



## **INTER PRESS SERVICE (IPS)**

### **Strengthening the Voice and Visibility of Women in Elections in Africa**

#### **Editorial Checklist**

The following checklist has been developed by IPS as part of a two-year project to improve coverage of women's participation in African elections -- both as candidates and voters -- and of the extent to which polls address issues related to gender. It is intended to help journalists become more effective in researching and writing stories on these matters.

#### **CONTEXT**

1. Does the story explain the type of electoral system the country uses?
2. Does it explain the advantages and disadvantages of the electoral system to women's entrance into political office?
3. Does the story highlight the factors that contribute to women's entrance into political office? For example, have parties set quotas or other special measures to ensure that women are candidates; or, are there special constitutional measures such as legislative quotas to open up more spaces for women in political offices as a way to bridge the inequality gaps? Are these factors operational within the country?
4. Does the story highlight the factors that inhibit women's entrance into political office?
5. If there are more women or fewer women standing for elections during the period of coverage, what factors have contributed to the increase or decrease?
6. Which political parties have fielded women candidates and which ones have not? Have certain political parties done better than others, and if so, why?
7. Do any of the parties' manifestoes or blueprints for action speak to the issues of gender equality and women's rights?
8. Is the story analytical? Does it go beyond the event and raise the underlying issues?
9. Does the story cite details on gender equality from the constitution and/or the government's signature to international conventions, declarations and platforms such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Optional Protocol on Women to the Africa Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, among others? [This is the watchdog function of the media. Is the government adhering to the conventions, declarations and commitments it makes through signature to such documents?]

DO...

- Include a brief explanation of the type of electoral system(s) used for presidential, parliamentary and local government elections.



- Explain how the electoral system(s) is/are an advantage or disadvantage for women's entrance into political office.
- Highlight the factors that contribute to women's entrance into political office.
- Highlight the factors that inhibit women's entrance into political office.
- Provide a brief discussion on the trends of women in political office. [See 'Data']
- Include information on which political parties have fielded women candidates and which have not, and why.
- Explain briefly what the parties' manifestoes say about gender equality and women's rights.
- Go beyond the event and the numbers to explain what they mean and why.
- Hold the government accountable by citing the legal and international rights instruments it has signed. But remember, citing is not the same thing as quoting -- and you should try to avoid simply quoting from national, regional or international instruments and policies in your story. Instead, analyse whether government is on target with adhering to these instruments. This is done through the use of data to show how well authorities are meeting the targets or commitments agreed to, and through the voices of relevant sources. [See 'Sources']

#### DON'T...

- Submit stories that are not well-researched.
- Provide a simplistic analysis of the coverage issue by omitting information on the country's electoral system(s), trends of women in political office, and parties' stated positions and actions on women's entrance into political office, gender equality and women's rights.
- List the factors that contribute to or inhibit women's entrance into political office without an analysis of why the factors prevail within your country's context.

#### DATA

1. Does your story include data on the numbers of women in the following structures:
  - Cabinet positions
  - Parliament
  - Judiciary
  - Political parties' politburos or highest central organs
2. Is all the data sourced?
3. Is the data used in ways to illustrate trends in women's entrance into political office? For example, does a story on an upcoming poll also include data about women's performance in the last two elections and their entrance into offices, to show the reader whether there is improvement or a backlash?
4. Is sex-disaggregated data used to show the situation of women in politics in comparison to men?
5. Does the story include sex-disaggregated data on women and men as voters?
6. Does the story include data on women's and men's voting patterns, if available?

#### DO...



- Look for up-to-date statistics on women in governance and political structures, the most recent data on voters, among other relevant figures, and source the data used in the stories.
- Use sex-disaggregated data to illustrate where women are in politics in comparison to men.
- Include data on women and men as voters.
- Use data in context to illustrate gender gaps, trends and to provide an analysis of the gendered nature of politics in the country.

#### DON'T....

- Submit a story without any data.
- Present data that is not sourced.
- Use out-of-date data. Do your research to ensure that the numbers are correct and up-to-date.

#### LANGUAGE

1. Does the story contain language that promotes sexism, gender bias or discrimination, or gender stereotypes?
2. Avoid language that promotes "ageism": "...the 60-year-old woman candidate..." etc. There may well be stories where age has to be mentioned and analysed -- an item on a by-election where all candidates are octogenarians, in defiance of national trends, for instance -- but as a general rule writers need to be cautious about age.
3. Are there any specific adjectives used to describe the character or physical appearance of women politicians or candidates that convey bias?
4. Is the physical description of a female politician or candidate relevant to the story? Would you apply the use of physical description equally to men and women politicians or candidates?
5. Is the language used inclusive of women and men?

#### DO...

- Check carefully before submitting stories to ensure that no language, phrases or adjectives that perpetuate sexism and gender bias have been used.
- Use inclusive terms such as "women and men", "man and woman" -- and pronouns such as "they", "their" and "them" -- to avoid the use of the generic "he" and "man" for all people.
- Avoid words that exclude women, such as "chairman", "mankind", "manpower", "man-made", "man-to-man" and "gentleman's agreement", among others -- or words that exclude men such as "housewife" and "prostitute", among others.
- When using gender neutral terms such as "farmers", "traders", "entrepreneurs", "children", "detainees", "parents", "peasants", "professionals", the "poor" and "workers", among others, be sure to use sex disaggregated data in the story to show where women are located in these groupings.



- Use the 'IPS Gender and Development Glossary' (available in English and French) and other sources on sexist language to avoid perpetuating discrimination and stereotypes in reporting on women in politics

#### DON'T...

- Describe women's physical appearance or the way they are dressed unless this is central to the feature. If you feel the need to describe what a female candidate is wearing, ensure that you do so in a way which does not discriminate against her (do not mention a woman's appearance while failing to describe that of the men she is competing with, for instance -- and do not write about which woman is considered "the best dressed" of various female candidates, a categorisation not generally applied to men). In addition, guard against descriptions that simply endorse images which candidates are trying to put forward about themselves (a male candidate trying to appear "a son of the soil" through dressing casually, for example). Your job is to analyse campaign strategies -- not further them.
- Use "he" or "man" as generic terms for all people.
- Use words that exclude women, such as "chairman", including the phrase "male domain" unless used in italics or quotes as stated by a source, among others.
- Use words that exclude men, such as "prostitute", among others.
- Use language that demonises or trivialises women politicians.
- Use language or phrases to describe women according to their marital or family status, while the same is not done to describe or label male politicians.

#### SOURCES

1. Does the story include a balance of female and male sources? [One female and six male sources would not be considered a balance of voices and perspectives in terms of the sexes. As a guide: A story that includes three female and two male sources or three male sources and two female sources would be acceptable.]
2. Do the sources interviewed provide a diversity of views and perspectives on the coverage issue? [If all the sources hold the same views or, are putting forth the same arguments on the issue, then the story does not provide a balance of views, but ONLY ONE view told through different voices. It is not enough to have different voices; different views are also needed, because there is more than one side to any issue.]
3. Are all the sources from the same side of the political spectrum? [Reporters should interview female and male sources from various political parties.]
4. Does the story only include politicians and political analysts as sources? [Sources from civil society groups working on the coverage issue as well as female and male citizens should also be interviewed to provide a diversity of views and perspectives.]
5. Does the story only include the views and perspectives of women and men in one age group? [Reporters should endeavour to convey the voices and perspectives of the young, middle-aged and elderly. Women and men in all three age groups are voting citizens and may have varying views and perspectives that will enrich the coverage issue.]



DO....

- Interview both women and men to balance the voices of the sexes.
- Seek out women and men with varying views on the coverage issue.
- Women and men from different political parties and spectrums should be interviewed.
- In addition to female and male politicians and political analysts, women and men from civil society and citizens should be interviewed.
- Women and men across different age groups – young, middle-aged and elderly voters – should be interviewed.

DON'T.....

- Interview only men, or only women for the story.
- Present only one view or perspective on an issue in a story, even if this view is stated by many people.
- Become a mouthpiece for a party or grouping by interviewing only men and women from that organisation.
- Interview only male and female politicians and political analysts.
- Do not interview sources from one age group alone.