



## A NEW GENERATION IS TAKING OVER?

33 years

Tanzania Media Women's Association



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**The popular saying that unity is strength was manifested in 1987. It was the year that 12 media women said enough is enough to the discrimination being faced in the news rooms and the portrayal of women in the media. They formed the Tanzania Media Women's Association – TAMWA. What did change since 33 years of its existence?**

The United Nations Decade for Women Conference in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985 contributed to the birth of TAMWA. This conference emphasized the importance of women's mobilization as key to challenging entrenched gender inequality and patriarchal norms. While the conference addressed the general situation, women in the media in Tanzania saw it as particularly addressing their situation. At the time women journalists were only assigned to cover what was then "soft news" such as health issues and court proceedings. All the "hard stories" such as parliament, presidential addresses or tours of the country were for men.

We were basically second class members of the news rooms. Most of the women journalists in the 1980 have a story to tell as they dared to venture into a domain that was deemed to be for men only. But this patriarchal and discriminatory behavior was not limited to the newsrooms. The coverage of women and issues that concern women was not there, if it was it was minimal and rarely on the front page or as a headline on the radio, at that time there was no TV. We felt that as women journalists we should change that to bring out the voices and stories of the other half of the population. TAMWA was a response to then and now that discrimination and inequality are unacceptable.

### What has changed?

No fight for rights had been without pain and 33 years on, there are many women journalists who can pinpoint TAMWA as their inspiration; there are many women, those in power and those in villages, who can say TAMWA fought for them, and there are men all over Tanzania who can say that TAMWA brought to their notice issues of women that they did not know. At the launch of TAMWA, Tanzania had one government newspaper, one party paper and one government-controlled radio station. Now the media landscape is diverse. This vibrant media scenario has meant that there are more opportunities for women to join the profession and also more space for stories that feature social issues most of which have women at the center. The move from state- and party-controlled media to private media in 1986 challenged TAMWA in several ways: not only in terms of women in the media moving up the ladder but also their portrayal in the media as well as their voices being heard alongside those of men.

Certainly, the onset of community radios in Tanzania and the onset of social media are changing the media scene. Both play a part in interaction with the audience, hence providing new insights to issues, identifying problems that might otherwise be overlooked, and offering solutions that are relevant to particular communities/individuals. In the same way that the media landscape changes, so too, no doubt, will views be changing. In the 33 years since TAMWA's inception, a lot has changed, and more change is still to come as inequality, discrimination and the patriarchal system still exist.

### Who is the new generation?

Most importantly, there are more women in the newsrooms and more women editors; women are now heard and seen as an integral part of the development of Tanzania and their contribution is acknowledged. Gone is the ridicule of the former days when it was seen as a bunch of frustrated women talking nonsense. The case is such that when TAMWA speaks, people listen, they

know there is an issue that needs attention and action. TAMWA is a recognized and respected national institution.

The young women of Tanzania are enthusiastic, energetic, confident, and eager to take on the baton from the mature generation and go further. They continue to challenge the outdated and harmful norms and as well as to address the inequality and discrimination in the social, economic and political spheres in the country. An example is the 2015 general elections when TAMWA was at the forefront of promoting coverage for the women candidates and a gender sensitive reporting towards the elections. It was because of this stance of the young TAMWANites that the UN Women collaborated with TAMWA to have an analysis of the media coverage of the elections with a gender perspective.

### Change of feminist point of views and conflicting generations?

The first generation of TAMWA is not the current one. Our experiences and the time we were living in propelled what we needed to do and how to go about doing it. This will be the same for the young TAMWANites. The Feminist understanding did not change but evolved with the times and situations. But at the core, what started in 1987 will continue because the fact remains that society in Tanzania still prioritizes the male point of view and women are treated unfairly within this society.

In TAMWA, there is the typewriter generation, of which I am part of and the .com generation. The current generation has been brought up by TAMWA and so knows the power of the media; they are fast paced, wanting results and having different approaches to achieve them. We have to accept that we are different and working in different times. But, looking at the interactions during the annual general meetings as well as following conversations on social media among members there is respect for the difference in thinking and approaching matters. There is also the underlying understanding that even if we have challenges, united we are stronger.

### Improvements through a new generation?

A new generation of TAMWANites has to take charge and they will have new ideas of doing things. Additionally, TAMWA does not work in isolation, it collaborates with other human rights organizations such as the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP), the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC), the Women Fund Tanzania (WFT) and many others and this helps consolidate its strength in media advocacy. Internally it has made changes to its Board and made some additions and changes to its Constitution. This is an acknowledgement that there was need to make changes to work in the evolving environment in which it works.

The founding members and the ones who were with us at the beginning have run the race. If you watch the athletics you will see that when one passes on the baton the athlete will keep on running for a while. As such my fellow founders who are alive, Fatma Alloo, Edda Sanga, Leila Sheikh, Rose Haji, Dr. Ananilea Nkya, Pili Mtambalike, Elizabeth Marealle, Rose Kalemera, and Halima Shariff, will be there for a while longer watching the new generation leadership of Rose Reuben and Joyce Shebe on the mainland and Dr. Mzuri Issa in Zanzibar take the baton over to the next lap.

TAMWA will go on the record as the oldest media organization in the country, and it has had immense impacts at the family, society and national level. It has managed to do that because of its members. I can look at TAMWA's tomorrow and know that she will be there, confident, strong and in pursuit of a society that respects human rights with a gender perspective.

**On the author:** Valerie Msoka was the executive director of Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA), a women and child rights advocacy organisation in Tanzania and at international level. She has been a radio journalist and producer for BBC world service and Radio Tanzania and worked in different UN radio project developments in Sudan and Iraq.

