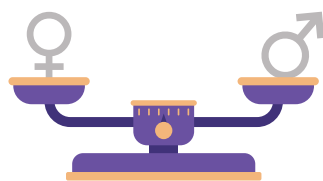




MEDIA GENDER CHARTER FOR SRI LANKA

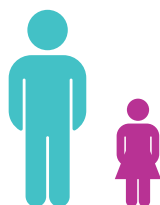
GENDER CHARTER FOR SRI LANKA MEDIA

1. Preamble



Who should comply with the Gender Charter for Sri Lanka Media? The Charter is for all people working in the Sri Lanka media sector.

The Charter objectives are in line with Sri Lanka's national and international commitments to achieve gender equality. The Sri Lanka Constitution states in **Article 12** that no person shall be discriminated against on the basis of, among other factors, sex, religion, language, and race, and guarantees to every person the freedom to engage in a lawful occupation. Sri Lanka is a signatory to **international agreements** on gender equality, safe working conditions, and non-discrimination in the workplace. **Structural changes to media institutions, especially for state media reforms and right to information, have been high on the post-war Sri Lanka media reforms menu.** However, discussions on gender portrayal and representation in the media have been subordinated.



Compared to the number of men, women are rarely invited on TV or radio or in the press as authorities or experts on politics, government policies, elections, employment, economy, legislation, peace & security, sport, law & order/crime stories, climate change, transport, international and trade issues, transport, etc. In addition, issues of priority to Sri Lankan women, including post-war realities, are still not being addressed in mainstream media stories. Media articles on these and other priority topics for women are often confined to special pages or ghettoized segments in the media and tagged as 'women's issues', rather than being placed on the regular main news pages as issues of concern to everyone.

For many years, concerns have been expressed about the portrayal of women and girls in Sri Lanka media and about the limited role and status of women in the media profession. The Charter sets standards and ethics for **media reporting** in relation to women and girls. It also covers **gender equality in work-place policies, practices** and working conditions in the media sector.

A section of the Charter covers an ethical code of conduct on reporting and terminology for LGBT+ people. As with all members of the society, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people have the right to fair, accurate, and inclusive reporting of their life stories and concerns.



• Throughout this document the word 'Charter' refers to 'The Gender Charter for Sri Lanka Media'.

• Article 12 (2) 1978 Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

• These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (2007), the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981) and the ILO Convention 111 on 'Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation' (1998).

Problematic working conditions for women include:

1. Unequal access to career opportunities, promotion, equal pay, training, and recruitment for women (especially women from resource-poor families).
2. Some jobs in media are perceived as 'men's jobs' and some as 'women's jobs'.
3. Recruitment announcements for senior positions that state, they seek 'male applicants'.
4. Female employees incurring extra costs to respective media houses, because the employer has to pay for transporting women home after 7 pm.
5. Sexual harassment and the strong male bias in the newsroom. Many women and men in the Sri Lanka media sector have little understanding of the diverse forms of harassment/sexual harassment and what to do if they encounter them (or possibly they are reluctant to discuss the topic). The keywords are 'unwanted' and 'unwelcome' conduct. Sexual harassment may be overt or subtle. Sri Lankan women journalists maintain silence about routine sexual harassment. Cultural prohibitions and fear of stigma, contribute to the culture of silence.
6. Women receive malicious online media abuse and threats. Threats affect women journalists as they do male journalists, however, the threats women journalists face are two-fold: the dangers all journalists work under, but in addition, they are targeted for simply being women taking on a public role as professional journalists.
7. Women journalists in Tamil media face extra cultural, geographic, and safety challenges. The impact of war is visible in the media industry. This is reflected in a strong north/south divide in terms of resources, opportunities, representation, and portrayal & voices of women in the media.



The news agenda depends on your choice of:

- How you cover news stories.
- What you consider an important item (and what you consider unimportant).
 - People you choose to interview.
 - People you choose to invite as guests on your TV or radio program.
 - Your choice of images to illustrate stories.
 - Your decision about where stories should be placed (on what pages or which item in the news line-up on radio and television).

Portraying gender in a fair and ethical manner will only occur when it becomes a concern for all media practitioners across Sri Lanka: media owners, journalists, photographers, news editors, camerawomen and cameramen, anchors, cartoonists, program producers and directors, TV/radio debate program producers, bloggers, podcasters, self-regulatory bodies, journalist schools, and unions, fact-checkers and HR managers in media institutions, and citizen digital journalists. Civil Society actors can contribute to this process through monitoring, advocacy and through dialog with media.

Many media institutions still do not have gender equality training, gender policies, or anti-sexual harassment policies in place. The Charter calls for staff and contractors to receive gender training and specific training on prevention of sex discrimination and sexual harassment and an understanding of acceptable and unacceptable conduct.

2. Objectives in the Gender Charter for Sri Lanka Media.

The Gender Charter for Sri Lanka Media was the result of consultations held with a wide range of media practitioners, activists, trade unions, gender experts, academia, research organizations and civil society organizations in Sri Lanka on what they want to be included in the Charter. The Charter reflects many of their key points and aspirations. The Charter objectives call for:

I. Gender sensitivity in reporting

Journalists and media institutions shall ensure that reporting is gender sensitive and in particular shall:

- ✔ Use non-sexist language and portray women and girls as they really are, rather than re- reframed gender stereotypes.
- ✘ Refrain from using sexist language or language that discriminates against, patronizes, trivializes or stigmatizes women.

Women are often objectified and commodified sexually and referred to in derogatory and lewd language in the media. They are portrayed as sex objects, beautiful objects, as homemakers, as victims (of violence, poverty, natural disasters, war and conflict, etc.) or they become front-page and headline (main story) news when they engage in activities which are not in line with society's prescriptions of how women 'should behave' or 'should not' behave.

- ✘ Avoid confining your media stories about women's lives only to topics that make women look as though they are perpetual 'victims'. These topics are important but similarly write stories about those women who are contributing greatly to the future of Sri Lanka and the world.
- ✘ Refrain from glamorizing or justifying violence and abuse against women and girls.
- ✘ Refrain from publishing the identity of survivors of sexual violence, respect their privacy, and take reasonable steps to avoid re-traumatization.



II. Inclusiveness and Equality

Journalists and media institutions shall ensure inclusiveness and equality in their publications and broadcasts and in particular shall:

- ✔ Give women, opportunities to present their opinions and expertise in written and broadcast media coverage on all topics (including among others): politics, government policies, elections, employment, the economy, new legislation, peace and security, health, education, science and technology, trade, international relations, rural and agricultural issues, sports, climate change, arts, culture, infrastructure planning, transport, service provision of utilities – water, waste disposal, electricity, internet.
- ✔ In addition, include issues of particular importance to women's lives in your mainstream media coverage.
- ✔ Include a gender balance of women and men in panel discussion programs on TV and radio.
- ✔ Where feasible, include in your journalism the opinions and experiences of diverse women interviewees from across the spectrum: ethnicity, geography, religion & beliefs, ages, rural/urban, education, social class, occupations & professions, women with disabilities, migrant women & girls, child brides, widows of all ages (the conflict in Sri Lanka left 24 percent of the female population widowed), women-headed households, rape survivors, business leaders, women professionals, successful women role models. Over half the population in Sri Lanka live in rural areas and therefore the importance of including the opinions of rural women.
- ✔ Use language in reporting that is gender-neutral and gender-inclusive. For example, use: 'If a journalist works hard, he or she will succeed' or 'Journalists who work hard will succeed', but NOT 'If a journalist works hard, he will succeed'.
- ✔ When describing a job or career, unless the specific gender is relevant to the story, use gender-neutral vocabulary. For example, use a camera operator, instead of a cameraman or camerawoman. Use police officer instead of policeman/policewoman, etc.

III. Media Institutions and Working Environment

Senior management in each media institution must make it clear to all staff and contractors what decisions have been made towards furthering gender equality, gender diversity and equal opportunities in their media institutions and what is expected in relation to the following issues:

- The culture within the media institution.
- Ways in which existing policies and practices are being revised to improve gender equality and equal opportunities.
- Recruitment - measures to increase the female-to-male ratio across jobs.
- Enhancement of women's career opportunities. Women's career trajectory in the organization: promotion procedures, talent development, training/education opportunities.



Media institutions shall:

Take actions to achieve equal representation and gender parity at all decision-making levels and leadership positions. This includes on Boards, in management and editorial positions, and in unions, and in media oversight and regulatory institutions and media training organizations. E.g. set targets to aim for at least 40% of women Board Members by a certain date.

✔ Formulate policies/codes of conduct/codes of ethics on gender equality for recruitment, equal remuneration, and equal opportunities for promotion and career development.

✔ Formulate and implement policies on work-life balance, availability of parental leave, childcare, and eldercare and other support facilities for the benefit of all employees.

✔ Take measures to increase the female to male ratio within each media institution and across job functions and assignments. E.g. in the newsroom: women often comprise rank and file of journalists and presenters in the print and broadcast media but few are in the top leadership positions.

✔ Ensure gender parity in terms of opportunities for journalists to work in their chosen areas of news and reporting. E.g. women reporters are often assigned to health, education, and social issues, while men are given assignments on 'hard issues' such as politics and the economy, which are seen as part of the career path to senior editorial and media management positions.

✔ Take active measures to ensure a safe and secure working environment for all employees and freelancers in the work-place and on work assignments in the field.



• Raisa W Code of Conduct and Guidelines to Prevent and Address Sexual Harassment in Workplaces. ILO, Employers Federation of Ceylon. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-colombo/documents/publication/wcms_525537.pdf

• Not only men but a sizeable number of women journalists also consider it unnecessary to pursue such a goal according to journalists who participated in this study, <https://samsn.if-j.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/SRI-LANKA.pdf>

• Raisa Wickrematunge <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/may/28/sexism-slander-hatred-sri-lankas-culture-of-online-abuse>

IV. Eliminate sexual harassment in the workplace and on work assignments

Sexual harassment is a criminal offense under the Penal Code of Sri Lanka. There is general agreement that gender policies and enforceable procedures to address incidents of sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace and when on work-assignments could contribute greatly to make newsrooms, unions and professional associations more equitable.

Media institutions shall:

- ✔ Adopt a zero-tolerance policy on sexual harassment in the workplace and when on work assignments.
- ✔ Formulate and implement a policy for the prevention and redress of sexual harassment in the workplace and on work assignments, including measures for disciplinary action against perpetrators of sexual harassment. Clear-cut guidelines about acceptable and non-acceptable behavior at work and on work assignments should be publicized to staff, contractors, and sub-contractors by way of websites, social media, posters, leaflets, etc., and through training.
- ✔ Provide training to all staff and contractors on prevention of sexual harassment and in understanding what constitutes sexual harassment – an understanding of acceptable and unacceptable conduct. (Sexual harassment can be perpetrated by colleagues, supervisors, management, contractors, or clients.) Employers should take any claims of harassment seriously. It is vital that the employees have workable complaint procedures available to them.
- ✔ Adopt a fair, transparent, workable and enforceable procedure to address incidents of sexual harassment in the workplace and when on work-assignments. Preferably complaints should be administered by an outside entity that is independent of the media institution (this avoids having to complain to a line manager who may also happen be the perpetrator).

Most sexual harassment is by men to women. Sexual harassment may be overt or subtle. The keywords are 'unwanted' and 'unwelcome'. E.g.

- A person in a position of authority, such as a supervisor, demands sexual favors from an employee as a condition for the employee getting a career promotion or a job benefit.
- Inappropriate touching of a person or a person's clothing.
- Physical assault and threats of dire consequences for her career if she does not comply.
- Sending emails, texts, or pictures of a sexual or other harassment-related nature.



• Code of Conduct and Guidelines to Prevent and Address Sexual Harassment in Workplaces. ILO, Employers Federation of Ceylon. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bang-kok/---ilo-colombo/documents/publication/wcms_525537.pdf

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V. Establish mechanisms to implement the Charter's Gender Equality objectives, policies and guidelines within media institutions

All media institutions shall establish internal mechanisms within, media institutions to implement the objectives in the Gender Charter:

- ★ Each media institution should set its own target and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to track the progress of their organization on gender equality.
- ★ Action Plan – each media institution should draft a time-bound action plan on the implementation of the Gender Charter for Sri Lanka Media.



Suggested Action Plan Framework:

- Media outlets increase the number of items in which gender issues are given prominence.
- Media outlets increase the number of items (stories, panel discussions, etc.) in which protagonists are women.
- Media outlets eliminate stereotypes/victimization of women from news reporting.
 - Media outlets increase the number of women sources in news reporting.
 - Media outlets increase the number of articles written by female journalists
- ★ Allocate resources and budgets for implementation of the Charter. These will be needed for gender training, gender advisors, and any study visits.
- ★ Provide compulsory gender-sensitivity training for all journalists and others working in media institutions, whether employed permanently, temporarily or on contract basis. Training should cover the provisions of this Charter.

External mechanisms

The media industry should explore ways to:

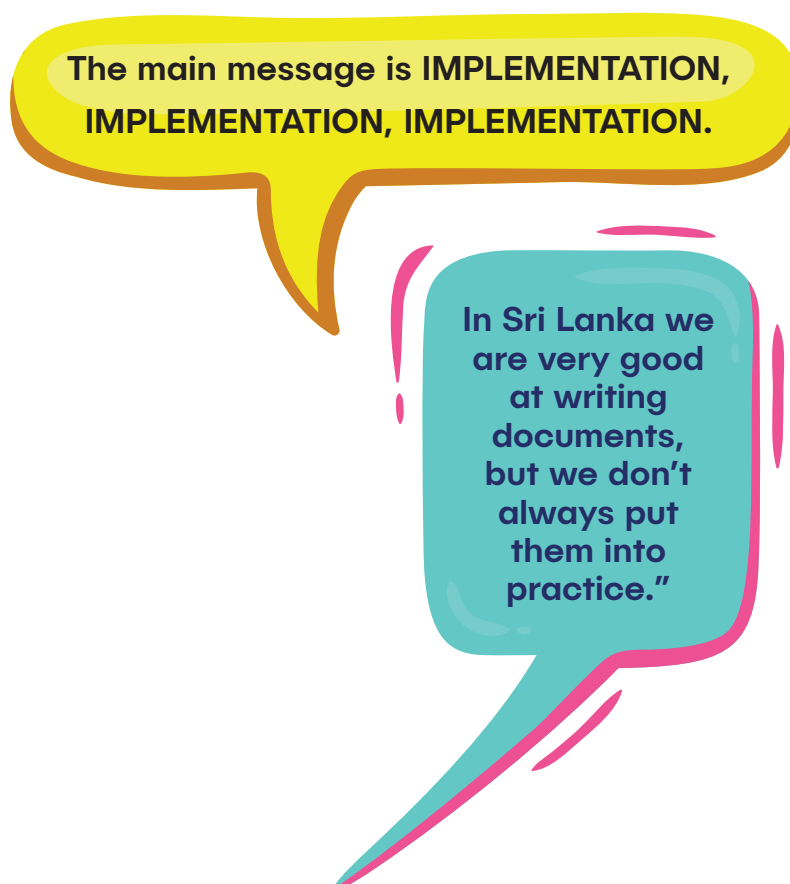
- ★ Develop workable, enforceable complaints procedures for gender biased and negative reporting in the media, including provisions for public complaints, and enforceable standards on gender equality in reporting.
- ★ Processes for regularly measuring progress on the implementation of the Gender Charter.

IMPORTANT PLEASE NOTE - Guidelines and Checklists for implementing objectives in the Gender Charter for Sri Lanka Media

A separate user-friendly reference guide titled 'Guidelines and Checklists for implementing objectives in the Gender Charter for Sri Lanka Media' has been designed as a reference tool-kit for implementing the Charter. It is written for busy media practitioners. It answers the following questions:

What do we need to do? How do we do it? Why is it needed? Who should do it?

Most sections also give useful contacts and case examples. The case examples are from Sri Lanka, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Nepal, Netherlands, Senegal, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the USA.



This quotation from a male senior member of a Sri Lanka media institution echoed the sentiments of others.

3. Reporting stories on LGBT+ people

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people (LGBT+) have the right to fair, accurate and inclusive reporting of their life stories and concerns. As with all members of the society, the media should treat LGBT+ people with fairness, integrity and respect.



Publish news and stories that reflect a balanced and fair representation of LGBT+ people, their role in society and their human experiences (fairness, integrity and respect).



Refrain from reporting in a manner that is discriminatory or derogatory of LGBT+ people. A person's sexual orientation or gender identity status should only be mentioned if relevant to the story. Intrusion into people's private lives is only justified by overriding considerations of public interests, and journalists should not produce material likely to lead to hatred or discrimination on the grounds of a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.



While, ever mindful of the need to facilitate free and open public debate, avoid publishing letters, online comments, or phone-in contributions that contain gratuitously offensive and possibly illegal statements and attitudes concerning LGBT+ people.

Avoid perpetuating stereotypes. When Sri Lanka media disseminates inaccurate information about LGBT+ issues, it reinforces the general public's (incorrect) view that LGBT+ people are a threat to the culture, religion, and traditional values of Sri Lanka.



Avoid using political shorthand such as 'gay agenda', 'homosexual agenda', or even 'LGBT+ agenda'. These terms are used by some to create the perception of a co-ordinated, negative and sinister conspiracy, rather than the pursuit of equality for LGBT+ people. It is better to use specific descriptions of the social issues concerned, such as the promotion of civil equality, and the tackling of workplace bullying and discrimination. This applies similarly to terms such as 'special rights' when 'equal rights' or 'equal protection' is a more accurate description of the LGBT+ issues involved.



4. Definitions of Terms

GENDER

refers to the roles, behaviors, activities, attributes and opportunities that any society considers appropriate for boys and girls, and men and women. Gender is different from biological sex. Gender roles, relationships and values in every society are defined by social and cultural customs. We absorb our gender roles and values from family, friends, community, media, school, teachers, religious preachers, opinion leaders. The term 'gender' is also used more broadly to denote a range of gender identities such as LGBT+.

SEX

refers to the biological and physiological characteristics such as reproductive organs, chromosomes and hormones that define 'being male' and 'being female' and other sexual orientations.

DISCRIMINATION

If you are treated unfairly because you're a man or boy or a woman or girl this is sexual discrimination. Roles, functions and characteristics of men and boys have often been given greater values than that of women and girls, creating unequal gender power relations that perpetuate discrimination against women and girls. LGBT+ people should also be treated with fairness, integrity and respect.

GENDER DIVERSITY

is an equitable or fair representation of people of different genders. It most commonly refers to the ratio of men and women, but may also include people of non-binary genders. Many initiatives promote gender diversity in fields traditionally dominated by men, including media, computing, engineering, and science.

STEREOTYPES

GENDER

are preconceived and generalized ideas about the attributes and roles of men, women, boys and girls and people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. When journalists aren't well trained or are not aware of their own prejudices, they may unwittingly re-enforce stereotypes.

GENDER EQUALITY

refers to equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. Gender equality is achieved when women, men, girls, boys and people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientation have equal rights, prospects and opportunities, and the power to shape their own lives and contribute to society.

GENDER ANALYSIS

examines the relationship and any inequalities between women & men, girls & boys in a division of labor, roles & responsibilities, access to, and control over, power, money, resources, and their relative condition and position. It also involves looking at other norms for how gender may be expressed, including norms relating to sexuality and identity, and social variables such as ethnicity, culture, age, urban/rural and social class.

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