



# Advocacy Toolkit for Women in Politics

## 7 Writing for Media – Opinion and Commentary Pieces

“Approach the editor of the newspaper you would like to write for and share your idea. Anticipate and be prepared to answer some questions so you can argue your viewpoint.”

If you have a look through your newspaper on any given day you will find that not everything in there is news – referred to in journalism as “hard news”. This is information about something new, that includes the voices of two or more sources and which has prominence. You are also likely to find features – stories with a human interest. You will certainly find that there are some opinion and commentary pieces. These are someone’s views and opinions on a particular issue.

Someone who writes a regular column providing commentary on issues is referred to as a columnist. But an opinion or commentary writer is not necessarily a journalist. Very often they are people who have specialist knowledge on a particular issue, whose opinion is highly regarded or

whose viewpoints are considered interesting enough for publication by the editor. As such, anyone can provide commentary on any issue they have deep-felt opinions about or an alternative view on and which they wish to share with the readership.

### Preparing an Opinion Piece

To do an opinion piece you need to start with thorough research on your newspapers and their audiences. Get to know the type of opinion pieces they like to publish. Talk to family, friends and colleagues and find out which paper they read often, whether there is a columnist they follow and why they like that paper and columnist. Having this information on hand will help you decide on the angle and give you some ideas of a style to approach your opinion piece.

Once you have your idea clear in your head for your piece, write a one paragraph brief on it. The brief will outline the issue, your views on it and why others should hear your view. Approach the editor of the newspaper you would like to write for and share your idea. Anticipate and be prepared to answer some questions so you can argue your viewpoint.

An alternative approach requires you to read the newspapers regularly. If a news item comes up that is related to your issue and that you feel strongly about, suggest doing an opinion piece on this to the editor.

If the editor is interested, find out the deadline for you to submit your piece. Be sure you can meet that deadline before you agree because newspapers are carefully planned and time-bound and failing to meet a deadline can be very disruptive for them and result in loss of faith in you. A word of warning. Don’t send your idea for an opinion piece to many newspapers. Only approach one paper at a time. If an editor finds that the same idea has been sent to competitor papers he or she will scrap it.

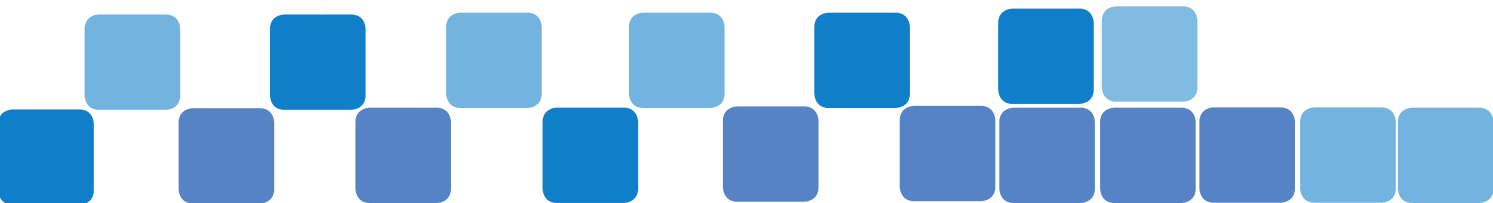
### Writing the opinion piece

You need to begin by stating the compelling argument of your piece right at the start. It is useful to start by writing one sentence and then putting the facts and messages you develop around it. Maintain the argument throughout, backed up with relevant data

### Key Notes

- ✓ A good way of gaining confidence as a woman politician in your writing and how you present yourself before audiences is to become a reliable and authoritative expert on an issue. To do so you must always talk facts, figures and impact.
- ✓ Talking facts requires thorough research. Read research and other papers and articles and talk with NGOs and academics who may be working on your issue or topic. When you are writing for or speaking in front of an audience, you are less likely to waffle or speak in generalities.
- ✓ Talking impact is a way of bringing the strength of the human perspective to the table. This can be done by finding out who is most affected by a policy, issue or event and taking time to talk to these people to hear their side of the story. These become the anecdotes that lift the facts and figures into real life.

*Adapted from 'Women in the News: Strengthening the Voice and Visibility of Women in the African Media's Coverage of Elections, Politics and Governance – A Handbook for Women Politicians and the Media', IPS, 2008*



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- not be more than 800 to 1000
- words so be clear and concise.
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- edge of the issue but without being
- academic or showy in tone. Your
- voice should come through natu-
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- Once you have submitted your
- opinion piece to the editor, follow
- up the next day to make sure
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