



**PRIMED**

PROTECTING INDEPENDENT MEDIA  
FOR EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT

**GLOBAL**

# Gender equality in the media

LEARNING BRIEF



**2024**



## CONTENTS

<b>About PRIMED</b>	3
<b>Executive summary</b>	4
<b>Background</b>	5
<b>Main findings</b>	9
Gramer Kagoj case study	9
Classic Radio case study	11
ARTS TV case study	12
<b>Conclusions</b>	14
General conclusions	14
Strategies to improve gender representation in the workplace	15
Strategies to improve gender representation in media content	16
Strategies to improve gender representation among media audiences	17
<b>Recommendations</b>	18



## About PRIMED

**The programme Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development (PRIMED) was designed to support public interest media content provision in three very different media environments –Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone. It also aimed to create and share learning to contribute to a more targeted and impactful global approach to supporting media outlets.**

A three-year programme that ran from late 2020, PRIMED was implemented by a consortium of media support organisations with expertise in different aspects of media and development. These were BBC Media Action (consortium lead), Free Press Unlimited (FPU), International Media Support (IMS) and Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF), with further contributions from Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), and The Communication Initiative (CI).

PRIMED sought to address the challenges facing public interest media at both outlet and environment level. The programme involved working with selected media outlets to increase

resilience to political and economic pressures. At the same time, it supported the development of information ecosystems that enable a better flow of trusted public interest media content. Gender equality and inclusion were integrated across the programme.

To create and share learning about effective media support in different contexts, PRIMED used the insights and data gained during its implementation phase to prepare this series of learning briefs. These attempt to answer key questions in relation to independent media and media support:

- The financial viability of media organisations (led by MDIF)
- The effectiveness of public subsidies to public interest media (led by BBC Media Action)
- Improving gender equality in media workplaces, content and audiences (led by FPU)
- The role of local coalitions in strengthening media ecosystems (led by IMS)



## Executive summary

This brief seeks to answer the following learning question:

**“What business and management models/ organisational and team structures, competencies and processes have the potential to improve gender equality in the workplace, gender-sensitive programming and engagement with diverse audiences?”**

To try to do so, Free Press Unlimited (FPU) focused on the experiences of three PRIMED media partners that actively engaged in mainstreaming gender issues across different areas, and in very different contexts and institutional realities.

These partners are:

- **Gramer Kagoj**, a regional newspaper in Bangladesh
- **African Renaissance Television Services (ARTS TV)**, an independent TV station in Ethiopia
- **Classic Radio**, a small independent broadcaster in Sierra Leone

In the course of the programme, all three partners undertook specific initiatives to address workplace gender equality, produce more gender-sensitive and gender-balanced content, and to increase their reach and appeal to women.<sup>1</sup>

Analysis of the outlets’ progress towards their gender goals, and their overall gender equality, seems to confirm that a **holistic approach** (working simultaneously to improve gender representation in all three areas, and using **a combination of strategies** in each one) significantly improves the chances of progress, with different interventions and approaches complementing and reinforcing each other. While some strategies appeared to be more effective than others, the progress achieved by PRIMED partners cannot be easily ascribed to any single one, but rather to this combined approach.

Key insights reaffirm the importance of clearly defining gender goals and implementing

practical, achievable initiatives to obtain the desired changes. However, the main differential factor seems to be the level of **commitment from leadership**.

The most effective strategy to improve gender representation in the workplace, at least in the contexts of the media outlets analysed, seems to be **creating dedicated schemes to diversify an organisation’s talent pool, such as fellowships, internships or training programmes exclusively for women**. These work better when accompanied by strategies such as appointing (and empowering) **gender champions** (see page 7), and **gender-sensitive human resources management** (see page 7).

To improve gender representation in media content, the most effective strategy appears to be **regular self-monitoring of content produced**, achieved by implementing the BBC’s 50:50 Project (see page 8) and using quantitative data on gender balance to assess and drive change.

Finally, to improve gender representation among media audiences, the starting point should be an **improved understanding of the needs and interests of existing and potential women audiences**, and translating this into relevant, engaging, representative and trusted content. The analysis summarises the different strategies deployed by the PRIMED partners to this effect. But for various reasons, developing and piloting cost-effective audience research approaches for small and/or resource-deprived media was one of the unfulfilled promises of this programme.

## Background

The 2020 Global Media Monitoring Project data<sup>2</sup> shows that gender disparity remains a significant issue in the media sector – only 25% of individuals featured in newspapers, TV and radio coverage are women, who often are also portrayed in roles that perpetuate historical stereotypes.

Women are also grossly under-represented in the media industry, especially in leadership positions. This limits essential dialogues and perspectives in the media, and therefore also the possibility of correcting these disparities to better serve and engage women. However, extensive research by Luba Kassova<sup>3</sup> shows a “*potential cumulative revenue opportunity of US\$43 billion between 2023 and 2027 and US\$83 billion between 2023 and 2032 for the global newspaper industry*” if they closed gender consumption gaps (for example, bringing women’s newspaper consumption in line with that of men).

### ④ Gender disparity remains a significant issue in the media sector – only 25% of individuals featured in newspapers, TV and radio coverage are women.

PRIMED’s change hypothesis posited that fostering gender equality in the media (both in the workplace and in media content) can benefit women in society by enhancing women’s access to information. In turn, this makes women more likely to engage with the media, reinforcing the case for gender equality. In this context, FPU was asked to answer the question, “*What business and management models/organisational and team structures, competencies and processes have the potential to improve gender equality in the workplace, gender-sensitive programming and engagement with diverse audiences?*”

To do so, FPU worked with nine media outlets in PRIMED countries and developed case studies focusing on three PRIMED partners:

- [Gramer Kagoj](#), a regional newspaper in Bangladesh
- [Classic Radio](#), a small independent broadcaster in Sierra Leone
- [ARTS TV](#), an independent TV station in Ethiopia

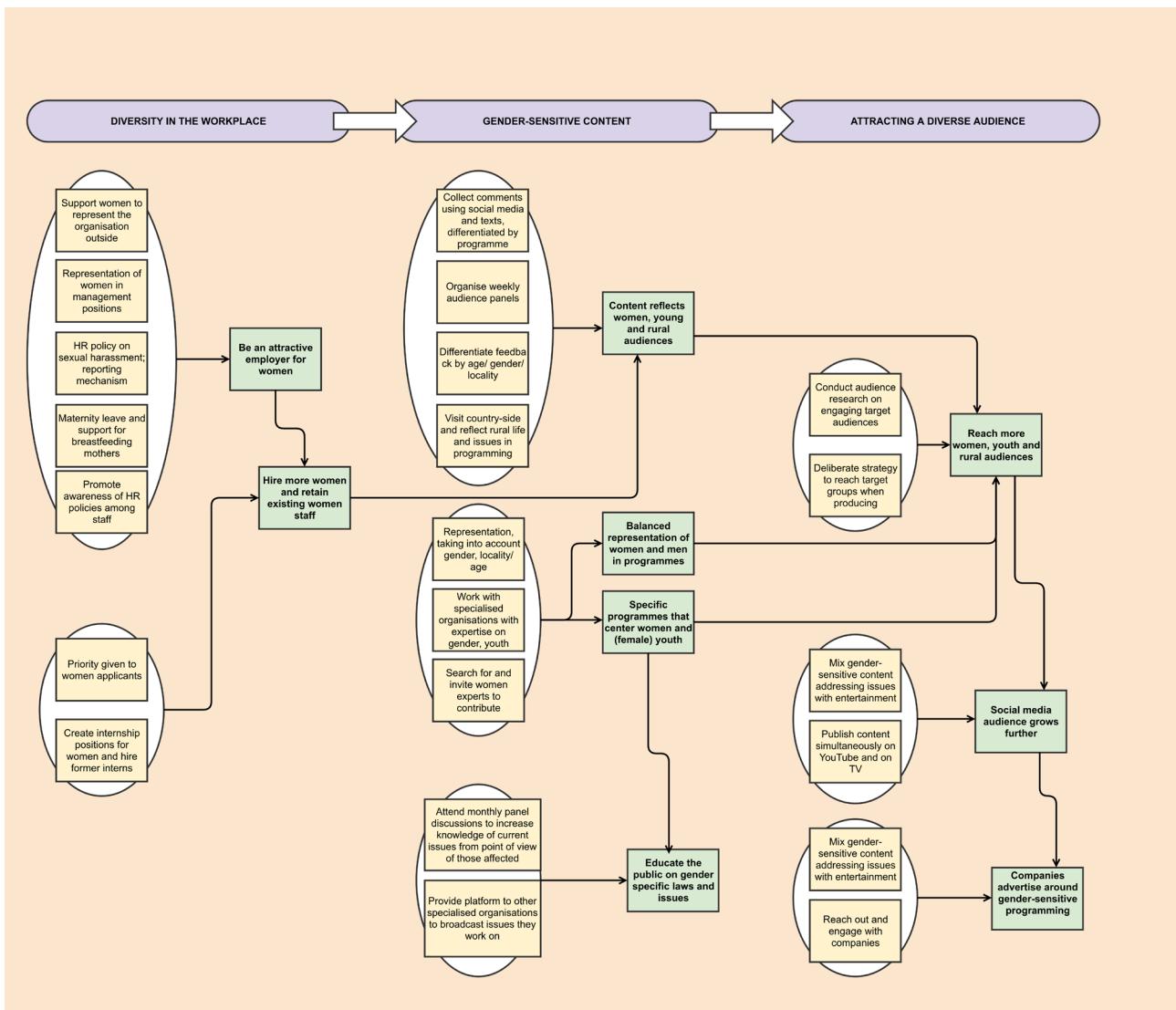
Operating in very different organisational realities and contexts, and with PRIMED encouragement and technical support, all partners, including three partners featured in the case studies, developed and implemented strategies targeting gender equity and equality in the media workplace, gender-sensitive reporting, and expanding their audience diversity. They either used these strategies independently or combined different approaches.

For all nine participating media partners, these strategies started to take shape during the initial phase of the PRIMED programme, with FPU later helping to confirm gender goals and, through several collaborative workshops, elaborate pathways of change for each partner. These resulted in a visual gender pathway of change for each media outlet, showing the activities planned to achieve their goals and classified by area of work (ie workplace, media content and audience). Figure 1 provides an example of the gender pathway of change developed with ARTS TV at the beginning of PRIMED.





Figure 1: ARTS TV original gender pathway of change



Progress tracking mainly involved checking each media outlet's performance against tailored **gender checklists** developed by FPU. The media partners completed these checklists halfway through and at the end of the programme, with FPU acting as an observer and trying to capture any learning where possible.

To assess progress made against initial plans/goals and extract specific lessons, FPU analysed additional data from:

- follow-up conversations with representatives from the media outlets, BBC Media Action country coordinators and other PRIMED partners working with the same media outlets

- consulting BBC Media Action's assessment of the outlets' wider engagement plans, which also contained gender-related goals
- audience research reports
- stakeholder interviews conducted by BBC Media Action
- the results of independent content analysis commissioned from in-country experts (Gramer Kagoj and ARTS TV only)

FPU classified each media outlet's overall progress across the three areas (workplace, media content and audience diversity) using **gender indicators** developed for this learning



question. After analysing data from these sources, FPU compared the main findings to draw programme- and sector-wide conclusions and recommendations.

The impact of gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive approaches on media organisations' financial viability was also addressed to some extent but this was not the focus of the learning. While financial gains and profits certainly act as motivational factors, in this context the business rationale extends far beyond mere monetary advantages. The impact of some of these interventions can go beyond specific, immediate goals to help mainstream gender considerations into broader organisational processes, shifting the focus from purely financial to enhancing the media organisation's overall sustainability and success.

FPU's analysis also benefited from country-specific reports on the status of gender (in) equality in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone, developed during the first year of the PRIMED programme. In addition, during the course of the programme, FPU conducted desk research on the existing strategies and approaches to fostering gender equality in media environments, identifying several that can be used to describe and/or group the interventions pursued by the PRIMED partners. The process also allowed the implementers to identify potentially useful tools to foster gender representation and equality (see Box 1).

In general terms, all PRIMED partners applied what is known as a **diversity engagement approach**. This approach recognises that to

effectively engage a wide range of audiences, especially those whose perspectives are frequently marginalised in the media, media outlets must make diversity and inclusion a fundamental priority throughout all facets of their activities. This involves implementing measures including cultivating a diverse workforce, creating inclusive content and ensuring accessibility for diverse groups of audiences. Achieving this strategy requires a commitment to inclusivity throughout the entire media production process, so both workforces and media content accurately mirror the diverse makeup of the society they serve.

The main specific strategies applied by the PRIMED partners considered for this brief are outlined below.

#### **Gender-sensitive human resources**

**management:** With the full support of management, gender-sensitive human resources policies and processes have the potential to drive change in the workplace. The success of this approach relies on the overall company culture, and its management's commitment to gender equity and inclusivity.

**Dedicated schemes to diversify the talent pool:** Usually in the form of fellowships, internships or training programmes exclusively for women, these schemes can help to develop the skills of women in the media as well as advance their position in organisations over time, making them more likely to stay in the sector, and/or be media owners. Beyond enriching women's capabilities, these programmes can also help target women who would not otherwise have the means or confidence to practice journalism or work in the media sector. This is especially important in contexts where women planning to have careers in a media outlet experience discrimination.

**Gender champions:** The objectives of a gender champion's work can be determined by an organisation's specific needs but they are typically a point of contact for gender issues. They prioritise gender equality in the workplace, help secure budgets for programmes and studies focusing on gender, and create allyship and awareness around gender issues. A gender champion can be a specific position in a media outlet or an additional responsibility for a staff member.

**4 The impact of some of these interventions can go beyond specific, immediate goals to help mainstream gender considerations into broader organisational processes, enhancing the media organisation's overall sustainability and success. 7**



**Gender-sensitive editorial guidelines:** Having gender-sensitive editorial guidelines facilitates efforts in producing gender-sensitive and gender-balanced content. Gender-sensitive approaches are essential in professional media production – gender must be considered at all times to ensure appropriate gender representation in content, and to appeal to gender-balanced audiences.

**Gender content monitoring:** This methodology can be used in many contexts and for different periods of time to provide critical data on gender representation in media content. Monitoring can be external or internal – both approaches were applied in the PRIMED programme. As part of the project, FPU supported the Dhaka-based South Asia Center for Media in Development (SACMID)<sup>4</sup> to develop gender content monitoring tools and track the performance of six Bangladeshi media houses (including three PRIMED partners). The results of this monitoring were used to create a dialogue with media houses' editors on how

gender-sensitive their content was, and possible ways to improve their gender awareness. In Sierra Leone and Ethiopia, PRIMED media partners were encouraged to adopt the methodology of the BBC's 50:50 Project (see Box 1).

**Improving audience understanding and engagement:** Understanding the makeup and the needs of a media outlet's audiences is key to being able to attract them. This is particularly important to engage audiences who are underserved by (or struggle to access) media content, a group that often includes women. This requires comprehensive and diligent data collection, for example through (commissioned) audience research reports, focus group discussions and key stakeholder interviews, as well as creating mechanisms for better audience engagement, for instance, by adjusting content formats, content, writers and visual representation to better reflect women and their interests.

### Box 1: Tools to advance gender equality in media workplaces and content

**BBC 50:50 Project:** A voluntary system of self-monitoring designed to increase representation of women in media content. Central to this is collecting data on women voices featured in content, but only taking into account controllable factors (ie the number of women among contributors that can be controlled, beyond the integral actors in a news story).

**PublishHer's Diversity and Inclusion Diagnostic Toolkit:** Developed in 2019 by a community of women publishing leaders as a gender mainstreaming process for the publishing industry. This toolkit offers ways to improve gender equality, ranging from recruitment to retention, and from broad company values to accountability within senior leadership.

**UNESCO's Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media:** Published in 2012, this set of indicators aims to boost gender equality and women's empowerment in all types of media organisations. It also offers verification methods for organisations' self-assessment and serves as a self-audit tool covering different operational areas. Some of the indicators were used by FPU in its tailored checklists for the gender component of the PRIMED programme.

**The Gender, Independence and Professionalism Label:** Created by the media development organisation Tuwindi, this quality standard is awarded to media organisations in Mali that can prove their commitment to gender equality by meeting at least 21 of 30 requirements. Rather than just highlighting media organisations' shortcomings in terms of gender equality, this label is designed as a constructive support system to facilitate improvement – including women representing at least 30% of a media company's leadership.

## Main findings

### Gramer Kagoj case study

Gramer Kagoj is a prominent regional paper in Jessore, Bangladesh, a country with stark gender disparities in its media landscape. With a population of more than 170 million, there are approximately only 300 women journalists. Depending on the sources, this amounts to 5–13% of the country's total journalists.<sup>5</sup> And only 16% of individuals featured in media content are women, according to the most recent Global Media Monitoring Project study.<sup>6</sup>

Not surprisingly, the situation at Gramer Kagoj was not very different at the start of the PRIMED programme, with only two women employed as full-time staff (8% of the total). Women employees included the owner/editor's spouse who nominally holds the role of deputy editor but is not involved in editorial matters. The second position was a junior reporter, the only woman reporter in Jessore at the time.

To **improve workplace diversity**, Gramer Kagoj used a combination of gender-sensitive human resource management, appointing gender champions and creating an internship programme exclusively for women.

Initiatives to create an attractive working environment for women included building specific toilet facilities for women and developing safety protocols for working night shifts in the field. While the outlet still lacks a formal human resources policy, it has taken steps to address language sensitivity issues and to prohibit sexist

and abusive language in the workplace. Two gender champions (a man and a woman) were designated to lead gender initiatives and address workplace safety, including reporting any cases of gender-based harassment. Finally, in response to a shortage of experienced journalists in Jessore, Gramer Kagoj developed an internship programme exclusively for women.

All of this helped increase the number of women in full-time positions from two to five (20% of the outlet's full-time staff.) At the end of the PRIMED programme Gramer Kagoj also had three journalism trainees on probation and had hired two women in part-time roles in the accounts and circulation departments. In terms of having women in leadership positions, the only promotion registered during the PRIMED programme was appointing a woman reporter to digital team lead. The organisation cited the lack of qualified women journalists in the region as a reason for this limited progress.

However, these modest changes are quite significant in the context of Bangladesh, and Jessore in particular. They can also serve as a catalyst as greater visibility of women making careers at the newspaper may attract new talent to the outlet, eventually leading to the promotion of more women into decision-making positions.

To **improve gender inclusivity and sensitivity in its content**, Gramer Kagoj benefited from the drafting of gender-sensitive guidelines, training in gender-sensitive reporting and external gender content monitoring provided by SACMID. SACMID also made a Women's Experts Database available to Gramer Kagoj, which the outlet updated and started using.

Despite all these efforts, evidence of positive change in this media outlet's content is not as clear cut as in its workplace. According to SACMID, Gramer Kagoj stood out as the outlet that presented the greatest number of stories challenging gender stereotypes (27% of the total number of stories). However, Gramer Kagoj's data did not reflect improvement in the percentage of women quoted in its stories, either generally or as expert sources. The outlet contends that using the Women Experts Database helped increase the percentage of women spokespeople featured in its reporting from 16% in April 2022

 **These modest changes are quite significant in the context of Bangladesh, and Jessore in particular. They can also serve as a catalyst as greater visibility of women making careers at the newspaper may attract new talent.** 



to 32.2% in January 2023, while the percentage of directly quoted women's voices rose from 14% to 25% during the same period. Assessing progress towards this indicator using Gramer Kagoj data is difficult because it has not been measured consistently.

Concurrently, audience research revealed that Gramer Kagoj's readers recognised and appreciated its new practice of not naming victims of abuse, as its editorial guidelines explicitly prohibit publishing "*the names and identities of survivors/victims, especially children and women, in cases where this can make them more vulnerable*". This practice seems to have played a pivotal role in the slight improvement in the outlet's gender representation and inclusivity, as revealed by audience research.

However, readers did not report improvements in Gramer Kagoj's overall portrayal of women. This can be partly attributed the length of the newspaper halving during the Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in eliminating a section highlighting women's issues from the print version. Respondents do not seem to have noticed the outlet's efforts to counterbalance this on its digital platforms (for instance by showcasing women role models through a month-long series of digital videos, and introducing a Facebook show focused on women's health). Reflecting this, independent content analysis found limited or no progress in gender sensitivity in Gramer Kagoj's print version but gave its digital platforms a higher score.

There was limited data to assess the impact of these efforts **in terms of increasing audience diversity, specifically appealing more to women.**

BBC Media Action audience research provided some insights, with data on audience members' perceptions on trust, relevance, engagement and voice in relation to the outlet's content disaggregated by gender and urban/rural location. However, most Gramer Kagoj efforts to reach and build trust with diverse audiences were largely limited to its digital platforms. Progress towards increasing women's readership of the print version (the baseline was 35% and the target was 40%) could not be assessed because the outlet did not collect this data consistently and PRIMED had no means to do so. Based on anecdotal evidence, Gramer Kagoj

reported an increase in women readers of the print edition, but the research team was not able to verify this claim independently.

However, analysis of audience engagement with Gramer Kagoj on Facebook suggests a positive trend. The percentage of its women followers on the platform increased from 10% (of a total of 19,100) in April 2021 to 18.9% (of a total 305,000) by June 2023. Gramer Kagoj attributes this to the targeted promotion of content to appeal to women, introducing women-oriented shows, highlighting women's voices in content, and using gender-sensitive language.

Gramer Kagoj also proactively engaged women readers during user testing of its new website and analysis of social media audience preferences, which were conducted with PRIMED technical support. The outlet also claims that it ensured a balanced representation of men and women readers when seeking feedback, and sought their input on issues including show design, title and timing when planning and launching various social media shows.

Assessing the **impact of business sustainability and viability efforts in relation to gender interventions** is challenging. PRIMED's financial goals, focusing on monetising digital platforms, were only partially achieved despite a 1,000% increase in digital operation revenues, largely driven by the monetisation of Facebook. However, there is no evidence of the impact of increased audience diversity on increased revenue, since a significant portion of Facebook revenue is linked to royalties on viral content used by other publishers and paid through the platform's rights management system.

Significantly, audience research also uncovered the fact that people would not pay for news content in Bangladesh's current culture, and do not feel it is their responsibility to support a newspaper. One research participant stated that she and other readers would probably look online for free news if the cost of purchasing the newspaper exceeded their budget. This important issue needs to be taken into consideration when developing a content monetising business strategy, and when assessing the potential impact of improved audience representation on the sustainability and viability of any media outlet.



## Classic Radio case study

The media landscape of Sierra Leone mirrors the country's broader gender imbalances and societal challenges. A large majority of the population does not consume media regularly, and when they do, they tend to prefer radio. Media consumption is also lower among women than among men. The media sector itself is also male dominated, particularly when it comes to leaders. With notable exceptions, most women in the industry face sexism and are assigned "soft" roles, such as generating non-controversial news pieces or soliciting adverts from potential advertisers.<sup>7</sup>

### Despite some recent progress, challenges also persist in producing gender-sensitive media content in Sierra Leone. Most of the country's media content is not gender-responsive, with limited efforts to address issues related to gender stereotypes or stigmatisation, or to promote gender equality or empowerment.

Still, many radio stations regularly play a vital role in addressing gender disparities, promoting inclusivity, bridging divides and providing an accessible platform for marginalised communities. In this context, Classic Radio, a commercial station in Sierra Leone's second city, Bo, wholeheartedly embraced the PRIMED-supported pathway of change to improve gender representation in its workplace, media content and among its audiences.

In the area of **gender equality in the workplace**, Classic Radio aimed to progress towards gender parity among its staff. In order to achieve this, the station implemented a series of gender-sensitive human resource management strategies, such as equal opportunities for

professional development, policies against sexist language and flexible working hours for nursing mothers. The outlet also started to advertise volunteer positions exclusively for women. It is also making efforts to reduce its dependence on volunteer journalists,<sup>8</sup> with many women previously working as "volunteers" transitioning to full-time positions.

As a result of these initiatives, by the end of the PRIMED programme, the percentage of women on the staff of Classic Radio increased from 20.8% to 35%, with notable improvements in the number of women managers (57%) and full-time reporters (50%).

To produce **more gender-sensitive media content**, Classic Radio focused on increasing women's voices, using the 50:50 Project gender content monitoring tool to both drive and assess its progress. The station also benefited from gender-sensitive reporting training provided by PRIMED. In addition, Classic Radio set up a dedicated gender desk and appointed a gender champion.

While the station did not achieve its ambitious goal of 50% representation of women in its content, this increased substantially from 27% to 42%, which was attributed to proactive measures. Audience members noticed hearing more women's voices, although men were still perceived as better represented in the station's content. However, audience research conducted by BBC Media Action found a "marked improvement" in the gender representation and inclusivity of Classic Radio's content. But challenges such as power interruptions affected listeners' experience, and the absence of a phone-in segment in the station's output could disadvantage less connected audience members, potentially including women.

Again, there is limited data to assess the impact of all these efforts on audience diversity. BBC Media Action's audience research, which centred around focus group discussions, highlights a high level of satisfaction among women listeners, but does not offer information about the audience makeup. However, as part of its efforts to reach and build trust with more diverse audiences, Classic Radio started to collect audience feedback through various channels, including



Chiefdom Correspondents (communicating directly with the radio's audiences) and social media platforms.

The impact of all these changes over the **sustainability and viability** of Classic Radio is difficult to ascertain, as there is not enough evidence to directly attribute any financial gains to the gender-related changes implemented during the PRIMED programme. Classic Radio credits its journey towards financial sustainability (moving from dependency on the owner's financial support to self-sufficiency) to cultivating strategic partnerships with NGOs working in the region, which has been made possible by the station's perceived greater independence and improved commitment to gender equality, and overall inclusiveness.

### **ARTS TV case study**

Just as in Bangladesh or Sierra Leone, women in the media in Ethiopia face many challenges. Research commissioned by International Media Support (IMS) and Fojo Media Institute highlights significant deficiencies in media workplace policies. Women in the media in Ethiopia face a highly competitive work environment. Alongside insufficient gender-sensitive policies, this hinders women's advancement in the sector. The lack of flexible working arrangements and childcare support in media organisations makes it difficult for women to balance their work and home life, which is still characterised by rigid gender roles in Ethiopia.

Ethiopian media outlets rarely have sexual harassment policies. If cases of sexual harassment happen at work, they are under-reported, male supervisors show insensitive

behaviour and disciplinary committees are said to be ineffective. All of these factors contribute to a lack of institutional trust among women working in the Ethiopian media.

The portrayal of women in the country's media is also characterised by disparity. A rapid assessment of the Ethiopian media environment in 2019<sup>9</sup> found that men were more than twice as likely to appear as news sources (203 women sources were identified compared to 480 men in the surveyed media over three months, a ratio of 30:70). Women were also less likely to be approached by journalists for quotes for online news – 20% of sources in the media surveyed were women.

ARTS TV is an entertainment and news TV channel based in Addis Ababa that started regular transmissions in 2018. Its percentage of women in staff at the beginning of the PRIMED programme was 23% (15 women and 49 men). To **improve gender representation in the workplace**, ARTS TV implemented a series of gender-sensitive human resource management strategies. With the support of the PRIMED programme, it incorporated protocols to address sexual harassment, launched a whistleblower policy and made sure these documents were shared with new employees. ARTS TV now meets the needs of nursing mothers by providing an additional lunch hour during the first three months after maternity leave.

Gender champions appointed at the project's outset include the outlet's general counsel and human resources manager, who are both tasked with handling gender-related responsibilities. While no formal definition or responsibilities has been outlined for these gender champions, they have provided valuable insights into research areas despite not working in the production or news teams. ARTS TV also created internship, volunteer and trainee positions exclusively for women. Three new women employees joined the newsroom during the PRIMED programme, along with women hires in various other roles.

Partly because of this, by October 2023 the proportion of women employees at ARTS TV had increased to 32% (24 women versus 52 men). The current team also reflects improved gender diversity in management roles, although

**4 By October 2023 the proportion of women employees at ARTS TV had increased to 32% (24 women versus 52 men). The current team also reflects improved gender diversity in management roles.**

the highest level management positions are predominantly held by men.

ARTS TV made less progress in producing **more gender-sensitive media content**. It did not implement the BBC 50:50 Project approach because of operational changes and was unable to set up any gender-sensitivity content monitoring systems to source real-time data that could be acted upon to balance gender representation in its programming.

Unsurprisingly, the independent external research of content produced by ARTS TV indicated only a modest increase in the representation of women as news sources. Before the PRIMED interventions, women featured as news sources in just 5.55% of stories. Afterwards, this slightly increased to 6.89%, although gender-related topics were absent from most analysed news stories. This was mirrored by audience research results that only found a “slight improvement” in gender representation. Audience members also pointed out that portrayal of women in ARTS TV news coverage was not always empowering. Audiences reported a marked improvement in the inclusivity of the outlet’s content, but this was driven more by including people from very different backgrounds in the news. Recognising the need for improvement, ARTS TV plans to introduce the BBC 50:50 Project monitoring approach after the PRIMED project ends.

Beyond its news reporting, ARTS TV incorporates gender-related issues into its dramas, which engages a diverse audience. The outlet also broadcasts several externally produced shows that focus on women’s issues, such as Mekent and the PRIMED-supported Mama Africa. Regrettably, a planned collaboration with NGOs to amplify advertising for gender-sensitive programmes has not fully materialised because of modest efforts to expand collaboration with NGOs and a lack of interest in gender among established advertisers. Despite hosting discussions on gender issues and women-centric programmes, ARTS TV lacks an established audience research system, so it is unclear how far its programming addresses the needs of all women, especially young and rural viewers. BBC Media Action’s audience research could not shed any light on this because it focused exclusively on news content.

However, ARTS TV can source some gender-disaggregated audience data by tracking its social media reach. At the end of the programme, women accounted for 37.5% of all views on its main YouTube channel (one of Ethiopia’s most subscribed) and approximately 25.2% of its Facebook audience. Although there is no baseline data to compare these figures with pre-PRIMED percentages, they suggest that ARTS TV is making positive progress in engaging women audience members through digital platforms, which could inspire the outlet to do more to cater to their needs.

Improvements in the overall **financial sustainability** of ARTS TV is anchored in its management’s willingness to introduce changes in its structure and workflows, and take critical steps to improve the outlet’s editorial and production processes. As a result, ARTS TV has realised a substantial growth in its digital presence and public engagement. A noteworthy increase in its subscribers and followers across various social media platforms could be furthered by increasing the gender diversity of the outlet’s digital content and audiences. A stronger sales and marketing department, essential for sustainable growth, could potentially attract new advertisers and secure consistent revenue streams by more effectively promoting ARTS TV’s gender-sensitive programming.



# Conclusions

## General conclusions

PRIMED's experience appears to confirm that a **holistic approach (media organisations working simultaneously to improve gender representation in their workplace, content and audiences, using a combination of strategies) significantly improve their chances of progress**, with different interventions usually reinforcing each other and helping maintain momentum. Although some of the most effective strategies are highlighted below, the progress achieved by PRIMED partners cannot be ascribed to any single approach but to a combination of approaches.

**Clearly defined gender goals, well-planned, practical and achievable interventions, and easily measurable targets are also needed for a media outlet to become more gender-responsive. But the differential factor seems to be the level of commitment from leadership.** In all of the case studies, PRIMED support was mostly limited to training and/or technical support (such as helping to draft gender-sensitive editorial guidelines or human resources policies), not resources to cover the costs associated with any changes. This should probably be remediated in future interventions, but for the PRIMED programme this made it incumbent on the media organisations' leaders to provide those resources (if possible). The most successful cases involved leaders who did that, and more, to support their organisation becoming more gender-sensitive.

The PRIMED experience also confirmed that achieving gender equality in the media is a long-term target. PRIMED programme activities were affected by several factors, including funding cuts and budget uncertainty that forced the cancellation or scaling back of activities included in the media outlets' gender pathways of change. The amount of achievable progress in just two years was always going to be limited but PRIMED has **established a feasible change trajectory with its media partners and has equipped them with essential tools for continual advancement**. How far the media outlets' different interventions can be sustained will depend on the level of commitment of each media outlet's leaders.

Finally, the case studies did not reveal direct links between improved gender representation in a media organisation's workplace content and audiences and its improved financial performance. Both areas probably require more time to make enough progress to be adequately assessed. However, the experience of Classic Radio seems to suggest that where NGOs and development agencies are particularly active, media outlets that show greater commitment to gender-sensitivity and gender balance are more likely to be selected as paid communication partners.

 **The PRIMED experience also confirmed that achieving gender equality in the media is a long-term target.** 



## Strategies to improve gender representation in the workplace

As shown in Table 1, all three case study media organisations applied a variety of strategies to improve gender representation in the workplace,

with the most effective being to diversify their talent pool.

**Table 1: Strategies employed to improve gender equality in the workplace**

	Gramer Kagoj	Classic Radio	ARTS TV
<b>Gender-sensitive human resource management</b>			
Accommodates women's specific physical safety needs (outside of the outlet)	✓		
Accommodates women's specific needs (in the outlet)	✓	✓	✓
Human resources policy has a dedicated section on sexual harassment		✓	✓
Human resources policy has clear sexual harassment reporting protocols	*		✓
Whistleblower policy exists			✓
Human resources policy includes provisions against sexist language		✓	
Promotes current women staff to leadership positions	✓	✓	✓
<b>Dedicated schemes to diversify the talent pool</b>			
Fellowships for women	✓		✓
Internships for women	✓		✓
Volunteer positions for women		✓	
Gender champions	✓	✓	✓

\* Gramer Kagoj has no written human resource management policy, but this task has been assigned to gender champions

**Creating internships, fellowships and volunteer positions exclusively for women was especially effective** across all three media outlets. It was even effective in contexts that are traditionally less conducive to any gender equality changes, as evidenced by the Gramer Kagoj case study.

**Each media outlet's introduction of gender champions also played a pivotal role in monitoring and ensuring the success of all gender-related activities.** At Classic Radio, the gender champion oversees various tasks, including 50:50 Project data collection, ensuring

continuity of efforts beyond the PRIMED programme. At Gramer Kagoj, gender champions take on responsibilities related to women's safety measures and following up any sexual harassment cases, solidifying their role in shaping and maintaining a secure and inclusive environment for women.

**Well-defined human resource management protocols and processes serve as guiding documents for gender champions and help create a more attractive work environment for women**, facilitating the recruitment of new entrants. For example, ARTS TV set good standards for itself by developing a number of

protocols to increase the safety of women in the workplace and making sure these policies are included in the onboarding process for all new hires.

## Strategies to improve gender representation in media content

All three case study media partners deployed a variety of strategies in an attempt to improve the gender balance and representation in their content. Those that generated data to enable the monitoring of the gender balance in their content were probably the most impactful.

**Table 2: Strategies employed to improve gender-sensitive content**

	Gramer Kagoj	Classic Radio	ARTS TV
Gender-sensitive editorial guidelines	✓	✓	✓
Training in gender-sensitive reporting	✓	✓	✓
External gender media monitoring (SACMID)	✓		
Internal gender media monitoring (BBC 50:50 Project)		✓	
Shows/content specifically for women	*	✓	✓
Uses Women Experts Database	✓		

\* Gramer Kagoj tends to broadcast content exclusively for women on its digital platforms. A column exclusively for women in the print version disappeared as a result of cutbacks during the Covid-19 pandemic.

As shown in Table 2, Gramer Kagoj in Bangladesh relied on external quarterly gender media monitoring reports from SACMID to assess the gender sensitivity of its content. In contrast, Classic Radio in Sierra Leone was coached to use BBC's 50:50 Project content monitoring system, which provided a weekly assessment of the gender balance in its output, enabling it to promptly address any identified imbalances.

The 50:50 Project methodology of **self-monitoring turned out to be more effective in understanding and addressing gender balance challenges in media content**. Several factors probably explain this. The consistency and timeliness of the 50:50 Project data collection

provided the editorial team with insights that could quickly inform their decisions. By having control of the process, the outlet also had no reason to doubt the quality of the data. At the same time, setting up and implementing the system proved to be relatively straightforward, requiring minimal financial and human resources, and the monitoring tool could be easily tweaked to offer more nuanced insights.

However, the 50:50 Project data does enable the level of granular understanding of media content offered by the system SACMID used to analyse Gramer Kagoj's content. These insights include the roles in which women are depicted (victim, role model, expert, etc.), and the topics in which they feature.



In contrast, the disadvantage of any media monitoring system implemented by an external party is that it takes place only during significant time intervals (not offering daily or weekly insights) and is relatively finance- and human-resource-heavy. How the external monitor is perceived can also limit the impact of its findings, with media outlets often being quite defensive in the face of perceived external criticism. FPU's final evaluation of SACMID's work found that in the hierarchical system of Bangladesh, its small size and limited experience on the topic of gender equality was perceived as not having the required authority to advise media outlets and other stakeholders on this topic.

## Strategies to improve gender representation among media audiences

**Improved gender representation among audiences requires a good understanding of women's needs and interests, and then translating that into relevant, engaging, representative and trusted content.** Audience research is key for this, but as Table 3 shows all three case study partners relied heavily on BBC Media Action's own audience research for insights into their audiences, as work to develop internal capacities and pilot methods to capture audience insights were dropped as a result of budget cuts.

**Table 3: Strategies employed to diversify media audiences**

	Gramer Kagoj	Classic Radio	ARTS TV
<b>Strategies for improving audience understanding and engagement</b>			
Audience research (external)	✓	✓	✓
Audience research (data analytics of digital content)	*		✓
Disaggregation of data analytics by demographics	*		*
Mechanisms for face-to-face engagement with audience members		✓	
Engagement with the audience members (via SMS or phone-ins during shows, comments on digital platforms)	✓	✓	✓

\* Gramer Kagoj mostly used data analytics on Facebook. ARTS TV used it for most of its platforms, but only disaggregated data by gender and age group, not by urban/rural location.

ARTS TV and Gramer Kagoj focused on learning how to use data from its digital platforms, incorporating social media metrics and Google Analytics as important data sources. Gramer Kagoj also engaged women readers during user testing of its new website and in analysing social media audience preferences, which were conducted with PRIMED technical support.

Additionally, all partners use basic technology (SMS, phone-ins and comments on social platforms) to engage more effectively with their

audiences, with Classic Radio also leveraging its network of Chiefdom Correspondents to receive feedback from the listeners in remote communities.

However, all of these mechanisms offer an incomplete picture of these outlets' audiences and can only yield limited insights. Developing and piloting cost-effective audience research approaches for small, resource-deprived media organisations was one of the unfulfilled promises of PRIMED.

## Recommendations

Based on the experiences of documenting the gender learning question in the PRIMED programme, and collaboration with international partners and media outlets in three countries, the following steps are recommended to improve any future programmes addressing similar challenges.

- Secure buy-in from media outlets' senior management to enhance gender equality across areas including the workplace, content creation and audience engagement.
- Ensure a shared understanding of gender goals and potential pathways for change (and its implications) through collaborative processes with media outlets.
- Consider facilitating financial resources to cover the costs associated with key interventions, and to increase the impact of training and technical support. Effective approaches that media organisations should attempt and/or be encouraged to try could include:
  - Appoint gender champions in the organisation to advocate for gender equity and equality across key areas
  - Address human resource management aspects to become a more attractive employer for all, with a focus on women
- Establish opportunities to attract women and members of other marginalised groups to the organisation
- Enhance the visibility of women in the media outlet, across various roles and responsibilities
- Conduct continuous gender-sensitivity analysis of the content produced and monitoring progress consistently
- Invest in methodologies to gain insights into audience preferences, ensuring the use of gender-sensitive language and the production of targeted content for women
- Make sure goals and targets are measurable, and that monitoring progress does not impose undue demands on media partners.
- In case of budget cuts, offer space for experiments and adapt the programme's success indicators accordingly.



## References

- 1 Although gender is not just male or female and it represents a spectrum, this research uses the umbrella term “women” instead of listing all groups who face more challenges and disadvantages within the wide range of gender identities (for example, transgender women and non-binary people). It uses the word “women” instead of “female”, as a more inclusive term that reflects a broader spectrum of identities. The case studies did not include an analysis of how far gender representation data includes various genders along the gender spectrum.
- 2 Global Media Monitoring Project (2020). *Who makes the news?* 6th report. Available at: [https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/GMMP2020.ENG\\_.FINAL20210715.pdf](https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/GMMP2020.ENG_.FINAL20210715.pdf)
- 3 <https://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020.11.19-The-Missing-Perspectives-of-Women-in-News-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>
- 4 PRIMED partner, a media development organisation based in Bangladesh <https://sacmid.asia/>
- 5 No recent data is available on the proportion of women journalists in the sector, but the Center for Women Journalists in Bangladesh estimates that there are around 6,000 men journalists working in Bangladesh, compared to 300 women (5%), while the Dhaka sub-editors' council and Dhaka Reporters' Unity estimated the number of men journalists as 2,432 and the number of women as 310 (13%) See: Quarratul-Ain-Tahmina (2023) Women and Hijras in Bangladeshi News Media. Available at: <https://mrdibd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Women-and-Hijras-in-Bangladeshi-News-Media-1.pdf>
- 6 Global Media Monitoring Project (2020). *Who makes the news?* 6th report. Available at: [https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/GMMP2020.ENG\\_.FINAL\\_.pdf](https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/GMMP2020.ENG_.FINAL_.pdf)
- 7 See James, W. (2017). Global Women’s Struggle and their Media Manifestations in the Sierra Leone Context: New Challenges or New Opportunities. In R. M’Bayo (Ed.), Sierra Leone State of the Media Report (pp. 32–38). UNDP, MRCG-SL, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. <http://www.mrcgonline.org/media/attachments/2018/12/08/state-of-the-media-2016.pdf>, and Conteh, F. M. (2021). Sierra Leone: Political Economy Analysis of the Media (PRIMED).
- 8 In Sierra Leone, the term “volunteer” is often used to refer to journalists – often experienced professionals working full time – that do not benefit from a full-time employment contract. They only receive a stipend (typically half the minimum wage) and make additional money by taking assignments from commercial or government institutions, and/or product placement or advertising commission.
- 9 Moges, MA (2021) ‘Ethiopian Media : Journalists Trends of Using Sources in Reporting Stories’, Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications, 7, pp. 1–12. Available at: <https://www.athensjournals.gr/media/2020-3852-AJMMC-Moges-04.pdf>.



# PRIMED

PROTECTING INDEPENDENT MEDIA  
FOR EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT



Public interest media are vital to open, just societies – they provide trusted news and information, hold the powerful to account and create a platform for debate. Yet truly public interest media are in crisis.

PRIMED (Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development) is a three-year programme to support public interest media in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone – addressing critical challenges, building resilience, and sharing research and insight about what works.

Led by BBC Media Action, PRIMED partners include Free Press Unlimited, International Media Support and Media Development Investment Fund, with additional support from Global Forum for Media Development and The Communication Initiative.

PRIMED is funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.



To learn more about PRIMED please see [bbcmediaaction.org](http://bbcmediaaction.org) or email [media.action@bbc.co.uk](mailto:media.action@bbc.co.uk).

 [@bbcmediaaction](#)  [@bbcmediaaction](#)  [bbcmediaaction](#)

BBC Media Action is a registered charity in England and Wales (no 1076235) and a company limited by guarantee in England and Wales (no 3521587) at Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London W1A 1AA, United Kingdom.

Front cover photo: Sopna Debnath, from PRIMED partner Gramer Kagoj.

BBC MEDIA ACTION