

Feminist and Gender Perspectives in Literature on Media & Development

by
Viviane Schönbachler
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Content

Abstract	5
Key findings	6
Conclusions for the practitioners.....	7
Why reviewing gender perspectives in media development literature?.....	9
1. Summary of the scientific literature.....	10
1.1. A case study of <i>Internews</i>	10
1.2. Literature on media development and media for development ...	11
1.3. Thematic chapters on gender and feminism	13
1.4. Discourse and practice: Gendered constructions and practices in media development	15
1.5. ICT, gender and development.....	16
1.6. Contributions from African Media Studies	17
2. Summary of 'grey literature'	19
2.1. Policy-related documents	19
2.2. Empirical studies	19
References	21

Abstract

Gender remains an under-researched topic in the literature on media and development. A brief evaluation of seven books on media development and media for development shows that only 2% of pages are devoted to gender and feminist issues and that 'gender' and 'women' are often framed in narrow, binary ways. It is the field of Gender Media Studies and development communication that contributes most significantly to the literature on gender in media development. Grey literature and research on information and communication technologies (ICTs) for development also contribute to the current research on media, gender, and development. Nonetheless, this literature review identifies the emerging field of African Gender Media Studies as the most varied and promising field of research with respect to the assessment of gender perspectives in media development, particularly on the African continent.

Key findings

- » **Scientific literature** on gender in media development is sparse and is mostly contributed to by feminist scholars through dedicated chapters; it is not addressed as a cross-cutting issue.
- » However, **feminist perspectives** on media for development has brought forth the importance of considering multi-layered (both material/embodyed and immaterial/symbolic) processes of (self) identification of 'target groups' in media development projects, which influence the lived experiences of the groups and individuals.
- » **African Media Studies**, even though an emerging field, might contribute to the broadening of media development scholarship, through, for instance, the disruption of fixed categorisations and essentialisations often present in 'Western' ways of thinking. Gender perspectives in African Media Studies also bring the **concept of intersectionality** to our attention.
- » Even though efforts in adopting an intersectional approach have been made (e.g. Internews) there is need for more **action research** to better understand the concept and render it applicable in the context of media (for) development.
- » **Grey literature** on women in media (development) is abundant, providing important empirical data, e.g. through the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP). However, the large number of publications offered by various (media) development actors need to be read critically, taking into account their particular normative **conditions of production**.

Conclusions for the practitioners

This literature review demonstrates that gender in media development is an **under-researched** topic. As a whole, the literature on media development is largely gender-blind with some rare exceptions (which are mentioned in section 1.3.) In the reviewed books on media (for) development, half of the references to ‘gender’ or ‘women’ occur only on 2% of pages that explicitly discuss feminist perspectives. The rest of the references to these two terms are mainly framed as development issues in narrow and heteronormative ways. There are, however, some exceptions where gender issues are discussed as part of broader societal norms, depicting women as agents of change.

Most empirical work on gender issues in media development is provided by **grey literature** and in research on ICTs and development. The two most cited sources of data for research on gender in media development are the aforementioned [GMMP](#) and the [Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media by IWMF/UNESCO \(Byerly, 2011\)](#). However, research on gender in media development remains fragmented, exploring disparate issues such as challenges for women working in the media sector, institutional discourses and practices on gender, and barriers and opportunities for women to use ICTs. Even though all these aspects are interrelated, much more research is needed from different perspectives to do justice to the complexity of the issue of gender in media development.

Promising approaches can be found in the **African Media Studies** (see [Bosch, 2011 and Orgeret, 2018 in section 1.6](#)). Despite struggling with administrative and institutional difficulties, the field of African Gender Media Studies has concrete suggestions on ways to contribute to the closing of the research gap on gender in media development. Through post-colonial and intersectional lenses, gender issues are examined within a wider circle of social complexity instead of the narrow framework provided by the understanding of ‘gender equals woman’, which always restricts women to their gender, obscuring the broader social, cultural, and political power structures in which gender identities, roles and relations are embedded. The perspectives of African women can help media development progress towards social justice and freedom of expression for all.

As under-researched areas, gender and feminist perspectives in media development expose many gaps in research. Some topics that need **further investigation** by media development scholars may include:

- Gendered participation in ICTs and AI, beyond questions of access;
- Institutional discourses and practices involving gender in media development;
- Applying qualitative, participatory or action research designs to test and innovate media (for) development projects;
- Investigate masculinities and non-binary gender identities in media development;
- Developing an intersectional framework for media development scholarship and practice.

While awaiting more research in the field of African Gender Media Studies to inform media (for) development practice, practitioners could contribute to the strengthening of the field by collaborating in academic research projects, beyond donor-driven agendas. As an inspiration for such a collaboration, I cite here the Report on *Barriers to Women Journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa* conducted by African Women in Media (AWiM) and Fojo Media Institute (*see also section 2.2*). The main **recommendations** of the report (*Akinbobola, 2020, pp. 55–57*) are:

1. include gender perspectives in journalism training;
2. provide mentoring opportunities for women journalists;
3. promote women's participation in leadership beyond tokenism;
4. offer transparent and diversified ways of progression in the profession;
5. ensure quality maternity policies (including flexible working conditions for parents);
6. implement gender policies on national, organisational and industry levels. South Africa could serve as 'good practice' example concerning affirmative action.

Moreover, practitioners might want to ask themselves the following **questions to reflect** upon their gendered practices:

- Do our assessments consider the specific conditions, needs, and relationships of all the people we work with?
- Who is excluded from our projects? Why? And how can this be changed? Should it be changed? What would the consequences be?
- How do our activities affect the relationships between men and women, between generations, between rural and urban dwellers, between the educated and the less educated, etc.?
- Where does our project reinforce existing power relations?
- Do we respect the expression "Nothing About Me Without Me"¹?
- Do our projects include our 'target groups' in all their diversity in all stages of the process? Or does it happen only indirectly through partner organisations?
- If we talk about 'women', 'youth', 'farmers', 'journalists', 'children' etc., whom do we include and exclude? Do we work only with the already privileged members of specific groups?
- Where do the data that inform our projects, theories of change, and policies come from? Which norms, realities, and power structures do they reflect?
- Which aspects of our work are based on scientific knowledge and where do we make assumptions? Which values are these assumptions based on? What consequences do these assumptions have on the people we work with?

1) First used to fight discrimination against disabled people. *See Charlton (2004) Nothing About Us Without Us. Disability oppression and empowerment.*

Why reviewing gender perspectives in media development literature?

The year 2020 was a year to evaluate the progress made in gender equality. Twenty-five years after the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), at the end of [African Union's Decade for Women 2010-2020](#), and five years into the [Sustainable Development Goals](#), it was time to take stock. According to the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) report, changes towards gender equality in the media sector are small and slow. In 1995, the quinquennial report showed that only 17% of the people who were heard or read about or seen in the news were women, and twenty years later, in 2015, the percentage rose only to 24%. In 2020, three quarters of the news subjects and sources remained male (*GMMP, 2021; Macharia, 2015*). Despite gender equality being a key development goal, research on media development has paid very little attention to the issue. A literature review on gender and feminist perspectives in media development is needed to recognise the blind spots and find ways forward.

One of the main challenges of reviewing the literature on gender in media development scholarship is that the subjects of media development and gender are dispersed across a vast range of disciplines, including media studies, communication science, development studies (*Berger, 2019, p. 262*), gender studies, feminist research and many other fields (*Bosch, 2011, p. 29*).

1. Summary of the scientific literature

1.1. A case study of Internews

The most pertinent study identified in this literature review is by *Margaretha Geertsema-Sligh (2019)*. It explicitly addresses gender in media development based on the case study of *Internews* as a media development organisation that integrates gender into media development. Through qualitative interviews with mostly female staff members of *Internews*, Geertsema-Sligh investigates how the organisation integrates gender in its work and how it deals with challenges that arise (p. 211). The study examines how the organisation set the goal to move from gender aware to gender transformative, working towards an intersectional feminist approach² (p. 225). She found that in 2015 the organisation developed a ‘Women’s Initiative’ thanks to the female president at the time and the enabling international environment 20 years after the Beijing platform (pp. 213, 224). Despite that, the efforts remained haphazard, failing to build up coherent media development programmes around gender issues (pp. 213-214). In 2018, the ‘Women’s Initiative’ became a framework and broadened its goal to include diverse groups facing overlapping forms of oppression (p. 217). In this sense, the organisation set the goal to do gender transformative work through an intersectional approach to challenge the root causes of gender inequality (p. 217). However, Geertsema-Sligh’s findings are ambiguous about how *Internews* was able to accomplish that, particularly in non-Western societies where it often faced resistance (p. 221).

This interview study stands out as a rare piece of work on gender in media development and is therefore an important contribution. Its findings can motivate media development researchers and practitioners to look into research on Gender Media Studies or gender in development theories to address the identified challenges. At the same time, the study has some limitations which could be addressed in future research (p. 226). What it fails to take into account, for instance, is the implementation and outcomes of *Internews*’ gender transformative approach while focusing solely on perceptions of staff members. Another crucial point that the study leaves unaddressed is that an intersectional approach should critically look behind denominations such as ‘local’ or ‘community’. However, its author fails to discuss issues such as ‘elite capture’ (*Oguny & Gillies, 2020, p. 9*) in approaches sometimes qualified as participatory in media development.

What motivated *Geertsema-Sligh (2019)* to conduct her study in the first place was that she hardly found any gender perspectives in the existing literature on media development:

“[...] women are only mentioned tangentially in literature on media development specifically. Very little research has been done in this area and a review of the literature shows that the field is male dominated and mostly gender blind. Literature on media development often treats women as an afterthought, for example by listing women as one of the marginalised and disadvantaged groups that should be focused on.” (p. 209)

The next section demonstrates the extent to which this finding is reflected in my own search for gender in the seven books on media and development that I reviewed.

2) [UN Women](#) provides a glimpse into the concept of intersectional feminism through different perspectives. (Accessed on 24.09.2020)

1.2. Literature on media development and media for development

In order to gain an overview of gender and feminist perspectives in the field of media and development, I started off by screening seven books on media and development issues published between 2008 and 2019. These books incorporate, to different degrees, two approaches to media and development that are often intertwined in practice: **media for development**, which refers to media mainly as instruments to reach development goals, and **media development** which aims at building up an independent media sector by strengthening the media themselves³. The seven books on media/communication and development selected are sorted here by year of publication:

- *Nicholas Benequista, Susan Abbott, Paul Rothman & Winston Mano (eds.) (2019) International Media Development: Historical Perspectives and New Frontiers;*
- *Richard Vokes (2018) Media and Development;*
- *Jessica Noske-Turner (2017) Rethinking Media Development Through Evaluation: Beyond Freedom;*
- *Martin Scott (2014) Media and Development;*
- *Linje Manyozo (2012) Media, Communication and Development: Three Approaches;*
- *Thomas L. McPhail (ed.) (2009) Development communication: Reframing the role of the media;*
- *Jan Servaes (ed.) (2008) Communication for development and social change.*

These seven books have only three chapters⁴ on topics related to gender and feminist perspectives (hereafter “thematic chapters”), one chapter concerning ‘media development’ and two related to ‘media/communication for development’.

Additionally, I conducted a brief word count of ‘gender’ and ‘women’⁵ (see Table 1) and found, in a total of 1,908 pages, 253 mentions of ‘gender’, half of which are spread across 35 pages, which is about 2% of all pages. The same goes for the word ‘women’, which comes up 543 times and more than half of them within the 35 pages of the thematic chapters.

Table 1 : Word counts of ‘gender’ and ‘women’ in reviewed books on media and development

Book	‘Gender’ in non-thematic chapters	‘Gender’ in thematic chapter	‘Women’ in non-thematic chapters	‘Women’ in thematic chapter
Benequista, Abbott, Rothman, and Mano (2019), 275p.	13	49	6	128
Vokes (2018) 300p.	11	5	41	34
Noske-Turner (2017), 176p.	7	—	20	—
Scott (2014) 231p.	6	—	13	—

³) For more detailed discussions of the different approaches to media and development, see Manyozo (2012) and Scott (2014).

⁴) For further discussion of these chapters see below in section 1.3.

⁵) Acknowledging that in development discourses ‘gender’ still often rhymes with ‘women’.

Book	'Gender' in non-thematic chapters	'Gender' in thematic chapter	'Women' in non-thematic chapters	'Women' in thematic chapter
Manyozo (2012) 259p.	18	—	46	—
McPhail (2009) 239p.	7	74	18	135
Servaes (2008) 428p.	63	—	102	—
	125	128	246	297

Source: own elaboration

I found that the words 'gender' and 'women' appear mostly in the three thematic chapters on gender or feminist issues, with one exception, the book edited by *Jan Servaes (2008)* on 'Communication for Development and Social Change', in which 'gender' is mentioned at least once in 12 out of 17 chapters, and 'women' in 14 out of 17 chapters. In general, however, the literature on media (for) development fails to consider gender as a cross-cutting issue, despite appeals from different authors for a more systematic inclusion of gender perspectives (see *Myers, 2009; Orgeret, 2018*). Instead, topics related to gender and feminist perspectives are put in separate chapters.

Beyond the quantitative argument, a qualitative look can shed light on how specific meanings are attributed to the terms. To that end, I sought to examine the immediate context in which I found the words during my lexical search. The mentions of 'gender' and 'women' in non-thematic parts of the books refer most frequently to gender and women's issues framed as development problems, with gender equality as a development goal. 'Gender' alone, when not linked to development topics, is most often framed as a socio-demographic category amongst others, such as age or class. In the book edited by *Servaes (2008)*, on the other hand, the usage of the term is more varied, as in 'gender mainstreaming', 'gender sensitivity', and 'gender as a social and cultural norm'. While in this book 'women' are sometimes explicitly described as taking an 'active role in development'⁶, references to the word 'women' by and large remain associated with terms such as 'reproductive roles', 'beneficiaries', 'rural', 'vulnerable', 'marginalised groups', and 'gender-based violence' or 'violence against women'.

But also in some of the other books single gender-related reflections were detectable: *Jessica Noske-Turner (2017)* for example argues for gender-disaggregated data in evaluations of media development projects (pp. 95–98) and *Martin Scott (2014)* reflects upon the tensions between participation and power relations, asking how changing existing gender inequalities might create new conflicts (p. 50). However, these short but interesting reflections are not discussed further and, all in all, the books reviewed remain on quite superficial and narrow views of gender inequality in the media development sector. The majority of frames depict gender inequality as a problem limited to development, and women as passive, victimized or reduced to their reproductive role.

The following section discusses the three chapters in these books that take an explicitly feminist and gender-aware perspective on media development and development communication.

⁶ Already the dedication of the book states: "To Patchanee, Fiona, Lisa and the millions of strong women and girls who often remain invisible as the real change agents in today's world." (*Servaes, 2008, p.3*)

1.3. Thematic chapters on gender and feminism

To start with, I'll discuss the chapter on feminist critique of media development in *Richard Vokes' (2018, pp. 122–128)* recent book on Media and Development. To my knowledge, it is the only attempt to demonstrate how feminist considerations have affected media for development. He starts from the 1960's and demonstrates parallels between feminist and dependency theories regarding their critiques of the modernisation paradigm. Both approaches argued against essentialisations, the inherent characters of inequality, and the elite dominating the existing system (p. 123). However, very soon feminist critiques out-passed dependency theory showing that development was disproportionately worsening the situation of women compared to that of men, based on evidence found by Esther Boserup⁷ (p. 124). Applying this critique to media development, Vokes mentions that media technologies exported from the West were already male-dominated and, once in the South, these technologies often fell into the hands of men, leaving women with less access to media devices and content (p. 125). On the other hand, he argues that media development was used to transfer 'modern' Western values and ended up educating men through male worldviews that dominate media content (p. 126). This led to the criticism that the "Women in Development (WID)" approach did not take into account the structural factors in how gender roles are assigned. The postcolonial feminist critique went even further, stating that the experience of development does not depend only on gender, but intersects with other factors such as class, religion, caste etc. As an implication for media development, Vokes notes that, in addition to the media being content-biased, but also do different women read the same content differently, depending on their own situation and experience (p. 127).

Unfortunately, the chapter is relatively short, ending in the 1990s without any discussion of the more recent debates and critiques regarding Gender and Development (GAD). What is more, the author fails to take these considerations into account in the rest of his book. Even though he touches upon topics like ICTs and celebrities, which have an important gender dimension, he does not take up a gender perspective. Moreover, he omits theories of masculinities and non-binary gender identities and their influence on media (for) development, which represent some of the more recent debates.

Luz Estella Porras and Steeves (2009) have also proposed a feminist contribution to media for development in their chapter "Feminism in a Post-Development Age" in the book *Development Communication (McPhail, 2009)*. The main argument is to pay attention to more immaterial aspects of communication in development projects. The authors discuss five approaches to communication and their links to feminism. The first two approaches can be described as 'mainstream' development approaches: (1) modernisation and (2) political economy. While the former considers women's issues only as an 'add-women-and-stir'⁸, the latter focuses exclusively on materialistic, economic aspects like media ownership, concentration, employment inequalities, audience markets and access to media use from a women's perspective (p. 141). Porras and Steeves argue for a more holistic approach, taking into account immaterial dimension in addition to the aforementioned materialistic ones (p. 145). Therefore, they discuss three more approaches to development communication: (3) spirituality, (4) post-development, and (5) embodiment.

⁷ Boserup's (1970) research on the effects of development on women should be read together with *Ifi Amadiume (1995)* ethnography on the effects of colonialism on African women.

⁸ As in the critiques of the Women in Development (WID) approach (see *Geertsema-Sligh, 2019, p. 214*)

The point on spirituality discusses the lack of current development communication projects to integrate the aspects of spirituality and religion, which are important dimensions in the reinforcement of gendered oppression as well as the protection from gender-based injustice. The authors point particularly to the ‘theology of liberation’, influenced by Paulo Freire, who put forth key arguments for participatory communication and ways to transform power relations through dialogue, even though Freire himself did not talk explicitly about gender relations (pp. 149–150).

Unlike the two approaches mentioned above, the third approach presented in the same chapter considers, again, a material part of communication that is often neglected: the body. Porras and Steeves point to interesting work on the embodied experience of communication, particularly linked to feminist theories (p. 155). The argument here is that women’s bodies and the experience women have because of/through their bodies is an important material part of communication. However, in media development projects, the aspects of mind/messages are said to be privileged over bodily aspects such as appearance, voice or disability (p. 156).

Porras and Steeves want feminist development communication projects to adopt a holistic framework that considers materialistic and immaterial components as well as the embodied experience of women. While it seems difficult to consider all these aspects in each project, they should nonetheless inform project design, larger development programmes or the intervention strategies of media development actors. In particular, the less prominent components such as spirituality, post-development considerations and embodiment can indeed be integrated more systematically in media (for) development.

Carolyn Byerly (2019), contributing to the literature on media development in her chapter titled “Gender, Research and Media Development: A Feminist Perspective on Media Structure” in the volume edited by *Benequista, Abbott, Rothman, and Mano (2019)*, argues for a better understanding of gender relations in the media landscape in order for media development to incorporate gender equality (p. 81). While she substantiates her argument on research from different continents, she shows that the main challenge remains the same: gender inequality in the media reflects gender inequality in society (p. 83). She cites examples where advancements were made possible thanks to existing gender agendas, laws, women journalists that excel in ‘men’s’ topics, and journalist associations with more than 50% of female members (p. 83). On the other hand, Byerly also mentions important drawbacks in gender equality due to corruption in the media sector, inapt policies around maternity and childcare, as well as norms that remain masculine (pp. 83–84). The author concludes with some suggestions on what can be done to advance gender equality in the media, notably creating alternative media spaces that are owned by women, making bigger spaces for women in existing media and lobbying for laws and policies (p. 89). The author calls for stronger relations between key actors, such as media scholars, media activists and development specialists, to reach a more equitable development of the media sector for men and women (p. 90).

Even though Byerly calls for cooperation with development specialists, the data and research she uses in her argument mix all kinds of different contexts, from Africa to the Nordic countries and Eastern Europe. One could ask: Where is the link to the development sector? Particularly regarding the use of data from re-

ports such as the Global Media Monitoring Report (GMMP) or the Global Report by the International Women's Media Foundation (Byerly, 2011), it is pertinent to ask if the data reflect the type of media the media development actors are working with. Are community radios represented in these studies as much as they are targeted by the media (for) development projects? Another important point to be drawn from Byerly's chapter is that the quantitative argument is crucial to make the extent of women's absence in the media sector, in media content, and particularly in decision-making positions, visible in a descriptive way. But at the same time, the quantitative argument reaches its limits in explaining this absence. For instance, she uses Eastern Europe as an example to illustrate that the fact of more women working in the media does not reflect more gender equality, but rather a devaluation of the profession (Byerly, 2019, p. 90), and thus showing the limits of a purely quantitative argument.

1.4. Discourse and practice: Gendered constructions and practices in media development

Karin Wilkins (1999) examines gender dimensions in institutional discourses in 262 communication for social change projects between 1975 and 1995 implemented by US aid agencies. Even though her research is more than 20 years old and limited to development communication on health, nutrition and population projects implemented by US aid agencies, the research focus on the discursive construction of female beneficiaries remains pertinent today.

In her analysis, Wilkins discusses different approaches used in development communication and how gender is discursively constructed. Over time, she noticed that women in their reproductive function remained a key target group, whereas the attention to women in other functions decreased, leading to a further essentialisation of women as child-bearers (pp. 62-63). Her main findings show that social marketing and social change discourses often reproduce traditional gender roles and power relations or aim at individual change instead of societal change, locating the responsibility of change at women's individual level (p. 63). She also found institutional discourses to have changed together with the trend of globalisation and neoliberalism towards approaches based on individual change and structural privatisation (p. 63), from which women did not benefit despite being an important target group (p.64).

This study shows that institutional discourses of development actors are embedded in socio-cultural and economic structures that influence the construction of target groups and inform project approaches. This is also true for media development and, as Wilkins shows, highly relevant to the discursive construction of gender identities and relations. Being aware of the limitations of her research, Wilkins recommends more research on the institutional discourses in media development and the relation between institutional discourses and project implementation (p. 64).

While Wilkins' contribution focuses on the discursive aspect of media (for) development projects, *Mary Myers (2009)* proposes, in a paper for the conference 'Radio Convergence and Development in Africa', that gender should be considered as a cross-cutting issue in media practices. She parts from the idea of a linear communication model and discusses gender issues in media production, content, and consumption (p. 3). Myers notes the well-known difficulties women

journalists in Africa have to contend with, such as demanding working hours and frequent travelling, which make it difficult for them to combine work with their responsibilities as family members. On the other hand, the author points out that content is based on 'male' norms and, to gain more female sources, journalists need to make extra efforts, which are often not supported by media organisations (pp. 7–8). When it comes to female audiences, Myers mentions several gendered dimensions, such as access and ownership of devices, time to listen attentively, education disparities (e.g. language), that discriminate against women as active audience (pp. 10–12). Similar obstacles are said to impede women's access and use of ICTs (p. 13). Myers concludes by arguing that gender-disaggregated data are needed to inform efforts to advance gender equality in media and development, pointing out the difficulties to access these data particularly in rural areas (pp. 15–16). Myers' contribution provides a good overview of gender issues in media development and exposes some practical difficulties that could be easily addressed in media development agendas.

1.5. ICT, gender and development

A relatively abundant and recent field of research on gender, media technologies and development focuses on gender dimensions in ICTs. Given that the radio is the most widespread mass medium in sub-Saharan Africa, research on ICTs focuses on the 'blending' of radio and ICTs (Asiedu, 2012, p. 242). Even though mobile phone technology is widespread throughout sub-Saharan Africa, internet penetration is still limited in many areas (p. 248). As mobile phone technology is widely used in radio stations (Fortune & Chungong, 2013, p. 73), it should be more clearly differentiated in research from less accessible technologies such as the internet-based ones. But, research findings show gendered barriers to access, such as literacy, economic, as well as socio-cultural obstacles, which impair both mobile phone and internet-based ICTs (Fortune & Chungong, 2013; Myers, 2009, p. 13).

Frances Fortune and Cindy Chungong (2013) conducted research in West Africa and included audience perceptions and participation in radio stations through mobile telephony. Their key finding is that, while women listen to the radio, the radio does not listen to its female audience, meaning that radio stations do not take into account gender-disaggregated data in programme development (p. 87). Their findings also show that costs for participation are an important obstacle for women to use mobile phones to participate in radio programmes. Moreover, many topics are not interesting enough for women to want to participate in them (p. 90), which the authors attribute to the male domination of media in general including community radio (pp. 73–74). What remains unaddressed, however, is the role of literacy in the case of using ICTs for participation, given that even for writing an SMS one might need basic levels of literacy.

The same point is made in Christobel Asiedu's (2012) argument on the dominance of European languages in ICTs (p. 241). Asiedu is critical of the idea of ICTs as drivers for development, questioning the vertical integration and liberating potential of internet-based ICTs in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly with respect to the women in rural areas. Based on a postcolonial perspective, her argument is backed by empirical evidence. Asiedu shows that internet-based ICTs lag far behind radio in sub-Saharan Africa (p. 248–252) with the latter promoting the creation of indigenous knowledge and local discourse on development thanks to its orality and use of vernacular languages (p. 241). Hence, her theoretical and

empirical argument demonstrates that radio is more capable of supporting a bottom-up approach than ICTs and that ICTs in contrast are more likely to reinforce existing (gender) divides (p. 242). However, Asiedu does not discuss the potential limitations of her empirical argument given the lack of accessible and reliable up-to-date statistics and gender-disaggregated data in sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, the article does not address economic and infrastructural barriers to ICTs in many developing countries, which are crucial issues in the context of ICT for development⁹.

Overall, research on ICT fails to propose ways to address the broader digital gender gap through media development. The literature on ICTs, gender and development remains limited to the existing power structures, being focused more on gender dimensions in access and less on structural barriers to participation and interaction. Therefore, as scholars in African Media Studies argue, much more research is needed on gender and ICTs from media and communication studies. Orgeret (2018) and Bosch (2011) call for more nuanced research on the opportunities and challenges of ICTs with respect to women's empowerment (Bosch, 2011, pp. 31–32), on how ICTs affect harassment of female journalists (Orgeret, 2018, p. 357), or, more generally, on possible ways to close the digital gender gap.

1.6. Contributions from African Media Studies

This leads us to a promising body of literature for gender in media development, particularly in relation to sub-Saharan Africa: the emerging field of African Media Studies (Mano & Milton, 2021). Even though research on gender is still scarce in African Media Studies, I would argue that, at present, it offers the most appropriate and nuanced lines of research to help integrate gender perspectives into media development.

In her article “African Feminist Media Studies: A view from the global South”, Tanja Bosch (2011) calls for (independent of her above-mentioned research on ICT) a greater inclusion of experiences and views from the South in feminist media studies, drawing particularly on the contributions of Black feminist writing (pp. 28–29). She also draws attention to the ways in which research is currently being done, arguing for more qualitative, participatory and action research in order to, on the one hand, grasp the relations between knowledge and power in feminist research and, on the other, link research to practice through creative methodologies (p. 29). For the field of media development, this would imply a critical assessment of its own theoretical and methodological foundations, the inclusion of more perspectives from African, Black or Latina feminists and the use of methodologies that are more action-oriented, qualitative, and empowering.

One way to do so could be an intersectional approach to media development. As reviewed above, Geertsema-Sligh (2019) shows how *Internews* has tried to move towards such an approach, albeit with limited success thus far. Intersectionality, as an approach “[...] enables us to see how power structures based on gender, race, ethnicity, political orientation, class and the like do not function independently of one another but must be understood together.” (Orgeret, 2018, p. 349). Usually, the concept of intersectionality is attributed to the Black Feminist movement in the United States, particularly through the Combahee River Collective statement (1979 [1977]). The term was later coined by critical race scholar and lawyer Kim-

⁹) For more literature on the digital divide in Africa, see Mutsvairo, B., & Ragnedda, M. (Eds.) (2019). Mapping the Digital Divide in Africa: A Mediated Analysis. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

berlé Crenshaw (1989). Interestingly however, *Sirma Bilge (2019)* demonstrates that feminists from the South had brought intersectional perspectives to development organisations long before the term ‘intersectionality’ became widely known (*p. 41*). In this sense, media development organisations should not reappropriate and disseminate intersectional approaches in a top-down manner but look for these approaches instead within the context of their interventions. These often hidden spaces of intersectional theorising on the ground can be found in African Media Studies focusing on gender.

For instance, the chapter by *Kristin Skare Orgeret (2018)* titled “Gender in African Media Studies” is quite rich in terms of approaches and ideas linking gender and media in African contexts. The author argues that research in media studies could be improved by scholars systematically including a gender perspective (*p. 348*). Based on theoretical considerations of intersectionality, post-colonial feminist theory and development theory, she calls for further investigation of empirical topics such as women covering conflicts, gender and ICTs, media and masculinities, as well as Queer African Media Studies. She mentions patriarchal structures at universities, heavy teaching and administrative burden for researchers and the lack of specialised journals, leading to research being dispersed among different fields and disciplines (*p. 348*), as potential obstacles to gender perspectives gaining more prominence in African Media Studies. Orgeret also draws a clear link between gender issues and development, while pointing out that gender and feminist issues have been appropriated by other political actors and research often remains narrow and donor-driven (*p. 350*). Drawing on post-colonial feminist thoughts, Orgeret concludes that women are too often reduced to their gender in media research (*p. 353*). Thus, in line with Bosch’s propositions, she calls for more independent, innovative, inclusive, and dialogical research on gender, development, and the media (*p. 351*).

2. Summary of ‘grey literature’

While academic literature on gender issues in media (for) development is relatively limited, the so-called “grey literature”, the literature comprising research and analyses produced by organisations or consultants outside of traditional academic publishing, is much more abundant. A comprehensive analysis of grey literature on gender and feminism in media (for) development would go beyond the scope of this literature review¹⁰. I will therefore limit myself to presenting some interesting empirical studies and policy-related documents.

2.1. Policy-related documents

The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), which leads the GMMP, also publishes a quarterly journal titled *Media Development*. The first issue of 2018, titled “Gender and Media – A holistic agenda”, addresses gender issues in media development (WACC, 2018). Although the issue is a collection of abridged position papers by the Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMAG) presented at the Commission on the Status of Women (p. 4), the contributions are based on research data and most of the authors are feminist activists and researchers. They address the existing challenges related to media content as well as the media sector as a whole, including media regulatory bodies, media organisations, journalism schools, media policies, and community and alternative media outlets. Despite belonging to the category of grey literature, this issue of *Media Development* clearly facilitates dialogue between researchers, activists and practitioners engaging with gender inequality in the media as called for by scholars such as Byerly (2019, p. 90).

With its Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media (GSIM), UNESCO (2012) has proposed an extension to its Media Development Indicators to assess and reflect on gender equality in media organisations and content. The aim is to support media organisations in the development of their own transparent mechanisms to advance gender equality in the media (p. 16). In addition to the rather binary conception of gender on which the indicators are based, it provides little guidance in how exactly gender equality can be improved.

2.2. Empirical studies

Grey publications on gender and media as well as their scientific counterparts almost always include data from the two main international enquiries on the topic. First, the [Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media](#) conducted for the International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2011, which, based on quantitatively analysed questionnaires (Byerly, 2011, p.17), examines the presence of women in 522 news organisations in 59 countries globally (p. 16). One of the report’s key findings is that only one third of full-time journalism workforce is made up of women (p. 6).

The second international study is the [Global Media Monitoring Project](#) (GMMP), which has been taking place every five years since 1995 with the latest report being published in 2015¹¹. This longitudinal study looks at gender aspects in the news content worldwide on a specific day. In the 2015 edition, 114 countries were

¹⁰) For a regular, up-to-date list of publications on media development, consult Catholic Media Council’s (CAMECO) bi-annual literature list. January-June 2020 literature review is available here: <http://www.cameco.org/media/cameco-media-development-publications-january-june-2020-1.pdf> (accessed on 24.9.2020)

¹¹) The report scheduled for 2020 has been postponed due to Covid-19.

covered (Macharia, 2015, p. 8). This rare and highly important study is mainly based on a quantitative content analysis and hence allows for comparison over time and space. The 2015 report found that only 24% of news content is about and from women, which is the same percentage as in 2010 (p. 8). The preliminary data published by the GMMP 2020 in March 2021 suggest that the percentage has not increased much in the past 5 years, with three quarters of news stories continuing to be with and about men¹².

Recently, an effort was made by the University of Gothenburg to combine these two important datasets with the dataset of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) into a single, open dataset called GEM, which is available online¹³. The data are used for quantitative and comparative analyses on the global level. Some studies are available in the book entitled “Comparing Gender and Media Equality Across the Globe : A Cross-National Study of the Qualities, Causes, and Consequences of Gender Equality in and through the News Media” edited by *Monika Djerf-Pierre and Maria Edström (2020)*.

To illustrate my argument about how African media scholars and activists can play a key part in advancing gender equality in media development on the continent, thanks to more complex and contextualised analysis of the problems ahead, I explore here the recent research report (Akinbobola, 2020) conducted by African Women in Media (AWiM) and Fojo Institute. Starting as a Facebook group in 2016, AWiM has developed into an important media development organisation advocating gender equality for African women in media (p. 7). The report published by AWiM and Fojo on the barriers that women journalists in sub-Saharan Africa face to enter or to progress within the profession, provides important empirical and theoretical arguments to support gender issues in media development. Based on survey, interview and focus group data, the report demonstrates the complex interrelations between societal, organisational, and individual gendered norms and practices. Even though the research lacks participants from Francophone and Lusophone Africa, and is limited by a biased sample due to difficulties in recruiting focus groups and interviews online¹⁴, the findings are still critical to understand the specific barriers African women journalists encounter in their specific contexts, and to compare similarities throughout the continent and globally (p. 14). After a detailed discussion of the motivations that drive women into journalism, the study discusses the manifold difficulties in progression, gender discrimination, balancing life-work expectations, and women in leadership positions, before presenting possible ways forward. A key finding of the report is that “[m]any of these barriers mentioned above overlap and occur at the same time” (p. 53) demanding an intersectional and multi-layered approach to address gender inequality in the media.

12) Preliminary data for GMMP 2020: <https://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp-reports/gmmp-2020-reports/> (accessed on 08.04.2021)

13) <https://www.gu.se/en/research/gemdataset> (accessed on 16.12.2020)

14) Due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, the research had to be conducted online.

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