Women Seldom a Topic in Political Shows in Morocco, MDI Study Shows

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Gathering more than 200 media decision makers, journalists, editors, directors of public media services, diplomats and international experts, the Media Diversity Institute (MDI) has presented results of “The Image of Women in the Moroccan Media in the Run-up to and During Local and Regional Elections 2015” study. In her opening speech at the event held on the International Women’s Day in Rabat, the UK Ambassador to Morocco Karen Betts said she is pleased that through British funding MDI has been able to help empower Moroccan and Mauritanian women. “The project has made an important contribution to raising the profile of women who ran in recent local, regional and provincial elections in Morocco,” said Ambassador Betts. She has mentioned other MDI achievements on social cohesion and diversity in the region such as the Dune Voices website.

Presenting results of monitoring done by MDI and its partners ISIC Alumni and AEF (Association of Women Start), Dr. Abdelouahhab Errami said that most of Moroccan media considered women to be voters rather than actors in political processes such were elections 2015. “Our Study shows that women’s issues are only tackled during specialized programs for women, cooking or talk shows. In political shows on TV and radio, women would only appear as guests and rarely women’s issues would be a topic of a serious debate,” said Dr. Errami.
He added that “political actors and leaders in Morocco used positive political marketing during electoral campaigns focusing on achievements regarding women”. “This practice shows us how women are used for political marketing but not for women’s issues,” said the author of the MDI Study. He also explained that the Study proves how machismo prevails even in articles and journalistic pieces written by female journalists.

Speaking on behalf of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and UNESCO Global Alliance on Media and Gender, Mounia Belafia said that the MDI Study reflects the Moroccan reality and it is in accordance with previous researchers. “Media do not treat women and women’s issues objectively. Media either victimize women or give over-improved image of them. In the same time, representation of women in the media is very important because the media have an effect on public opinion and therefore electoral results,” said Belafia.
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She added that there are positive changes in the Moroccan media but warned that globally we can see a professional divide between journalists trained in gender-sensitive reporting and others who are not.

Some of recommendations for better representation of women in the Moroccan media are:

- To raise the number of women journalists and to give them more high-ranking and editorial positions in media outlets;
- To stop limiting women's representation to family, marital status and children's issues and programs;
- To raise awareness of political parties and civil society activists that women are used as a tool in political marketing and encourage them to make sure that women are main beneficiaries of such political discourse;
- To train journalists on how to report on women and women's issues during elections;
- To give more space and media time to women as contributors, experts, political and civil society actors;

After publishing the Study, MDI Executive Director Milica Pesic expressed commitment to put its Recommendations into practice. “We now know exactly what are the challenges, as well as professional mistakes that our Moroccan colleagues make when report on women. And we know what they, what civil society activists and what decision makers should be doing to further empower Moroccan women to run for political positions. Parliamentary elections are coming and we have responsibility to be there, with women as well as with the journalists covering those elections. We have great partners for this work – ISIC Alumni and AEF, so we can together move to the next stage,” says Pesic.

MDI event in Rabat had great media coverage by the Huffington Post Maghreb-Maroc, Hespress, Media1 TV, SNRT, Hadat, Al Araby and many other media outlets.

MDI has conducted research and present the Study as part of the project "My Vote Matters Too" for increasing political participation and representation of women and other marginalised groups in the media. The project is supported by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office.