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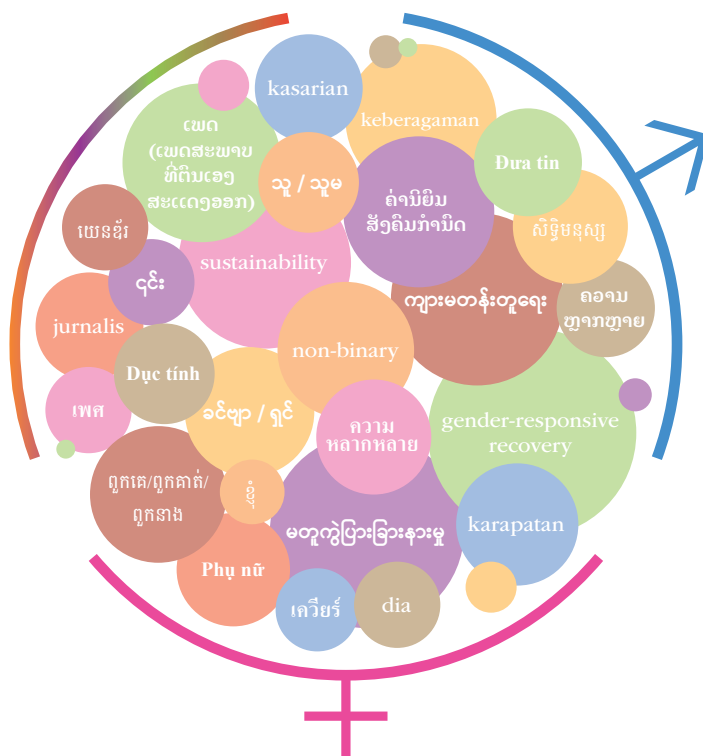


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A View from Southeast Asia



Johanna Son

GENDER on Our News Radar **A View from Southeast Asia**

Published by Fojo Media Institute, February 2022

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FOREWORD

‘GENDER ON OUR NEWS RADAR: A VIEW FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA’ is a handy tool for learning and teaching in journalism and communication. I hope that its practical tips, from the language of news to the methods of storytelling, will help journalists, media professionals and trainers integrate gender subtleties into their daily work.

This book is part of the Fojo Media Institute’s Southeast Asia Media Training Network project, which focused on the building the capacity of, and co-learning with, media trainers in Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Vietnam, from 2016 to 2021.

The use of gender as a news tool has become even more important – and obvious – in a society that is trying to deepen inclusion, respect for diversity at a time of many shared global challenges.

At the same time, building gender into the core of journalism requires an understanding of the cultural, news and political settings that vary widely across Southeast Asia.

The starting points of many news professionals and newsrooms in the region often differ from those in other regions of the world. Examples of this diversity can be found in this book’s use of local examples and contexts.

Our thanks to the Myanmar Journalism Institute and Cambodian Center for Independent Media, which collaborated with Fojo in carrying out a survey exercise in 2020 and 2021 on how trainers, editors and reporters view gender in their work. Apart from helping ground this book in the region, the survey responses validated the need to integrate a foundation of gender into today’s journalism courses.

Fojo's other work around gender in news has also included the publication of these studies – [Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape](#) in Myanmar, '[Women and Media in Vietnam](#)', and '[Women and Media in Cambodia](#)'.

'Gender on Our News Radar' is the last output of the Southeast Asia Media Training Network project. Its publication is complementary to '[Online Journalism and Storytelling: A Training and Learning Kit](#)' (2020).

Indeed, the release of 'Gender on Our News Radar' is a meaningful way to conclude this chapter of Fojo's work in this region, by contributing to journalists' shared knowledge around practical ways to tell better stories.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

A HINT OF (AND HOPES FOR) A MORE INCLUSIVE FUTURE, a news-based perspective and a Southeast Asian feel — these are the three elements that this book seeks to bring together.

While working on ‘Gender on Our News Radar: A View from Southeast Asia’, I found myself rifling through the mental files I had accumulated from more than three decades in journalism, be it from reporting, editing and commissioning stories or carrying out training work. These files included which approaches worked, traps to avoid, workshop methods to steer clear of.

What has stayed with me is the point that a tool for news work needs to be crafted from the lived experience of journalism, using a real-world mindset and newspeak, if it is to have a chance at being useful and relevant. Many a how-to resource for gender in news has gotten waylaid by sounding more like an advocacy manual, or being steeped too heavily in theory and too lightly in the practice of journalism.

This book also uses the language and lens of news because gender is part of the social fabric that journalists cover, day in and day out.

Central to ‘Gender on Our News Radar’ is the view that a gender-informed way of doing journalism, whether in reporting, editing or mentoring others, is not just ‘nice’. It is necessary, an essential skillset if media professionals are to keep up with the world’s changing conversations around gender.

But how does one make this tool feel more Southeast Asian? To try to convey more of the local touch, I have brought in examples and experiences from Southeast Asia that its news communities may be more able to relate to.

These examples and experiences require a look at the words around gender in our languages, which Section 2 (‘Some Words on Words’) goes into. For the insights they shared with me in engaging chats about gender in various Southeast Asian languages, I am grateful to Anisa Widyasari, Kittipong Thavevong, Mak Chanden, Nyunt Win, Uyen Diep and Vannaphone Sitthirath. I thank them too, along with Nai Nai, for contributing to the translation of the words and phrases that appear on the book cover.

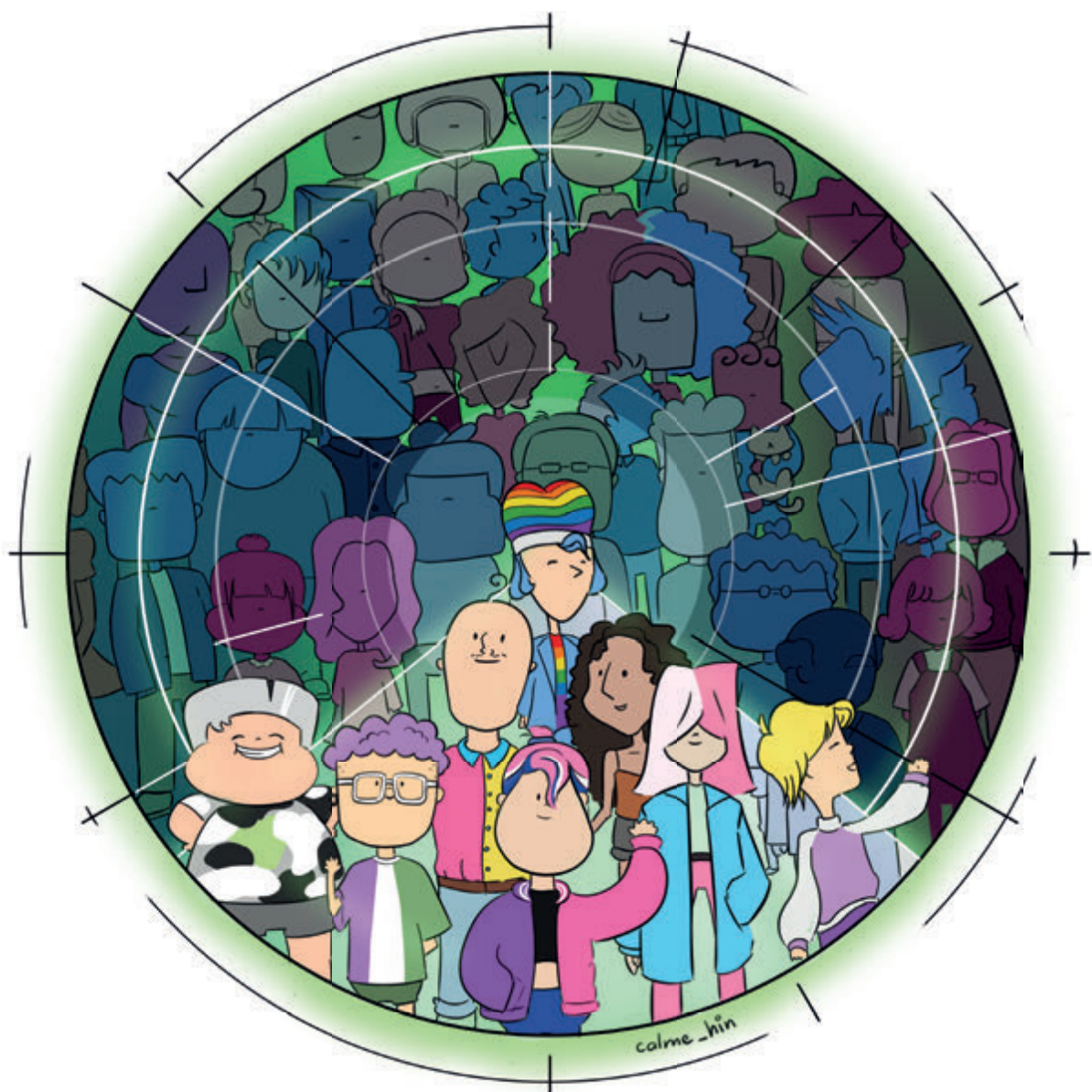
The regional feel of ‘Gender on Our News Radar’ is enriched as well by the thoughts of reporters, editors and media trainers from Myanmar and Cambodia, who shared their views of gender, as well as the training needs they see, in surveys that were done before work on this book began. (Highlights of these surveys’ results can be found in the annex.)

There is another back story to this book. The media landscape in Myanmar changed drastically after the military coup of February 2021, a development that led to some changes in the plans for this project. More importantly, questions simmer about the long-term survival of the news profession in that country.

Finally, I hesitate to call this a manual, not least because news work is creative work. It is, however, a tool that shares real-world tips drawn from doing journalism in the developing-country settings of Southeast Asia – and beyond. Consider this a software update of sorts that can be used as a refresher or self-learning activity, as well as in training events – and one that invites us to reflect on our craft.

Johanna Son

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learned concepts around the roles and differences associated with being men and women – is being weaved into the spheres of human rights, class and ethnicity.

These days, ‘doing the right thing’ means being respectful of diversity, ways of self-identification or non-definition of gender, adopting these as desirable social norms that stem from an awareness of human rights, dignity and inclusion.

Newsroom discussions and debates around gender can get narrowed down to which terms to use or avoid in copy and in style manuals, or be limited to the inclusion of women as sources in stories. It is not uncommon to come across assumptions – often unsaid, at times made explicit – that some stories are ‘women’s stories’ but others are not. Even in the more gender-aware newsrooms in what were called the ‘alternative’ media in the past, women editors found themselves being teased as the gender police.

Today, the spaces for analysing gender-related issues in news work are much wider, more varied. Discussions have gone much further than the man-or-woman-framework, widening the lens of gender as well as diversity and inclusion. These are increasingly being seen as organic elements of a shared, meaningful existence that sustain the human community on its only planet – against the backdrop of COVID-19, the climate crisis and other symptoms of a way of living that is destructive to our own existence.

While many of the ways in which gender enriches news work remain essential tools for today’s reporter, editor, trainer or mentor, these have also progressed beyond just counting how many women there are in public office, for instance.

Because gender-related issues are woven into today’s global conversations, they are naturally part of the stories that journalists report on. They are part of change - and change *is* the journalist’s beat.

Because gender-related issues are woven into today’s global conversations, they are naturally part of the stories that journalists report on. They are part of change - and change *is* the journalist’s beat.

Gender, which shapes a good amount of human interaction, is a matter of public interest and relevance, one that is at the same time individual and global, personal and political, even if gender conversations may play out differently in Southeast Asian communities. Becoming less and less stuck in boxes, gender is a multi-purpose tool for producing stories across different news beats, from politics to culture and lifestyle, health, rights and law, labour, education, business and the environment.

A scanning of the headlines, whether local or international, reflects the newsworthiness of stories that intersect with some aspect of gender. For instance, media accounts have discussed young people’s ways of defining positive masculinity and the growing preference (and debate) for using third-person, gender-neutral pronouns instead of ‘he’

or ‘she’ in English. In the news too are individuals who are breaking traditional barriers, – such as a woman who chose to become a pilot in Cambodia and a female weightlifter who won an Olympic gold for the Philippines.

More journalists, including in Southeast Asia, are also specialising in gender as an area of expertise, or creating new media products, from multimedia blogs to issue-based newsletters, on its different facets.

Be it for use in reporting, data analysis, photojournalism, editing, news management and publishing, or managing social media pages, gender is part of the nose for news.

As has been said, a shift in perspective changes what one sees. The skilled use of gender in news work can bring into focus angles that journalists and editors may not have spotted before, much like how the use of a filter reveals hues and adds depth to a photograph. It can lead journalists to probe into, and ask, the right questions. The layers that gender-skilled analysis peels through can spell the difference between a flat, one-dimensional story and one enriched by more voices and perspectives.

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RESETTING THE NEWS COMPASS

How can we set our news compass to use gender more effectively in storytelling?

At the outset, there are some usual but outdated perceptions to unlearn. These include the not-uncommon view that gender awareness is more a matter of political correctness than an indicator of editorial quality.

Some newsrooms find gender a topic and area of work to tolerate because they are part of grant-funded projects. Other editors and news managers may see training on gender as must-do tasks tied to the income streams they bring in. In other words, media organisations’ investments in gender have not always been connected to their daily work and editorial outlook, as well as management vision.

For sure, donor funding in media development has made many gender-related projects come alive and produce relevant outputs. Providing news professionals exposure to using gender as a news tool can certainly lead them to new discoveries in their work. But over the past decades, this lack of integration into journalism may also have helped compartmentalise the space that gender has in news work – and undercut what in development language is called its mainstreaming into everyday journalism.

It has not been uncommon to hear newsroom talk that there are ‘gender’ stories and ‘non-gender’ ones, much like a switch to be turned on or off, or that such stories necessarily (and painfully) involve the use of development jargon. Then, there is the view that putting women ‘somewhere in there’ is an editorial straitjacket, almost as if a gender-proficient journalist walks around with a checklist and a red marker pen.

But a real-world approach does away with the above, focusing instead on how journalists can carve gender into a news practice-based aid to telling more compelling stories.

Core to this is the recognition that the effective use of gender is among the indicators of a good news story, in the same way that diversity in sources, accuracy, context, depth and effective flow are. Not all journalism schools or courses in Southeast Asia integrate gender into the general journalism curriculum, but this is a logical and necessary step in training journalists who have the skills needed to understand, and be updated on, the world that they cover.

Habits and norms in newsrooms, societies and communities do shape journalists’ views on gender in news work. These can be unsaid, unarticulated or not quite evident, but recognising them and being curious about them are part of pressing the ‘reset’ button of our journalistic compasses.

To get started on this, here are two points to remember:

1 A good story about gender does not need the word ‘gender’ in it. In fact, it is almost always more interesting and more effective without it.

‘Show and tell’ is a more useful approach when it comes to giving gender issues meaning and proximity to news users. Knowledge of gender’s formal or textbook definition does not always translate into an understanding of nuance, usage, context or human experience, especially in settings where journalists or workshop participants are new to analysing and using gender in news-related work. In fact, the overuse of dictionary-type definitions of gender is a no-go zone for trainers and teachers. A better

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bet would be to give it a human face and ground it in everyday experiences.

Creative storytelling does much more for a news story rather than just the word ‘gender’ itself.

In the same way, it is a good idea to avoid opening discussions and training events with the question ‘what is gender?’ All too easily, this can mark the start of a swift descent to losing the attention and interest of participants.

2 Being gender-aware does not mean erasing all references to gender and sex, or making everyone in a news story the same.

In fact, doing the above sounds like stripping a story of some of its colour and feel, not to mention information that is useful for news audiences' understanding of it. A journalist's reference to an interviewee as 'he' or 'she', typically after the first mention of the person's name, provides details that can add to or complete a story. Beyond editorial thoroughness, there is a practical reason to do this with Asian names. News users, especially from other countries and cultures, cannot always know a person's sex through a reading of their names.

At the same time, there is growing room for individuals and news sources to state how they want to be referred to in terms of gender identity, including in interviews and stories.

Individuals can choose to indicate what their preferred gender pronouns are in online and chat profiles, email signatures or other social spaces, so it helps to be attuned to this as part of journalistic practice. Journalists need to know when the situation requires them to check with interviewees about their preferred pronouns, and how to do this. Examples of preferred pronouns are 'she/her' or 'he/him', or the more neutral 'they/them' for those who may not strictly identify as male or female. (See Section 2, 'Some Words on Words' for a more detailed discussion.)

USING THAT NOSE FOR NEWS

Example A: An elected public official, who is a member of a Southeast Asian country's legislature, saunters up to the press gallery and says: "From here and up (gesturing from his waist and above), is for the people. But from here going down (gesturing downward from his midriff) is my personal business."

This was how the legislator described the separation between his life as a public servant and as a private person. At the time he made this remark, the press was discussing his widely known personal circumstances: he had several partners apart from his wife, as well as several families. (This account comes from an incident I witnessed from the press gallery many years ago, when I was a political reporter in the Philippines.)

What stories about gender, society and politics could flow from using the legislator's comment as an entry point? The possibilities abound.

Such a comment could lead to a story about the insights of the electorate, perhaps men, women and other genders, around how they view the importance, if any, of elected officials' private lives in their performance as public servants. A story could also be done around what the legislator's remark reflects about Philippine society and politics, go deeper into the popularity of this 'norm' among politicians and public officials, or explore what may be diverse perspectives around this issue in different countries.

Example B: You're looking at statistics that are showing the steadily rising enrolment of children in pre-primary education. That could be a solid lead for a story, but further reading shows that this is not the whole picture.

Although the total enrolment figure has indeed been rising through the years, the pace of growth in girls' enrolment has been trailing that of boys. This 'clue' leads to a change in the story, and to other questions. Potential questions to probe include: Why are more girls being left behind in pre-primary education than boys? What factors may account for this gap, such as the distance of children's homes from the learning facilities, or perhaps their families' income and ethnic backgrounds, ways of thinking? What decisions are being made inside families, and by whom, that result in girls staying at home?

The two examples above give glimpses into how using a gender-informed lens can open up various pathways to wider, or new, angles in stories.



KEY MESSAGES

The global conversation around gender has been changing, evident from a scanning of the news environment.

These processes of social change are appearing on the news radar as journalists keep up with and survey the world around them, in search of stories.

Gender is part of the nose for news, an indicator of editorial quality. It can reveal new angles, nuances and under-reported linkages. Most important, its use can prompt journalists and editors to ask the bigger questions needed to develop stories further.

**FOR
TRAINERS:
TIPS FOR
DISCUSSION**

1 As part of preparations for a discussion or training activity, look for – and keep – articles, video reports, online posts and examples that touch on gender in the news or public spaces.

Local examples that draw attention to these as public and social issues would be useful, but mixing in regional and global ones can add to the quality and variety of discussions.

With these collected samples as case studies, encourage a conversation by asking participants to do a journalistic assessment with a gender lens: What makes them work, or not, as stories? What are their strong and weak points, and why? Have the participants produced, assigned, or edited such reports? Do their media outlets or news sites do such types of stories and why, or why not?

This approach can be a useful starting point especially when working with journalists and participants with different levels of exposure to, and experience with, gender in their reporting or editing. Creating activities around concrete examples can keep discussions from slipping into the realm of too much theory, or falling into the ‘what-is-gender’ trap. What would challenge individuals journalistically and pique their curiosity at the same time are creative points of engagement.

2 Draw out from participants: Tell us one good, outstanding story with a gender angle or content that you remember.

Some questions to delve into: What struck you about this story? In your news environment, newsroom or country, have you noticed any changes in the coverage of gender-related issues, or an increase in media products that specialise on these? What examples come to mind?

3 Divide participants into groups, each of which acts as a newsroom tasked to screen stories and suggest further gender angles to develop.

Ask each ‘newsroom’ to come up with a list of follow-up stories it would assign to its reporters, based on its review of the selected stories in tip number 1. It would then dissect, discuss and agree on ideas for gender stories to be pursued further.

Below are guide questions for each newsroom group to use in its discussion:

- Taking off from each gender-related story provided for analysis, list possible leads or follow-up stories that you find solid and interesting enough to be worth assigning to your reporters. Frame each story assignment as key questions around what you, as editors, would like them to find out and highlight.
- Why do these stories need to be told? What is their importance to the larger public?

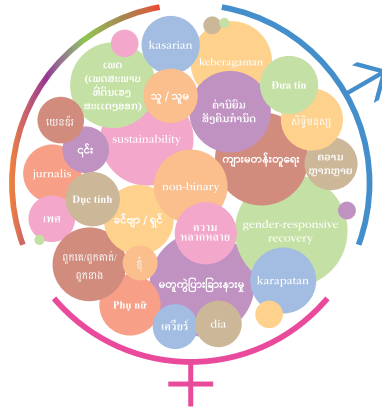
4 Conduct an exercise where groups of participants, using a sample news report or a set of these around an event, issue or time frame, do a simple comparison of how many male, female and other voices are in the material they analyse.

These groups can share what they find out, discuss insights and questions they have. While diversifying voices and genders in stories is not just about numbers or a competition of sorts, this exercise can be a concrete and visual way of taking a second look at news after they have been published.

This can also be creative data-gathering experiments in reviewing the diversity of sources and genders in the news produced by the participants’ media outlets, and provide useful feedback to newsrooms.

Inquire into this point: What is an issue around gender that you have always wanted to understand better, have better skills around, or find yourself curious or unsure about?





2

SOME WORDS ON WORDS

REPORTING WITH THE WIDER PERSPECTIVE that gender offers leads to a topic that is inseparable from it: language.

The words that we use in news are a rich barometer of discussions and ideas that have found their way into our daily lives. Language is a mirror of society and its biases, as well as the shifts (or little or none) in these. Far from static, language is, after all, about social codes that emerge from the negotiation of ideas within communities.

Words can make some groups of people invisible or more visible and package individuals and communities in stereotypes, or go beyond these.

Words have also been channels to advocate for change in the norms around gender — pathways to making conscious shifts, instead of just waiting, so to speak, for change to come around on its own.

Because words are the major tool of journalism, taking a good look at how the media use them — whatever the language — is a healthy exercise in discovering, and unmasking, the not-always-so-obvious assumptions that these can carry, or pass on. Being gender-aware in language can thus help news professionals nurture a more intentional way of using words in their work, going beyond what is habitual or common usage, or assuming that this is the only way to go.

LESSONS FROM HISTORY

A short walk down linguistic history, in particular the sexist bias in English, is instructive. Some knowledge of the past casts a light on how far the changes in our language have gone, as well as the work that remains to be done.

“More often than not, however, the masculine in language, whether in word choice or in grammatical form, is assumed to be the norm, while the feminine is ignored or barely noticed,” Dennis Baron, a professor of English and linguistics at the University of Illinois, wrote in the book [‘Grammar and Gender’](#). “This reflects a distorted view in which women function as the second sex and language simply holds a mirror up to nature,” he said. Baron wrote this book back in 1986, a fact that says a lot about how long gender in language has been a work in progress.

While Baron’s book is about the English language, the insights it offers are relevant as well to journalists and communicators in Southeast Asia, whatever language they use.

For example, it is jaw-dropping to read Baron recount that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the feminine was formally subsumed under the generic masculine (‘he’ being used to refer to everyone) by virtue of no less than a law on English syntax. “In 1850 an act of Parliament translated the generic masculine into an even more formal law,” he wrote. “In addition, campaigns have been waged over the past two hundred years to eliminate feminine marking for English nouns like giantess, lady doctor and chairwoman.”

In the TikTok generation, the above sounds almost unreal.

Baron reminds us that words reflect social patterns, instead of biological factors. “Nevertheless, the stereotypes persist. They may be illusions, but they are powerful and persistent ones,” he said, explaining that many biases “have become encoded in our words.”

Discussion continues about the need to dismantle some of these codes that are housed in language – by detaching assumptions about genders and sexes from the people or behaviours they supposedly describe, or by using pronouns that can be shared across sexes, genders and identities. At the same time, while these may help make communities, including women, more visible, such visibility does not necessarily mean equality.

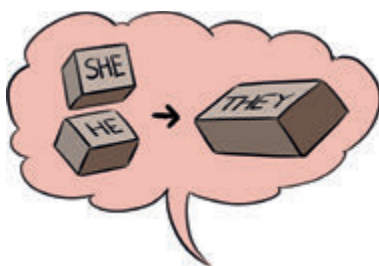
Language is a habit, and habits can change over time. Change can be given a nudge by the words used in the news that we produce and consume. The vocabulary of gender can change as the ideas behind it change.

Some words and phrases may drop out of usage across different times and contexts, while others may come in. Several may acquire changed nuances or be considered insensitive, exclusionary or reinforcing of stereotypes. The connotations of words may be recast, not least due to social campaigns.

For example, the word ‘herstory’, a term first coined in the seventies that refers to history from the point of view of women, is now found in the [Oxford](#) and [Cambridge](#) dictionaries.

The language of news, too, has been making room for the concept of having more diverse, flexible gender identities — and not having to sort people into unshifting categories. Stories in the media talk not only about being female or male, reflecting individuals’ widening scope to identify as being beyond those two tags, or neither of them. News reports use words such as ‘gender-expansive’, an adjective for persons who have a more flexible gender identity or expression than commonly held in their culture. More and more news consumers know that transgender, or just ‘trans’, refers to people whose gender identity differs from their sex at birth.

WHAT’S IN A PRONOUN?



The conversations around more fluidity beyond just two identities, masculine and feminine, are taking place in the arena of pronouns, especially in languages where many of these are gendered.

In English, there is emerging the practice of using gender-neutral or non-binary pronouns as a way of identification and self-expression, and to make groups of people seen and heard. Perhaps the most well-known discussions are around how to refer to the third-person singular, without using the pronoun ‘he’ or ‘she’, or using the ‘he’ as the default for referring to everyone.

The gender-neutral, singular-person pronoun that does not exist in English is often referred to as the ‘missing’ word. Indeed, ‘The Missing Word’ is the title of a chapter in Baron’s 2020 book [‘What’s Your Pronoun? Beyond He & She’](#), which dives into the story of pronouns in the cultural history of rights and identities. While gender-neutral pronouns are making a comeback, Baron writes that they have actually been used through the centuries. William Shakespeare and Jane Austen, used the singular ‘they’ to refer to a third person, he says. A quick online search throws up articles about discussions around this type of pronoun use through the seventies, eighties and nineties.

The conversations around more fluidity beyond just two identities, masculine and feminine, are taking place in the arena of pronouns.

Here is an example of the usage of ‘they’ as a third-person singular pronoun: ‘Patrick is making their own infographic because their artist colleague is sick.’

Columbia University linguistics professor John McWhorter says using ‘they’ as a singular pronoun can be seen as a “refinement” in the English language. “People are referring to themselves or some of their cohort as ‘they.’ I highly suspect that we are ultimately seeing something more happening to a pronoun that never seems to want to sit still,” he wrote.

In his book ‘What’s Your Pronoun? Beyond He and She’, Baron says that the days of the singular ‘he’ are ending, adding that the goal of changing pronouns is “to validate the words of those whose voices have been considerably silenced.”

But this matter is not without debate. “What do you want, good grammar or acceptable woke politics? Pressed to choose, I’ll take good grammar,” [the author Joseph Epstein wrote](#) in the conservative US-based magazine ‘National Review’. Others ask why, in the first place, ‘new’ words like non-binary pronouns have to be constructed for certain groups of people. There are those, however, who find nothing strange with that, pointing out that languages and dictionaries naturally change over time.

Beyond words in specific languages, there does appear to be, in public writing and communication, a heightened consciousness around making space for the identities that individuals choose for themselves, including through the use of words that work fine without having to be in the masculine form.

This awareness is also increasingly found in discussions across Southeast Asia.

For starters, several languages in the region, unlike English, have third-person pronouns that are not tied to ‘he’ or ‘she’.

In daily conversations, speakers of Thai and Lao, for instance, typically find out if someone being referred to is a he or a she from that person’s name or through subsequent descriptions.

Indonesian and Filipino have single and plural forms of the third-person pronouns ‘he’ and ‘she’ that do not relay information about sex or gender. In Khmer, it is possible to use a third-person pronoun for both men and women, but there is also a ‘they’ that refers to men and one that describes women.

Several languages offer choices for words that have the same meaning, some of which are gendered and others that are not. In the more gender-aware context that is emerging today, media and other professionals in information and communication find it a positive move to opt for words that do not always need to classify by sex or gender.

Several languages in the region, unlike English, have third-person pronouns that are not tied to ‘he’ or ‘she’.

For instance, Burmese has words for ‘journalists’ that are gendered and some that are neutral. The English word ‘journalist’ also comes in handy in language that is used daily, including in news.

In Indonesian, there is a word for a male journalist and a female one, with the plural pronoun being the masculine form. But media professionals and

others who want to avoid bias from having to fall back on the masculine form often prefer to use the generic ‘jurnalís’ instead.

But while gender classifications may not always appear in the third-person pronouns of several Southeast Asian languages, they appear in connection to the gender of a speaker, through forms of the first-person pronoun ‘I’. In such cases, for instance in Thai, a woman says ‘I’ using a different word (‘dichan’) than a man would. In Burmese and Khmer, there is a male ‘I’, and a female ‘I’, but also a personal pronoun that can be used by both.

How societies navigate the gender-binary rules commonly found in many languages, adapt them or make new ones, is a gold mine for stories. For instance, a Thai female who identifies as transgender may choose to use the male-attached pronouns as well as polite particles used at the end of sentences and phrases (‘khrup’ for male speakers, instead of ‘kha’ for female speakers). Some, however, may be comfortable sticking to the gendered rules in grammar, and still others may be non-conforming or prefer to avoid being strictly tied to any gender identity.

In different parts of the world, social experiments are underway that involve tweaking the rules and ways of grammar where they are not quite structured to bring in more gender identities. Language teachers are, for example, [trying various ways of making grammar rules mix with, and make room for, the changing norms in society](#).

BEYOND EITHER-OR

Using the two traditional categories of ‘he’ or ‘she’ is no longer enough in order to describe the world we live in. Apart from changes in usage and more choices of words, some terms around gender have been repurposed or are acquiring different meanings.

The expansion of the acronym ‘LGBT’ (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) to include a wider range of identities reflects how words can change across time, as social shifts take place. While the use of ‘LGBT’ picked up through the nineties, it has become longer over the years as it took in more, and wider, identity markers around sexuality and gender.

Today, it is far from rare to see news reports use ‘LGBTQ+’ or ‘LGBTQIA+’ (‘lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual’, and the plus sign can refer to and include allies and other identities).

Interesting too is the word ‘queer’, which used to be seen as a slur to refer to homosexuals, but has, since the eighties, been reclaimed by those who use it assertively, confidently or defiantly.

The online universe has also seen the evolution of words like ‘femboy’ (a mix of ‘feminine’ plus ‘boy’), which used to be a pejorative term referring to a young male who displays characteristics that are traditionally defined as feminine. These days, ‘femboy’, also a popular hashtag, has taken on an

empowering characteristic for gender non-conforming men, usually under 30 years of age, who use feminine clothing or appearance as a means of gender expression, but [do not necessarily feel tied to a particular sexual orientation and male and female codes](#).

How much meaning and context matter is highlighted too by the meanings that can be attached to words, such as ‘feminist’.

This point was in full display during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics (held in 2021), when a South Korean female triple-gold medalist in archery, An San, found herself the subject of global headlines after being called ‘feminist’ in online tirades launched by irate male compatriots.

While her accomplishments earned her accolades across the world, An San received from her home country [a barrage of sexist online attacks from men who said that her short hair was masculine and that therefore she was a “feminist”](#), even a ‘feminazi’ out to destroy men.

This incident showed how the word ‘feminist’ is seen disparagingly in the conservative political environment in South Korea, a country that has been seeing pushback against campaigns addressing gender-based violence and inequality in work and under the law.

Contrast the connotation attached to ‘feminist’ in the above story with the use of this same adjective in an empowering context by a Myanmar-based advocacy group, which calls itself the [Purple Feminists Group](#).

The use of sex-specific words and terms has long been a major topic in conversations around gender and language in the media.

At one point, some news desks were keen on taking out just about all indicators touching on sex and gender in stories, making them blind to such nuances. This led one gender rights advocate, quoted in the 2010 book [‘IPS Gender and Development Glossary: A tool for Journalists and Writers’](#), to say how strange and ironic it was for society to find it more appropriate, or more enlightened even, to use a piece of furniture – ‘chair’ – to refer to human beings.

It is in no way disrespectful or discriminatory for a feature story to say that an engineer, for instance, is female or male – it is the assumption that an engineer is a man or should ‘naturally’ be male, that is a slippery slope. The problem with words like ‘housemaid’ lies not so much in saying that women do domestic work, but in their use to assign, or confine, women to such roles by default or because of their biology. It is this that can easily reinforce the views, still a challenge in many of our communities, that a woman’s main place is the home or the kitchen.

One way of making the use of gender-aware language a habit is for newsrooms to include the building of this skill when they hire and train their staff, be they reporters or editors. Gender proficiency can grow deeper roots if it is included in the style manuals that news organisations draft or use.

News-friendly choices do exist for words and phrases that are more inclusive from the viewpoint of gender, human rights, sensitivity and dignity. They are fit for use in the world of journalism.

A STORY TO FOLLOW

From a news perspective, the evolution of language, including around gender, is a running story. It bears watching to document how this plays out in ways that were unthinkable not too long ago — shifts that affirm that it is fine for individuals to be different and to define their identities (or not), and that it is unnecessary to herd everyone into one group.

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KEY MESSAGES

Words, in whatever language, are the major tool of journalism. The language used in media can make women, other genders and communities, visible or invisible, pass on stereotypes or help dismantle them.

Some words related to gender have changed, and will continue to shift, over time. New words or terms have come up, or meanings changed or repurposed.

In English, there have been shifts in the use of third-person pronouns, with many individuals using the plural pronoun ‘they’ in place of singular third-person pronouns, if they wish to avoid using ‘he’ or ‘she’. This expanded usage of ‘they’ is also taking root across work settings, in many parts of the world. At the same time, debate around the usage of gender-neutral pronouns continues.

Several Southeast Asian languages have third-person pronouns that are gender neutral. But there has also been an awareness, including in news communities, of the value of creating more room for gender-neutral pronouns and words.

**FOR
TRAINERS:
TIPS FOR
DISCUSSION**

1 Ask participants to reflect on their current ways of using words related to gender.

How do they choose what words or terms to use, or what to avoid? Have their news desks discussed these usage issues? Do newsrooms have a stylebook, or any kind of guide about words, phrases and portrayal of gender in stories? Is this a matter left to a journalist's individual preference?

Participants can share experiences around interviewing, editing and making headlines and titles and/or social media posts.

2 Draw up a list of persons and professions, a mix of interviewees, and after making some time for reflection, invite views from journalists around how they choose their interviewees and decide who to seek out.

After establishing that your event is a safe professional space for discussion, explore and give examples about how the male gaze tends to be the default or habitual one. Have they noticed this, or become conscious of this, before? Share this experience if so. Have they ever received editorial feedback on varying sources, whether in terms of background or gender?

3 Working with English-language material, invite participants to practise using 'they' as a singular pronoun (in place of 'he' or 'she'). Conduct a group exercise that involves participants replacing the words 'he' and 'she' with 'they' in sample articles that you provide.

This exercise aims to show concretely what it means to change the lenses one uses in processing gendered pronouns and how stories could look like in such a shift, given the emerging use of 'they' as a gender-neutral option to saying 'he' or 'she' in stories.

What words would they like to be defined more clearly? In groups, draw up a 'wish list' of terms that they would like newsrooms to define, address or include in writing and news guides.





Arts and culture are a window into our societies, bringing our gaze to the known and seen, as well as to the unknown, unseen – and unsaid. Two films from Myanmar caused a stir in international festivals in late 2021 – ‘[What Happened to the Wolf?](#)’, which follows two terminally ill women who fall in love with each other, and ‘[Broken](#)’, a documentary around women’s stories of trauma from conflict.

Articles from the Philippines reported the streaming of the Philippine Educational Theatre Association’s play ‘[Under My Skin](#)’, which stitches together stories of different individuals and different genders, to break the taboo around HIV.

Gender – including usually sensitive topics such as norms that hinder gender equality as well as harassment on social media – was the focus of the 2021 call of entries by the [Lanxang Shorts](#) film competition in Laos. In Cambodia, [Episode 3 of Tok Toch](#), a Khmer-language podcast aimed at younger people, asked: “Why does society always tell me I should do this or do that because I am a male/female?”

Another sign that gender has been moving up the ladder of public and news interest is the creation of gender-focused products, such as the [Lunar](#) newsletter of the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post.

There are also stories that probe into gender issues within the media industry, including newsrooms’ consciousness about, and development of policies around, diversity, representation and the provision of employment opportunities, including to women and LGBTQ. In the wake of the #metoo movement that started in the United States in 2017, some newsrooms in Asia have had to discuss sexual harassment and clarify policies on it, and blend an awareness of gender into work policies and environments.

THINGS WE DON'T ALWAYS TALK ABOUT

Perceptions and expectations around masculinity, femininity and gender roles do shape views in the news community, because its members are not separate from society at large.

For instance, it has not been unusual for news desks to assign what are interpreted to be ‘harder’ assignments to males and feature pieces and ‘lighter’ stories to females. News desks and journalists may have the perception, or may have gotten used to thinking, that going out into the field or doing work that involves the use of equipment, as such as visual journalism, is more of a masculine task, or at least a less feminine one.

How journalists in several Southeast Asian countries make their way through these issues are discussed in ‘[Her Lens: Where Are Southeast Asia’s Women Photojournalists?](#)’, published by the Reporting ASEAN series. The story showed that while women have been carving out more spaces within the news profession, conventional expectations of gender roles persist within it.

Many women journalists are expected to give up work and promotion opportunities, including those that involve travel, or to take leave for reasons related to families and the household. They are often expected to be perfectly fine with this situation too.

The journalists quoted in the ‘Her Lens’ article convey a real-world picture of how gender issues play out in Southeast Asia’s news circles. Journalists and editors explained that women photojournalists and visual reporters do not fit the ‘typical’ image of Lao women. Cambodian women journalists, as well as other news professionals and the public, are uncomfortable with the sight of women getting squeezed and shoved within packs of mostly male photojournalists while on news coverage, they said.

Many editors and journalists recognise how an having a more diverse composition of staff can contribute to producing news coverage that stands out.

At the same time, many editors and journalists recognise how an having a more diverse composition of staff can contribute to producing news coverage that stands out. They appreciate the different gaze that women photojournalists can bring, be it in framing stories, or in identifying subjects and engaging with them. Indeed, quite a number of Southeast Asian women journalists have been thinking – and doing differently – from traditional expectations in news work.

But it is not all about having women in news settings, or just being a woman. A female Vietnamese editor, interviewed in the ‘Her Lens’ story, zoomed in on the editorial value that the deft use of gender brings. She corrected the oft-too-quick assumption that being a woman means that one has an automatic and innate awareness of gender and its connections to power dynamics in human interaction. “I’m looking for a feminist perspective, not a female reporter,” Phuong-Thai Bui, chief of the world news desk at Vietnam’s Zing News, was quoted as saying.

Apart from looking out into the world through their reportage, the media need to turn their reflective lens inward – to not just report gender equality and inclusivity, but be accountable to these same norms inside the newsroom.

Likewise, the news industry’s engagement with gender issues is a necessary topic for journalists to take a critical look at, even if doing so can be uncomfortable in some quarters.

To be global citizens whose journalism is congruent with their work cultures and values, the media are called upon to be the change that their own reportage aims for. If they report on gender bias, discrimination, exclusion and violations of human rights, surely they need to counter these within their offices as well?

If the media report on gender bias, discrimination, exclusion and violations of human rights, surely they need to counter these within their offices as well?

Gender is not only a subject of reportage and a tool for storytelling. A gender-informed newsroom is also a more professional one.

KEY MESSAGES

Journalists can only report on issues - and teach or discuss them with others – if they can make a connection with these. This applies to gender as well.

The global conversations about gender as a reflection of the norms of diversity, equality and inclusion, as well as rights, are also being heard and seen in Southeast Asia. News stories that have gender angles are a regular part of the mix of daily news coming from within the region. This reflects the news relevance of gender and its intersection with other issues of the day, ranging from development to culture to sustainability in a post-COVID-19 era.

At the same time, gender is not just a news topic or a storytelling tool. The media profession needs to be part of the social change around gender, by internalising this into its work culture.

**FOR
TRAINERS:
TIPS FOR
DISCUSSION**

1 Prepare lists of words and phrases related to gender from news articles, videos and podcasts to use as entry points for an exchange of insights among

participants.

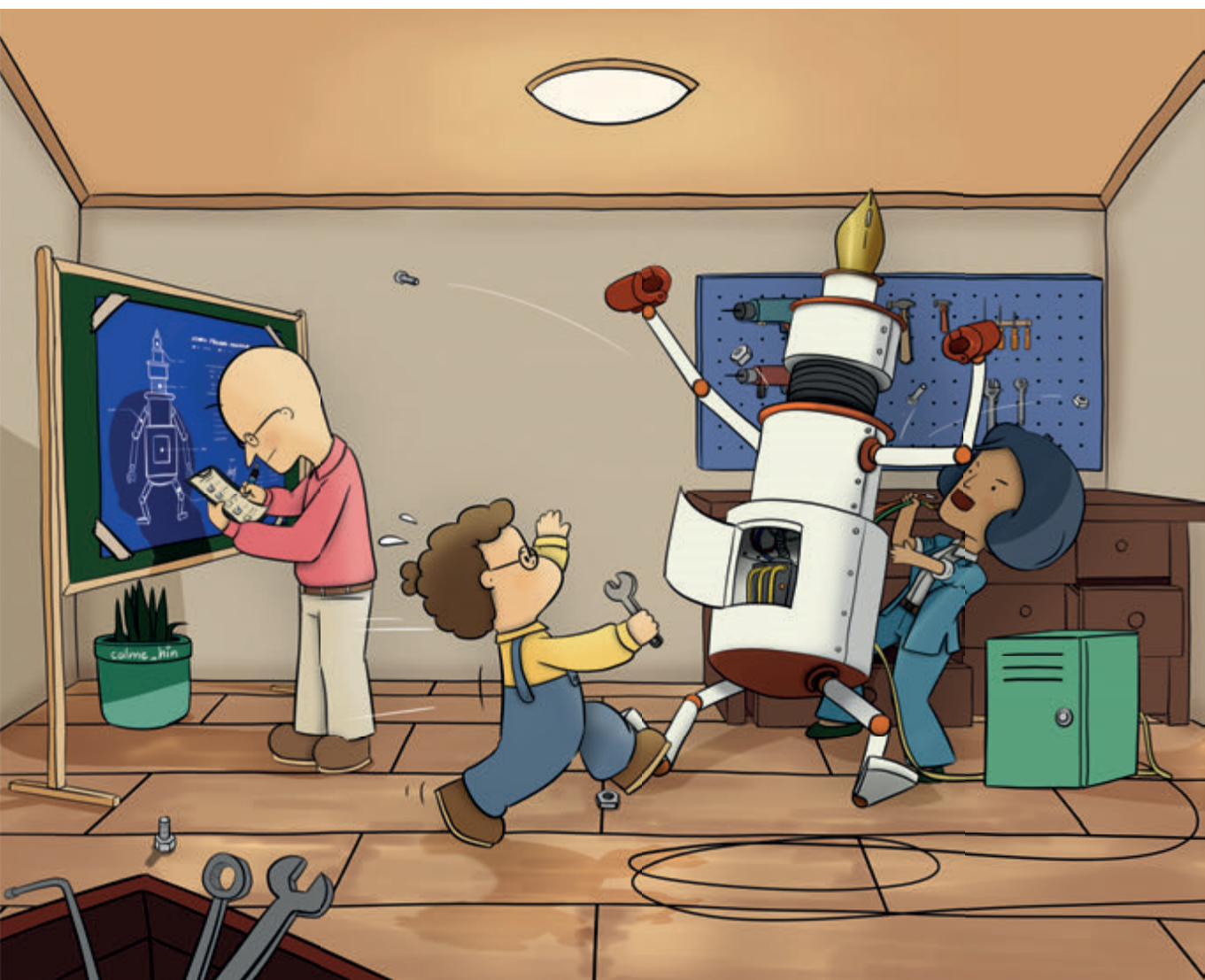
Invite them to select which terms they or their news outlets use, or which ones are discussed in usage guidelines or editorial policies. Encourage discussions about their confidence in using these concepts in news work, and how they understand them.

Do discuss local-language stories and gender-related words used in news copy, since local-language products are the dominant media across Southeast Asia. But mix in some common English terms to expose participants to a wider range of perspectives, and given the fact that some English words do not always have equivalent translations in other languages.

What words have come into use or fallen into misuse, or are increasingly being avoided? Are there new words, changed meanings of words that they have noticed in news reports?

2 Ask participants to share examples in their own languages of pronouns for 'he', 'she', 'they' or certain professions or groups of people that are usually gendered, as well as neutral ones.

Are there gender-neutral options available, and have they been choosing to use them, and how and why? Are they being encouraged to do by their newsrooms? (See also discussion tip number 3 in Section 2, 'Some Words on Words'.)





WHEN THEY HEAR THE WORD ‘GENDER’ IN RELATION TO THE NEWS, many journalists nod their heads because they should, or feel they should. News professionals may say well, how can anyone really argue against being gender-informed in stories?

For many journalists, the challenge lies in putting together the nuts and bolts of a gender approach. Practice is the key to sharpening this skill. After all, the point of journalism lies in doing it, far beyond talking about it in workshops.

Below are news practice-based tips and habits for gender-informed journalism. The list of tips begins from a basic awareness of gender, then progresses to the nuances and more complicated questions that this storytelling approach can lead to. The habits below are useful not only in gender-aware reporting but for improving news skills in general.

EIGHT TIPS FOR PRODUCING STORIES

1 Take a look at where the women or other genders are in a story. Are they missing? Having diverse voices, viewpoints and backgrounds makes a report more engaging.

Since slightly less than half of the world's 7.87 billion people are women, the world of news should reflect this better as well (the United Nations says [there are about 3.8 billion women to 3.9 billion men](#) as of 2020).

Because women have historically been less visible in a society where 'he' has tended to be the default mode, an awareness of this context is a first step in honing a keen sense of gender in news work. Keeping this awareness active is helpful because representation in the news tends to be skewed toward men.

Diversity and pluralism help producers and users of news see a wider picture and encounter views different from their own, which in turn makes for healthier media spaces.

2 Check out gender-disaggregated figures, which can lead to hidden or under-reported angles in stories. Data sets are journalists' partners in storytelling.

Journalists have access to an ever-widening range of information and statistics around various facets of life and development, from politics to climate change, human rights to science, education to work. Statistics presented in global and regional reports are often broken down into male and female, in addition to other indicators such as age, geographic location and educational levels. For example, global reports track the number of women in parliaments or rank countries by the status of women.

Using primary data sets as go-to sources of information, rather than copying from secondary material that cite them, is a habit that serves journalists well. It also helps protect news professionals from errors, and from falling victim to misinformation and disinformation.

Many reports feature the use of data visualisation, which allows users to generate the figures they need, and to do analysis relating to one or more countries, selected parameters or periods of time. These sets of figures can also be more independent sources of information, or provide data unavailable at the national level. Reports by United Nations agencies, as well as those produced by data analytics outfits, scientific and research institutes, banks and credible non-profit groups, are worth following.

COVID-19 has given rise to reports analysing its gendered impacts, covering areas such as health, equity, climate change and employment. An example is the [COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker](#), which was produced by the United Nations Development Programme.

Many of these briefers are also interesting subjects for stories. For instance, the medical journal ‘Lancet’ looked at how [women fared worse than men in depression and anxiety amid COVID-19](#). Using this research, The Economist magazine produced [a data-based story](#) for news audiences.

3 Weave figures deftly into a story. This adds more heft to it, while keeping the narrative flowing smoothly for readers to follow.

With the purposeful use of gender-differentiated data, statistics contribute to, rather than disrupt, the pace of a story. Avoid throwing in hard-to-digest chunks of statistics without blending them into the body of the story, so that readers and viewers do not end up struggling to find their way back to its main point.

4 Take a pause to review how different genders are portrayed in a news report. Does it tend assign typical, presumed roles and profiles to the people featured in it? Does the way they are portrayed pass on stereotypes?

A second look provides a chance to screen story drafts for gender bias. Are women defined mainly or singularly through their reproductive roles? Are they cast in the role of victims even when this is unnecessary, or not the case? Is the portrayal of men one that assumes that they do not, or should not, have the need to express emotions, and binds this to masculinity?

Some tired angles for stories in the Southeast Asian context include the framing of women’s labour migration as necessarily including exploitation, trafficking or abuse. Too many instances of these continue, but migration across borders has long been part of the human experience. Migration is not always a sad story, and it has given many people opportunities for a better quality of life, as well as economic mobility.

5 Analyse how the impacts and meanings of events and policies differ for women and men, other communities. Investigation into what these might be, and why, could throw up new leads.

For example, gender bias in the law discriminates against women in majority-Catholic Philippines, a country where there is no divorce. Under that nation’s law, [criminal penalties for extra-marital relations depend on the offender’s sex](#).

While marital infidelity is a criminal offence for both men and women, it involves shorter jail terms and higher evidence requirements for males. Under Philippine law, the crime of “adultery” is committed by a married woman and her paramour who engage in sexual intercourse.

Proof of extra-marital sex alone is thus enough for wives to be punished for adultery – but this is not the case for husbands.

A married man is covered by a different crime called “concubinage”. To prove this, the wife must show that her husband has kept a mistress in the conjugal dwelling, or has had sexual intercourse with her “under scandalous circumstances”, or lived with his mistress in any other place.

Legal experts and gender rights campaigners have long been pushing for the repeal of the penal code provisions for adultery and concubinage, arguing that they violate the equal clause provision of the Philippine Constitution.

To probe further into this story, journalists can look into the historical, socio-cultural and religious contexts of these laws, and the reasons they remain unchanged after a century.

6 Examine the inconvenient or uncomfortable questions around perceptions of gender in a story, and the social tensions that often exist around these.

Go deeper into topics that are deemed sensitive, or are seldom questioned and assumed to hold true for everyone, all the time. These can include how people define masculinity, femininity and being non-binary. Double standards and power relations that play out at home, work, school and in subcultures within genders are points of interest.

Stories can address misperceptions too, such as views that gender inclusiveness and equality are akin to competition between sexes, or that the quest for equality is hindered by biological issues such as men's physical strength compared to women.

Other multi-layered story lines could be:

- While having more women in politics is a positive development, this by itself does not mean that women-led governments or the policies they adopt are automatically gender responsive. A relevant question to ask is: What difference does meeting, or aiming for, the recommended minimum of 30% of parliamentary seats for women make for a country?
- A man who has an extramarital partner is perceived as being 'responsible' in some societies as long as he continues to provide financial support, and maybe a home, for his wife. What role do gender and social norms play in normalising situations like this?
- Transgender people are much more visible these days. Yet many encounter stigma and harassment, run into challenges in areas such as military service or when processing identification documents. How do transgender people cope, and how do they see the future?

7 Explore ideas for enterprise stories by studying the linkages between COVID-19, gender and the quest for a more sustainable way of living. These issues will continue to be of public interest for years to come.

How has the pandemic impacted gender inequalities and/or progress toward a more gender-equal and inclusive world? How are women faring in this crisis, in the plans for recovery from it?

UN Women's 'Beyond COVID-19: A Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice' finds that the pandemic has "exacerbated preexisting gender inequalities and laid bare weaknesses in the already fragile global care

[economy.](#)” The facts and figures in such reports are rich data to learn from, and use, in analysis.

8 Putting on an editor’s hat, review the language used in a gender-related story to see that it mainly uses words that are part of everyday conversations. This improves readability, and helps audiences stay with the story.

Avoid littering news reports with development jargon and ‘big’ words whose presence does not necessarily turn them into more effective stories. Some gender terms may not be widely known to the average news user, and may thus benefit from having short, clear explanations.

THREE HELPFUL HABITS

1 Read, read and read — about your country or community, but also about our interconnected world and situations unfamiliar to you.

The value of this habit cannot be overstated as an investment in widening one’s perspectives and journalistic skills. Few things are fully domestic these days, and the ability to think globally enriches all news work.

Subscribe to the email newsletters of credible websites and organisations that produce quality information, collecting these resources like one would put together a playlist of favourite music.

2 Attend webinars and events on different topics in order to stay updated about the issues of the day.

Not every event needs to lead to the production of a story. Setting aside time for learning, including by listening to a mix of discussions, is indispensable to building the stock knowledge that is essential to good journalism.

For journalists, webinars are also venues where they can identify new sources, expand contacts, and stumble across story ideas.

3 Practise working with interactive dashboards and data visualisations that are available online.

This help build proficiency and confidence in using statistics, and in knowing where to find good ones. Try customising data sets in dashboards and trackers by using different filters across various indicators. Being comfortable with numbers adds to journalists’ ability to produce independent analysis, not to mention outputs like infographics, among others.

Training opportunities are available for those interested in data journalism. Platforms like [Flourish](#) and [Datawrapper](#) do not involve coding, and provide templates that text-based journalists use. [Thibi Recipes](#) approaches data storytelling like cooking classes, whipping up and sharing recipes for journalists to follow.





THE ONLINE RESOURCES IN THE LIST BELOW ARE USEFUL IN NEWS WORK, such as doing legwork and research, reporting and editing, or planning and managing news coverage. They range from glossaries of terms around gender to reliable data trackers and data visualisations, as well as useful thematic reports.

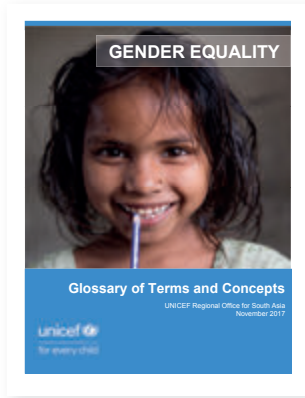
A good number of these are updated regularly, including annually. Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on different aspects of life and development have led to the publication of a wide array of reports and data that are distributed publicly. This has made much more primary information available to journalists to use as stories, or as background and sources of statistics.

Do sign up for newsletters from organisations and sources below to receive alerts and updates over email, away from ‘noisy’ social platforms and filtering by the algorithms behind them.

1 On definitions, usage of terms and concepts

A Guide to Gender Identity Terms | National Public Radio

<https://www.npr.org/2021/06/02/996319297/gender-identity-pronouns-expression-guide-lgbtq>



Gender Equality: Glossary of Terms and Concepts
| United Nations Children's Fund

https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/1761/file/Gender_glossary_of_terms_and_concepts.pdf/

GenderTerm: UN Women Online Resources on the
Use of Gender-inclusive Language

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/genderterm>

(Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish
searchable)

2 On population, demographics and development

2021 reports:

2021 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index: Unmasking Disparities by
Ethnicity, Caste and Gender | United Nations Development Programme

<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/2021-global-multidimensional-poverty-index-mpi>

2021 World Population Data Sheet | Population Reference Bureau

<https://www.prb.org/news/2021-world-population-data-sheet-released/>

The State of the World's Children 2021 — On My Mind: Promoting, Protecting
and Caring for Children's Mental Health | UNICEF

<https://data.unicef.org/resources/sowc-2021/>

World Development Report 2021: Data for Better Lives | The World Bank

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2021>

Data sets:

Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific 2021 | Asian Development Bank

<https://www.adb.org/publications/key-indicators-asia-and-pacific-2021>

Statistics on Children | UNICEF

<https://data.unicef.org>

World Population Dashboard | United Nations Population Fund

<https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population-dashboard>

3 About women

Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index

<https://www.bloomberg.com/gei>

Gender 3000 in 2021 | Credit Suisse Research Institute

<https://www.credit-suisse.com/about-us-news/en/articles/media-releases/credit-suisse-gender-3000-report-shows-women-hold-almost-a-quart-202109.html>

Gender Quotas Database | International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Stockholm University

<https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas>

Global Gender Gap Report 2021 | World Economic Forum

<https://www.weforum.org/reports/ab6795a1-960c-42b2-b3d5-587eccda6023>

Human Development Report 2020: The Next Frontier — Human Development and the Anthropocene | United Nations Development Programme

<http://hdr.undp.org/en/2020-report>

(With Gender Development Index, Gender Inequality Index)

Labour Statistics on Women | International Labour Organization

<https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/women/>

State of the World's Population Report 2021: Bodily Autonomy | United Nations Population Fund

<https://www.unfpa.org/swop>

The World's Women 2020: Trends and Statistics | United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

<https://worlds-women-2020-data-undesa.hub.arcgis.com/pages/population-and-families>

Women in Politics: 2021 | Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/03/women-in-politics-map-2021>

4 On the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Asia-Pacific SDG Gateway | United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

(SDG progress charts and SDG Progress Report 2021)

<https://data.unescap.org>

Data for the Sustainable Development Goals | United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

<http://uis.unesco.org/en/home>

The Sustainable Development Goals – Tracking Progress and Engaging Stakeholders in Review | UNESCAP

<https://www.unescap.org/2030-agenda/sustainable-development-goals>

5 On COVID-19 and related issues



ASEAN Digital Generation Report: Pathways to ASEAN's Inclusive Digital Transformation and Recovery | World Economic Forum

https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_ASEAN_Digital_Generation_2021.pdf

COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker | UNDP

<https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/>

Global Prevalence and Burden of Depressive and Anxiety Disorders in 204 Countries and Territories due to the COVID-19 Pandemic | The Lancet

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)02143-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)02143-7/fulltext)

Data story on the above:

COVID-19 Has Led to a Sharp Increase in Depression and Anxiety – Women Fared Worse than Men | The Economist

<https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/10/11/covid-19-has-led-to-a-sharp-increase-in-depression-and-anxiety>

COVID-19 Public Monitor | YouGov

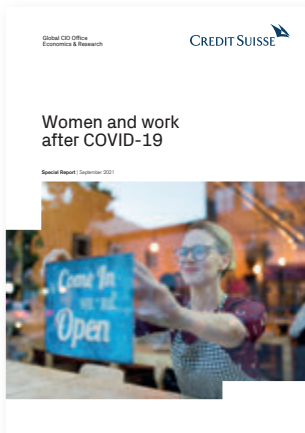
<https://yougov.co.uk/covid-19>

Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice | UN Women

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/09/feminist-plan-for-sustainability-and-social-justice>

Leaving No One Behind: Impact of COVID-19 on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) | UNDP

<https://www.undp.org/publications/leaving-no-one-behind-impact-covid-19-sustainable-development-goals-sdgs>



Women and Work after COVID-19 | Credit Suisse Research Institute

<https://www.credit-suisse.com/media/assets/microsite-ux/docs/woman-to-woman/women-and-work-2021.pdf>

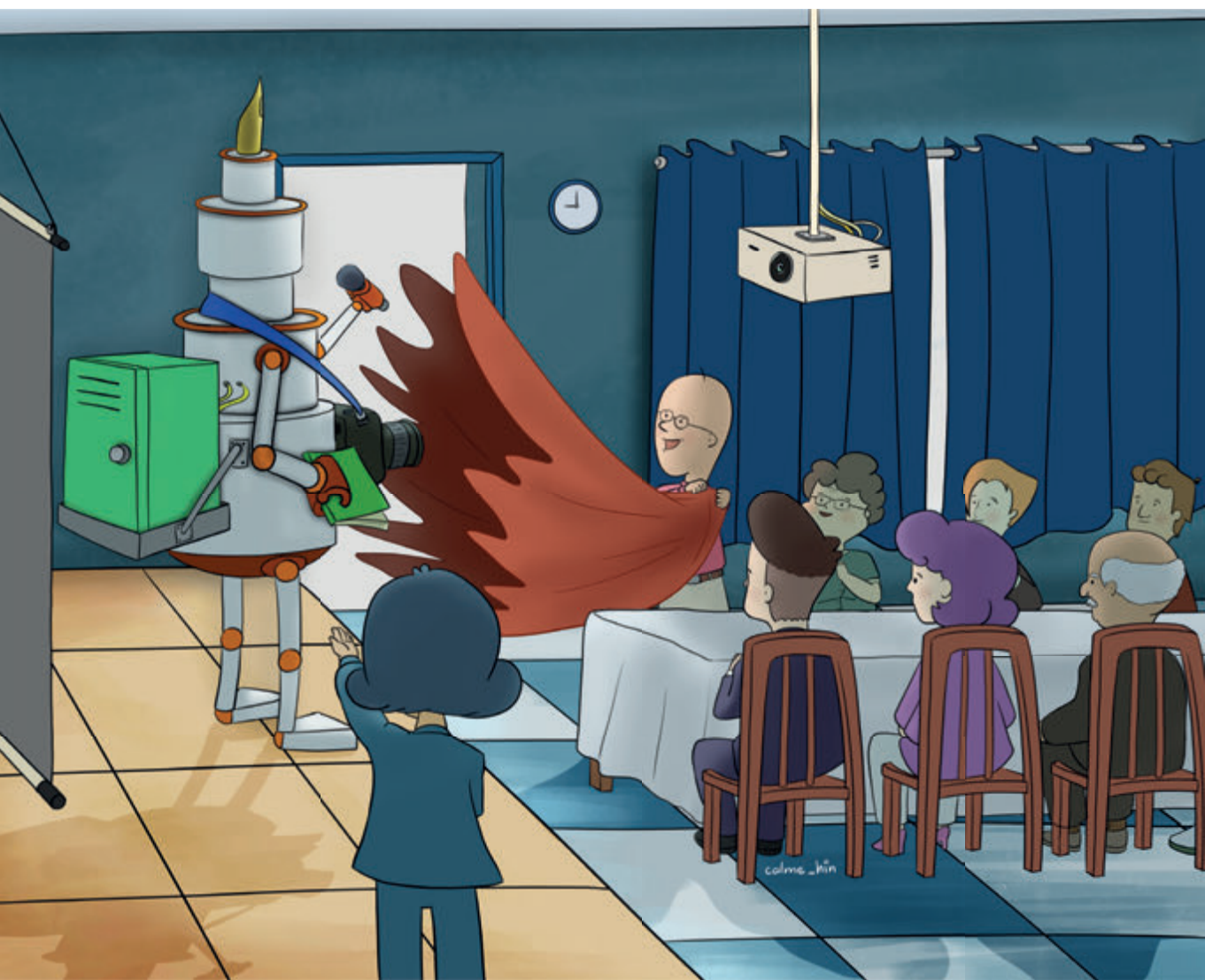
6 Other general dashboards and data trackers

Graphic Detail | Data Stories from The Economist

<https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail?page=1>

One World in Data

<https://ourworldindata.org>



To hold a 1.5-hour event to highlight gender issues on, say, International Women's Day, one option would be to start from examples from local media and online spaces that show how gender-related issues are being discussed. Using concrete examples helps, especially when working with participants who are newer to using gender-related skills in news.

For a half-day session, it could be possible to include one or two group exercises from those listed in Sections 1, 2 and 3.

A discussion of words and language around gender can be packaged as a stand-alone session that lasts anywhere from an hour to a whole day.

It may be useful to integrate discussions about the use of a gender-informed approach in relation to different news-related responsibilities, from pitching stories to reporting, doing interviews, copyediting and making headlines, to crafting social media posts. This would give trainers and teachers more room to get into more detail, and address specific newsroom situations.

Opportunities for hands-on practice in reporting and editing are of immense value, given that much of the learning curve in using gender-informed perspectives relates to how this is actually done.



'GENDER ON OUR NEWS RADAR: A VIEW FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA' was produced as part of the Southeast Asia Media Training Network (SEAMTN) project of the [Fojo Media Institute](#).

SEAMTN aims to strengthen the capacity of journalism training institutions in a regional network that covers Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Vietnam. It is supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (2016-2021).

Fojo belongs to the non-profit public Linnaeus University, one of Sweden's biggest universities.

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<https://www.reportingasean.net/her-lens-where-are-southeast-asias-photojournalists/>
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<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1100082>

ANNEX:

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM MYANMAR AND CAMBODIA

BELOW ARE TWO ARTICLES ABOUT THE INSIGHTS from a survey on views on gender in the media, which was distributed to respondents ranging from journalists, editors and trainers from Myanmar and Cambodia in 2020 and 2021.

The survey questionnaires used in this initiative were drawn up by the Southeast Asia Media Training Project of Fojo Media Institute. They were circulated by the Myanmar Journalism Institute and the Cambodian Center for Independent Media in English, Burmese and Khmer.

Myanmar Journalists Keen on Gender as a Reporting Tool, Survey Shows

from Fojo Media Institute | 6 August 2021

<https://fojo.se/en/myanmar-journalists-keen-on-gender-as-a-reporting-tool-survey-shows/>

Myanmar's journalists say they have not had much training on gender issues related to news reporting but know that having a gender perspective is an important journalistic skill – and would find it useful to get more, and deeper, training on using it to strengthen storytelling.

These were among the key findings of a survey by the Myanmar Journalism Institute (MJl) that collected insights and information about the understanding and awareness, as well as experience, of reporters and editors in Myanmar in using gender as a news reporting tool.

The findings of the survey initiative, which was carried out with the support of Fojo Media Institute's Southeast Asia Media Training Network project, are to be used as journalistic practice-based inputs in a gender-for-storytelling course that MJl would like to develop and offer in Myanmar. The findings would also help the institute weave gender into its wider training curriculum.



Students of full-time diploma courses at the Myanmar Journalism Institute

MJI

There were 49 respondents in the survey, which involved the use of two online questionnaires, one for reporters and one for editors, ranging from section to chief editors.

Among the 49 respondents, approximately 75% were men and 25% were women, mostly from online media outlets in Myanmar. The majority were from Yangon but media houses in Mon, Rakhine, Shan state and Thanintharyi, Mandalay and Patheingyi divisions were also represented. Most of the media houses produce news in Burmese, while some are in the languages of other ethnic communities.

Over 80% of the respondents said they had never received any training on gender aspects in news reporting.

The survey, among other things, showed that editors and reporters found it challenging to use gender-inclusive and gender-sensitive language in news stories and to identify sources who were women or of other genders, on topics that usually have male interviewees. It also showed a desire to produce more in-depth stories that go beyond mentioning “women” or “quoting women”.

Even though Myanmar journalists understand that they need to bring different sources into their stories, there is great need to enhance their knowledge of gender, Myanmar Journalism Institute Executive Director Kyaw Min Swe said.

What most still understand gender to be is just male and female and to promote the participation of women voices in the community through the media platform. Actually, the definition of gender is so much wider than that, he explained.

For MJJ, he said, the results of the gender survey are useful for shaping the curriculum of not just its full-time diploma course, but for designing a specialised subject for working journalists.

One of the tasks of the media, after all, is to raise the voice of the voiceless, which means to highlight sources that may not be popular or to give ordinary people from different sectors a voice.

For copies of the survey questionnaires in English, please click here for the questionnaire for reporters and [here](#) for the one for editors.

<https://ccimcambodia.org/?p=5597>



These insights are among the perspectives drawn from the online survey, through which CCIM wanted to find out media professionals' understanding around the use of gender as a tool in news work.

“Based on the result of this survey, many journalists did not understand deeply about gender in journalism work yet,” said Chanden Mak, CCIM training coordinator. “This training kit is very important for conducting training among those journalists and young new journalists, to make sure that they can cover gender issues with professional journalism in the future.”

There were 45 respondents to the survey, whose 10-point questionnaire was circulated from December 2020 and February 2021.

The questionnaire was sent out in English and Khmer to three types of respondents: journalists from different media houses and reporters who were reporter trainees of CCIM's Newsroom Cambodia (25 respondents or 56% of the total), editors (11 or 24%) and trainers/teachers (nine or 20%).

Seventy-six percent of the total respondents were male, and 24% female. They were a mix of professionals from 19 local and international media institutions, across print, radio, TV and online media in Phnom Penh.

Majority, or 64% of the respondents, have been in journalism from six to 15 years. Among editors and trainers, 80% of respondents have attended events or training programmes at CCIM before, while 20% replied in the negative.

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of gender “as an indicator of how good a story is” in their work, whether as journalist/trainee, editor or trainer, by selecting one among a range of five options, with 1 meaning ‘not important’ and 5 indicating it was ‘extremely important’.

An average of 95% of all respondents chose varying degrees of importance for gender, choosing one among the responses 3 meaning ‘important’, 4 or ‘very important’ and 5 for ‘extremely important’.

Broken down by type of respondent, all of the nine trainers said gender was important. Ninety-six percent of reporters/CCIM trainees said the same, and so did 90% of editors.

Among the trainers, 55% said gender was ‘very important’. The biggest proportion among editors, or 36%, also chose this reply. But among the journalists, it was the ‘extremely important’ option that got the highest percentage of replies at 48%. None of the respondents said gender was ‘not important’ in judging editorial quality.

Very few — just 2 or 5% among journalists and editors selected option 2 or ‘slightly important’. No trainer ticked this option.

The questionnaire explored respondents’ views about a mix of issues, such as how they understood gender, what challenges they see in using gender in news reporting, and their experiences writing, editing or training around it.

Asked to select two among five options that best reflect the meaning of the word ‘gender’, the two most often-selected replies were: ‘equality between men and women’, which was ticked by 53% of respondents, and ‘how the gender of individuals and communities and their location in society shape their lives, human rights and development’, which 47% of respondents selected.

The three other options given were: ‘more women as presidents and prime ministers’, ‘feminism’ and ‘avoiding the identification of sources in news stories as men, women or other genders’.

HOW DIFFICULT?

The respondents were asked to rate the degree of difficulty for journalists ‘to understand gender and use this in news reporting’, by selecting from options ranging from 1 for ‘not difficult’ to 5, meaning ‘extremely difficult’. Sixty-four percent of them said they found gender to be either ‘difficult’, ‘very difficult’ and ‘extremely difficult’ (options 3 to 5).

An analysis of the results for each respondent group shows that the journalists/reporters and editors, whose work involves production of stories, tended to give higher degrees of difficulty to using gender in their work, when compared to the trainers.

Among reporters, a total of 40% said they found gender ‘difficult’ to understand and use in news reporting. Among editors, 55% said it was ‘difficult’.

One among the editor-respondents and one in the reporters’ group said that gender is ‘not difficult’, while two reporters said it is ‘extremely difficult’ for journalists to understand gender and use this in news reporting.

Among the nine trainer-respondents, 33% selected ‘slightly difficult’, another 33% chose ‘difficult’, 11% went for ‘very difficult’ and 22% (2 trainers), ‘extremely difficult’).

What, exactly, are these difficulties? The respondents were asked to choose three among eight options that they consider the journalists’ biggest challenges.

The three types of difficulties most often selected by the respondents (23 respondents or 35%) were ‘avoiding gender bias and stereotypes of women in media, including mostly as sex objects or victims’, ‘selecting, identifying concrete, strong story ideas and angles that involve gender’ (selected by 35%), and ‘understanding what gender is and why it is an indicator of good, professional journalism’ (31%).

At the same time, the top choices show some differences per respondent group - among editors, reporters/trainees and trainers. The top three replies among the editors were ‘avoiding gender bias and stereotypes of women’ (21%), ‘selecting story ideas and angles’ (18%) and ‘doing their own, independent analyses of stories that are shaped by gender and the power relations in them’ (13%).

Among reporters/trainers, 17% chose ‘avoiding gender bias and stereotypes of women’ and ‘selecting story ideas and angles’ as well, followed by 16% choosing ‘understanding what gender is’.

Interestingly, the trainers’ views were different from the reporters and editors, offering a potential assessment of what issues to focus on in future training on gender. Among them, 19% chose the difficulty in ‘using gender-inclusive and gender-sensitive language in news stories’, 15% selected ‘lack of familiarity with gender-related concepts such as gender parity, patriarchy’, and another 17% chose ‘selecting story ideas and angles’.

To find out about their experience in writing, editing or training on gender issues, the respondents were asked “How often do you write or edit the story that touch or relevant to gender?”

An average of 45% of all respondents say they have produced and/or assigned or edited a story that discusses gender. Thirty percent said they have ‘never produced and/or edited’ such a story, 25% of respondents are uncertain about this.

A look at the responses from trainees/journalists and editors shows that 39% of them said they write or a story related to gender 1 to 3 times a year, 21% write or edit 2 to 3 times a month, 6% do this daily to once a week, 6% more than 4 times a month. A total of 28% replied ‘never/don’t recall’.

Among women trainees/journalists and editors, the figures are slightly different. Thirty-six percent said they produced gender-related stories 1 to 3 times a year, 9% said 2 to 4 times a month, 9% more than 4 times a month, and 45% selected ‘never/don’t recall’).

For CCIM’s Chanden Mak, this set of replies was not exactly surprising. CCIM’s experience has shown, he says, that most journalists often write very few articles related to gender even after finishing training programmes. Many trainees, being freelance journalists, focus on reporting on issues such as environment, human rights, politics and freedom of expression.

HOW ABOUT SKILLS?

Asked to rate their own skills in using gender in news work from a range of options, 22 of the total 25 reporter respondents (88%) said they had some skills in varying degrees and chose replies from 2 or ‘slightly skilled’, 3 meaning ‘skilled’, or 4 meaning ‘very skilled’. The 88% figure reflects the self-rating of 16 reporters who said they were ‘skilled’ (64%), three (13%) who said they were ‘very skilled’ and another three who chose ‘slightly skilled’.

Only one of the reporter-respondents said he/she was ‘not skilled or confident at all’. (Two reporters did not answer this question.)

Editors and trainers were asked to reply to an adjusted version of this question, where they rated the skill of the journalists/trainees they work with. They were asked to use the same range of options, from 1 meaning ‘not skilled at all’ to 5 for ‘extremely skilled’.

All but one (19 respondents, or 95%) of the 20 editors and trainers grouped together for this question, said their reporters and trainees had some skills. They selected ratings from 2 for ‘slightly skilled’, 3 for ‘skilled’ and 4 for ‘very skilled’.

The 95% rating came from 15 editors and trainers, or 79%, said their reporters and trainees were ‘skilled’, three (16%) who said they were ‘very skilled’ and one (5%) who said they were ‘slightly skilled’. (One of the editors did not respond to this question.)

Asked if they themselves have had training on ‘improving the gender in stories, either as a topic of a story, a tool to develop better stories, or attend training of trainers on gender’, less than half or 45% of the journalists and media trainers answered in the affirmative and 55%, in the negative.

The editors were not asked the same question as above, but were requested to reply to this query: ‘Have you ever given suggestions, feedback to your reporter or staffer in relation to a story you edited or assigned?’ Eight editors or 89% among the editors’ group said they have given suggestions or feedback to their reporters. Only 1 editor has never given such feedback.

For their part, the trainers were asked if they had ever ‘provided training on gender or been a trainer or resource person on the topic as part of a wider event or course’. A total of 44% (4 trainers) of the nine trainers said yes, another 44% said no and 12% (1) was uncertain.

Do the respondents’ media organisations have a style manual that covers gender? Sixty-three percent of respondents said that their organisations have their own style manual, while the rest said ‘no’.

Finally, the questionnaire sought the respondents’ views about the length of a course on gender in reporting, asking them to choose between three days, five days, or one week. Majority – from 62 to 64% – of both reporters and editors preferred a three-day training course, while all trainers favoured this option. Asked if they would send their staff to such a course, all but one of the 11 editor-respondents said they would do so.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND THE CREATIVE TEAM

About the Author

JOHANNA SON wrote ‘Gender on Our News Radar: A View from Southeast Asia’ as part of the Southeast Asia Media Training (SEAMTN) project of the Fojo Media Institute. Since 2017, she has been a consultant trainer for the institute’s work in Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Vietnam.

She is also the author of [‘Online Journalism and Storytelling: A Training and Learning Kit’](#), published by the Fojo Media Institute in 2020. (The book is available in [Burmese](#), [Khmer](#), [Lao](#), [Vietnamese](#) and [Thai](#).)

Johanna is the Bangkok-based editor/founder of the Reporting ASEAN news series, an independent venue for conversations and issues with a regional perspective. She also writes analyses for the ‘Bangkok Post’ and has contributed to the ‘Nikkei Asian Review’.

She is a former regional director for IPS Asia-Pacific news, where she worked for 22 years. She has edited 17 journalism-related books and publications on Asia and has written three journalism-related handbooks and guides, including [‘Reportage around ASEAN-related Issues: A Tip Sheet’ \(2019\)](#).

Johanna studied journalism at the University of the Philippines (magna cum laude), and was the Philippine winner of the Citibank Pan-Asia Award in 1992.

About the Illustrator

The illustrations in this book were done by **LE CHAN THINH**.

Chan Thinh is a multimedia student at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. He is studying design, for games and animation, at the FPT multimedia school.

About the Book Designers

The layout of this book was done by **SANIT PETCHPROMSORN**, who has been a designer and layout artist for books, reports and publications, as well as other visual material, for more than 20 years. In ‘Gender on Our News Radar: A View from Southeast Asia’, he put his own touch to the book’s original design.

That design was created by **WINNIE DOBBS** for ‘Online Journalism and Storytelling: A Training and Learning Kit’. Since the late eighties, Winnie has been doing design-related work around a wide range of materials, including publications that focus on women, gender, culture, environment and media.

REAL-WORLD TOOLS, IN NEWSPEAK

The separate award categories for men and women are disappearing from art and singing competitions. Shoppers are seeing plus-size women models (and mannequins) for clothes. The toymaker Lego says it will remove biases that signal to boys and girls what they should, or should not, do.

These show glimpses of the shifts that are underway in how gender is seen in social spaces, in local to global conversations about inclusion and diversity that journalists need to be able to explore, explain and be part of. This requires a gender-informed way of doing news, not because it is ‘nice’ but because it is a necessary part of the skillsets of today’s news professionals.

Proficiency in gender is part of the nose for news.

Speaking the language of news and drawing from newsroom experience, ‘Gender on Our News Radar: A View from Southeast Asia’ offers tips for using gender as a storytelling tool and invites journalists to examine the language that the media use around gender. Examples and context from Southeast Asia bring the book closer to the news communities of this region.