

# Highlights of the Gender and Media Progress Study 2020



Journalists in Tanzania covering the Gender and News Summit.

Photo by Aikha Kimaro



At 21% women's views and voices in the news have increased by a mere one percentage point in the last five years in the Southern African Development Community (SADC).<sup>1</sup> Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) topics are among the least covered. Gender Based Violence (GBV) accounts for half of SRHR coverage while sexual diversity, harmful practices as well as menstrual health are the least covered at 2% each. Across all topics, women's voices dominate only in news about gender equality (52%). Men's voices dominate in all the SRHR topics, although this is not as disproportionate as in other mainstream topics such as politics and sports.



Fehizora-Rafalimanana journalist from Madagascar interviews Fela Razafinjato President of Sembana-Mijoro an NGO which supports people with disabilities.  
Photo by Gender Links

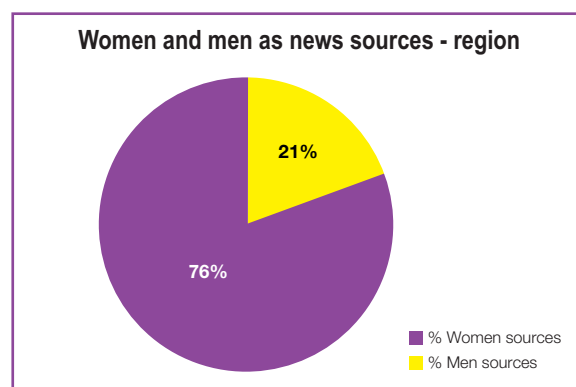
These are the top line findings of the 2020 Gender and Media Progress Study (GMPS), Southern Africa's largest and longest-running research and advocacy initiative on gender equality in the news. Since its inception in 2003, the GMPS has documented changes in relation to gender in news media content.

In 2020 the study paid special attention to SRHR as part of the Southern Africa #VoiceandChoice campaigns undertaken by the Southern African Gender

Protocol Alliance, a network of women's rights networks in 15 SADC countries that campaigned for the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development adopted in 2008. Gender Links (GL) coordinates the Alliance that further campaigned for the Protocol to be aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Alliance works closely with the Gender and Media Diversity Centre (GMDC) that brings together media students, activists and practitioners in its #VoiceandChoice campaign supported by the Amplify Change Fund.

Section J of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA) 1995 and the SADC Gender Protocol (2008) set targets for achieving gender equality in and through the media GMDC teams in 15 Southern African countries monitored 17 872 news items published over the period 1 September-30 September, 2020: 327 of these on SRHR topics.

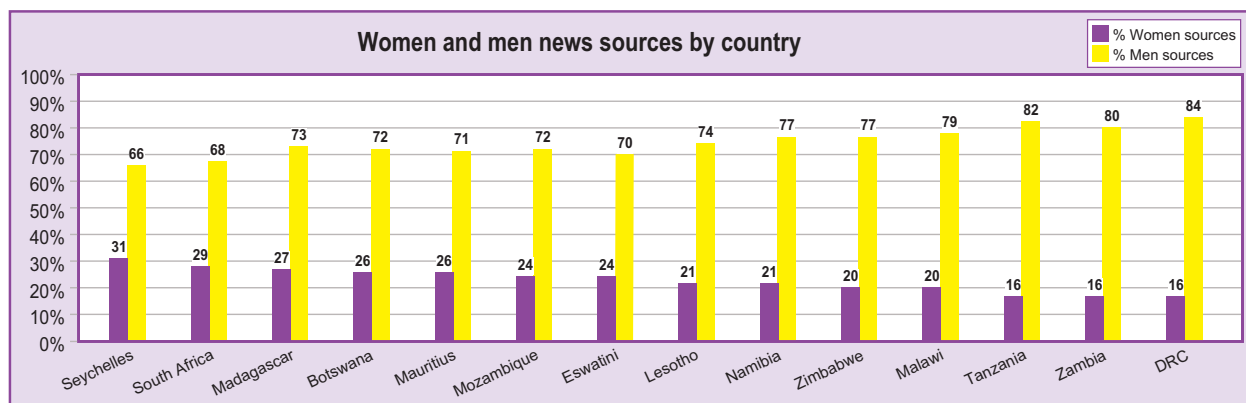
### Women and men news sources in the SADC media



The GMPS 2020 reveals that across the region women make up 21% of the voices heard, read about or seen in print, television and radio news, going up by merely one percentage point from 20% in 2015 to 21% in 2020.<sup>2</sup> These results show a consistent under representation of women's voices in the news media.

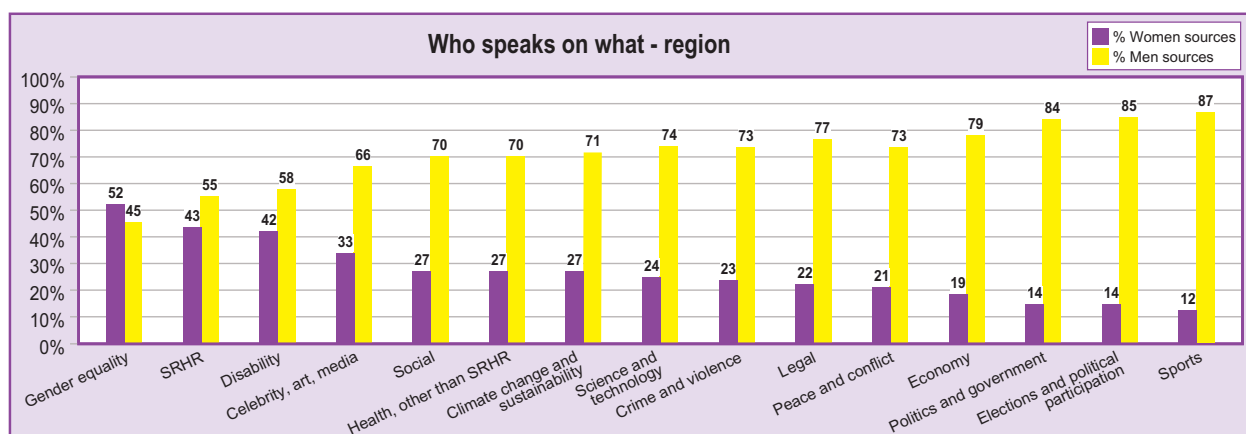
<sup>1</sup> The study did not include Comoros and Angola data is still being verified.

<sup>2</sup> Some sources in the monitoring were neither identified as female nor male



Women sources range from a high of 31% in Seychelles to 16% in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania and Zambia. Only Seychelles surpassed the 30% mark for women sources.

### Who speaks on what



The only topic category in which women (52%) are higher than men is gender equality. Women's views and voices are least heard in news about sports (12%), politics (14%), government and the economy (19%). At 43% women's voices on SRHR are significantly higher than in most other topics. However, given the significance of these issues for women it is pause for thought that gender parity has still not been reached in this topic category.

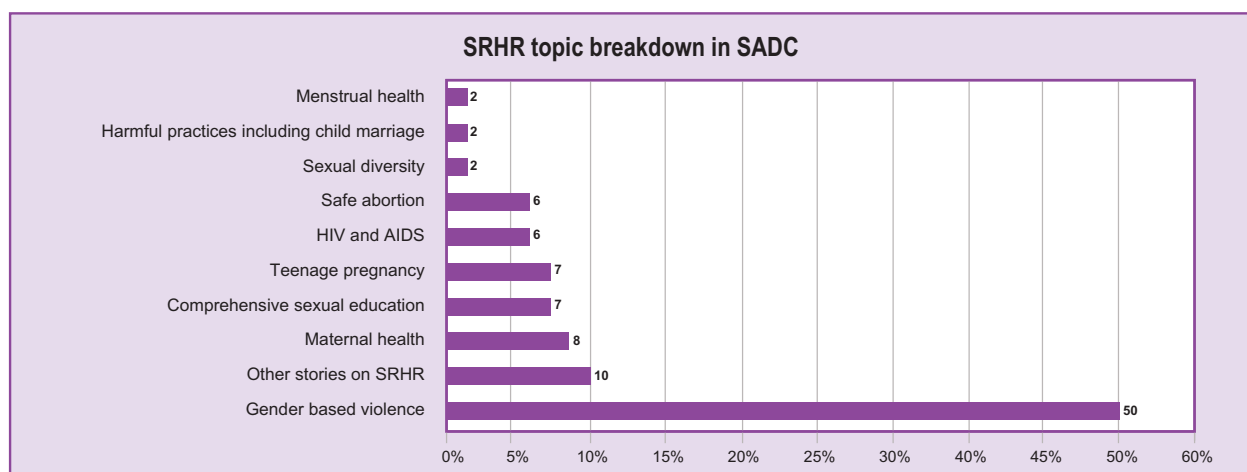
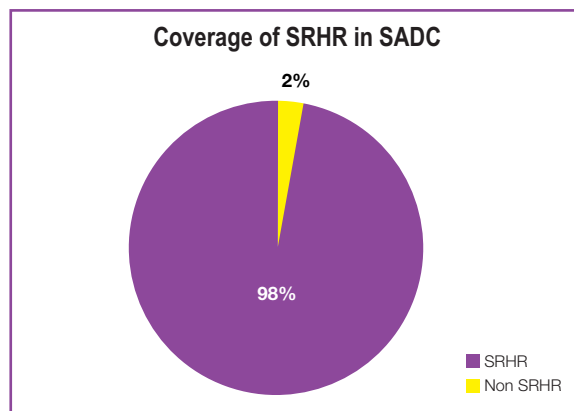
### SRHR and the media in SADC

SRHR is a key indicator of women's rights, voice and choice. According to PANOS "Journalists must contextualise issues and strive for objectivity and balance. Because human rights are more than just legal issues, there must be a reflection on the impact of the promotion or the abuse of human rights on real people's lives." In sub-Saharan Africa media coverage of reproductive health issues is poor due to the weak capacity and motivation for reporting these issues by media practitioners.<sup>3</sup>

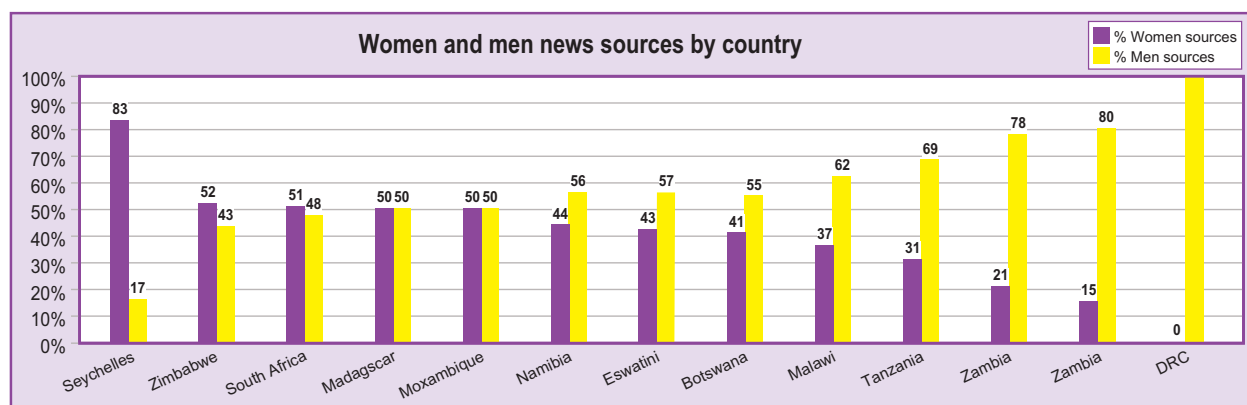
<sup>3</sup> Oranje, Rose & Undie, Chi-Chi & Zulu, Eliya & Crichton, Joanna. (2011). Engaging media in communicating research on sexual and reproductive health and rights in sub-Saharan Africa: Experiences and lessons learned. Health research policy and systems / BioMed Central. 9 Suppl 1. S7. 10.1186/1478-4505-9-S1-S7.



The GMPS 2020 found that SRHR constituted just 2% of all stories covered in the media during the monitoring period. A breakdown of which issues are covered under the SRHR topic is more telling on what exactly the media focuses on within the SRHR framework.

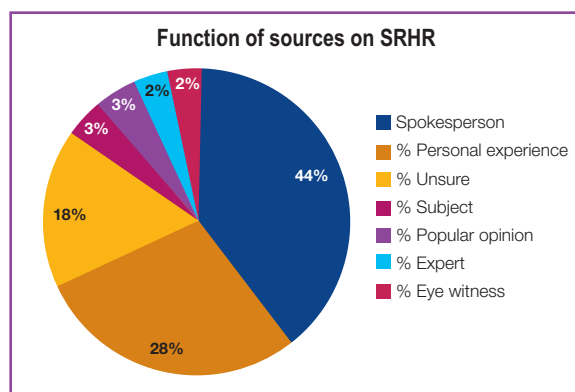


GBV is the most covered SRHR news topic making up 50% of all the SRHR news covered in the media. At 2% each, menstrual health, maternal health and sexual diversity are the least covered topics.



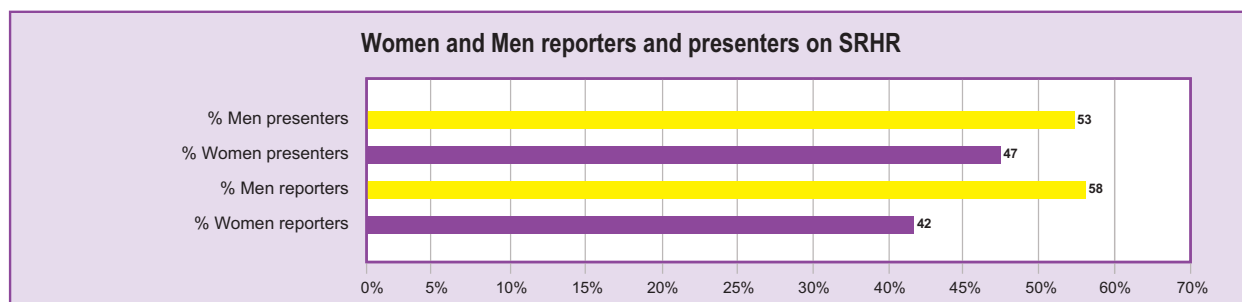
Although the overall regional average of women sources in SRHR topic categories is 43% this ranges from 0% in DRC to 83% in Seychelles. The research found that women's views and voices on SRHR constituted 50% or more in six countries - Seychelles, Angola, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Madagascar and Mozambique.

The study showed that official views, as opposed to personal experience, dominated in SRHR coverage. Spokespersons constituted 44% of sources, followed by the main subjects in news (28%) while personal experiences featured amongst the lowest sources at 2%. The media misses opportunities to tell the real stories of girls, women and families who face considerable challenges on the realisation of their reproductive health rights.



## Who covers SRHR

The study found that women comprise 42% of reporters and 47% of presenters on SRHR.



## Conclusions and recommendations

Journalists and reporters need to have a significant and in-depth understanding of women's rights to health and of the multiple factors at play that may impede the enjoyment of these rights as this will affect the way in which they report on these issues. This will allow them to employ a rights-based approach in their writing, for example, looking at the right to good health.

The study shows that there is need for continued media engagement to strengthen media coverage. This includes capacity building to understand and report on SRHR. The media is driven by new and exciting things happening around them so activists, researchers and governments must make their research and programmes easily available for media to make reference to and to provide in-depth analysis and coverage of these issues. Information research and data must be simple and accessible to the media.