. Therefore, despite women's vital and multiple roles to play in achieving sustainable development, the fact of their issues and concerns being not properly presented and covered adequately brought a great repercussion on gender equality and this reflects the unsustainability patterns of development which intensify gender inequalities.

INTRODUCTION

In most societies, gender relations are characterized by imbalance of power between men and women. Hence, women are everywhere undervalued in relation to men. So, this characterization, depict women as sex objects. According to Tuchman (1987) cited in Renzetti & Curran (1995, p.96), with respect to the treatment of women, the media are guilty of symbolic annihilation. That is, the media traditionally have ignored, trivialized or condemned women. Similarly, Matthew (2017) asserted that inadequate women's coverage seems to be a worldwide phenomenon.

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Moreover, Gallagher has shown that, the depiction of women in mass media is remarkably consistent throughout the world. The overall picture highlighted the negative features of media treatment of women. These include media under-representation of women and women's concerns; the use of women as a commodity in advertising, an ambivalent attitude to women evident in certain stereotyped images in which women were exclusively and unalterably "good" and "pure" or definitely and unchangeably "bad" and "immoral" (Gallagher, 1987, p.77). Similarly, according to Anna (2016), in addition to women under representation on TV, women are presented only in 10% of themes concerning their issues.

In support of the above argument, print and electronic media in most countries do not provide a balanced picture of women's diverse lives and contributions to society in a changing world. Electronic media is also depicting women as scrupulous, religiously intolerant, and craving only for their family, politically naive, socially inevitable and culturally ultra-modern. In recent time, sex and sensation are becoming the primary motivations behind any reportage, where women are used as commodity (Himashree, 2014, p.5)

Where important women's activities are covered, they are often simultaneously undermined or demeaned. So, it is important to realize that traditional and transnational ideologies of gender oppression did negatively affect women's roles and representations in media (Creedon, 1993).

Media is a visible barrier or promoter of the challenges facing women today. The presentation of Ethiopian women in the media furnishes a critic of current practices of broadcasting about the image, role and social conditions of women, and provokes rethinking, offering indicators for action which could help to overcome the barriers to women's aspirations and self-actualization (Almaz, 1991, p.4). Rahel, as cited in Tsehay, pointed out that the media has to be able to overcome stereotype prejudices, which do a disservice to both women and men. Hence, mass media depicts women and men in peculiar ways; those descriptions have formed stereotypes in different ways (Tsehay, 1991, p.68). To substantiate the above arguments, liberal feminists asserted that women are depicted in mass media as wives, mothers, and daughters, girlfriends; as working in traditionally female jobs like secretary, nurse and or sex objects. It is considered that media perpetuate sex role stereotypes because they reflect dominant social values and also because male media producers are influenced by these stereotypes (Himashree, 2014, p.6).

Although, mass media play a unique and important role in the shaping of a society where men and women enjoy equal rights, mass media, however, continue to reproduce discriminatory stereotypes about women and portray them in sexist ways. As a rule, women are portrayed in a narrow range of characters in mass media (Anna, 2016).

Since Ethiopia has been dominated by a patriarchal society, women have been given a subordinate place let alone their concern is represented in media. Hence, they have been negatively affected by the system. Few studies were conducted on gender and media in general, but specifically, there is no in-depth research carried out on how women issues are reported and presented in the media by linking with sustainable development.

Hence, it is important to look into how gender roles are displayed in news, programs, and entertainment of the media and its implications for sustainable development. Therefore, this study aims to look at how electronic media are reporting and presenting women's issues and explore its implications for sustainable development with the purpose of filling the gap left by previous studies by addressing the following research questions: a) how do the electronic media report and reflect women's issues? b) How media perceive the images of women and their concerns and represent to the public? c) How is the feminine identity constructed within the media? d) Could it be possible to achieve sustainable development without gender equality?

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