

Women and the Media

1. Global commitments

The Beijing *Platform for Action* recognizes the considerable potential of the media to contribute to the advancement of women. The role of the media is highlighted throughout all the critical areas of concern of the *Platform for Action*. The role of the media is also the focus of a separate critical area of concern, under which the *Platform for Action* sets out two strategic objectives.

- (Increased participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through all forms of the media and new technologies of communication.
- (Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.

The rapid evolution of new information and communication technologies (ICTs), and the recognition of their potential as a tool for development and women's empowerment, is reflected in international commitments undertaken since the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the *Platform for Action* in 1995. A major theme of the Commission on the Status of Women at its 47th session in 2003 was participation and access of women to the media and information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women. The agreed conclusions of that session outline a number of steps to be taken by governments in relation to both traditional and new media, with a particular focus on ICTs in view of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held later that year.¹

The *Plan of Action* adopted at the WSIS 2003 session in Geneva pointed to the importance of removing gender barriers to ICT education and training, building women's capacity to develop ICT content, formulating ICT policies for innovation and entrepreneurship that promote women's participation, and ensuring attention to gender equality issues and women's participation in uses of ICTs in health service delivery, education and employment. To inform follow-up and monitoring in all these areas, WSIS also called for the development of gender-specific indicators on ICT use and needs.² The *Tunis Agenda for the Information Society* adopted at the second WSIS session called for training and education to motivate the active participation of girls and women in decision-making for the information society, as well training and education to build the ICT capacity and confidence of women and girls. It also reiterated the commitment to develop sex-disaggregated indicators to measure the digital divide.³

WSIS Statements on gender and ICTs

Geneva Declaration of Principles (2003)⁴

ICTs have enabled women's organisations to increase the reach and impact of advocacy campaigns

- § In New Delhi, the "Save the Girl Child Campaign" set up a website dedicated to recording complaints against members of the medical community undertaking selective sex determination tests and selective abortion of female foetuses. More than 750 cases of selective sex determination tests and consequent illegal abortion of the female foetuses have been recorded. Links with other organisations active on the same issue were made to increase the number of recorded cases, mobilize public opinion this discriminatory practice and monitor individual complaints effectively. This experience was cited in the Regional Human Development Report as "an excellent example of advocacy groups using ICTs to further the reach of their campaigns, and to improve the efficacy of their campaigns by establishing networks with other groups with similar objectives."
- § In Andhra Pradesh (India), during the women's anti-liquor movement, the Women's Feature Service disseminated news about the movement and the views of the women participants to the women's organisations, civil rights groups and other NGOs around the world. This example is particularly notable because it shows how small and rural groups are able to make their voices heard: "While in the days of the print media it would have been very difficult for groups of rural women to project their views nationally, let alone globally, now with the electronic media it is very much possible, and in fact it is difficult to stop such transmission of news and views. The transformation of telecommunications does not end the power relations that exist, but it does allow the disadvantaged groups more scope to project themselves than was possible during the era of print media."

Sources: Save the Girl Child Campaign: Regional Human Development Report, 2005¹⁰
Anti-liquor movement: Kelkar (2004). "Women in the Digital Era."¹¹

Also of note is the growth in the number and range of activities of organisations and networks that focus on the portrayal of women a

Another development in the last decade has been the formation of national, regional and international associations and networks of women in the media (see box). The main focus of many of these organisations is to promote change in the way the mainstream media covers women, and in particular, how it addresses gender equality issues. Some also focus on mutual support and skills development to strengthen women in their role as media professionals. Women's news services are yet another set of resources that have developed significantly in recent years.

The emergence of national and international networks and organisations of media women

Examples of networks of media women

- § Association of Media Women of Kenya (AMWK)
- § Ugandan Media women's Association (UMWA)
- § African Women's Media Center: www.awmc.com
- § Red Dominicana de Periodistas con Perspectiva de Género (Dominican Network of Journalists with a Gender Perspective): www.aprimeraplana.org (Dominican Republic)
- § International Women's Media Foundation: www.iwmf.org (Washington)
- § Red Nacional de Mujeres Radialistas (National Network of Women Broadcasters): www.cidem-ac.org/html/radialistas/proy01.htm (Mexico)
- § Network of Women in Media: www.nwmindia.org (India)
- § Women Journalists in Finland: www.naistoimittajat.fi/womenjournalists.html

Examples of women's news & information agencies

- § Women's Feature Service: www.wfsnews.org/
- § Servicio de Noticias de la Mujer: www.noticiasdemujer.com/index.html (Costa Rica)
- § Comunicación e Información de la Mujer: www.cimac.org.mx/ (Mexico)

3. Gaps and challenges

Country reports for the ten-year review and appraisal of implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* noted a range of challenges in relation to the media and ICTs, including: the under-representation of women in the media, particularly at the decision-making level, the persistence of gender stereotypes and negative images of women in the media, the dissemination of sexually exploitive material and the greater difficulties of monitoring this through the internet than traditional media, and women's lack of access or skills for the use of ICTs.¹⁶

Women's participation and representation in the news

The findings of the 2005 Global Media Monitoring Project show that progress in

The “gender digital divide” and gaps in access the media (new and traditional)

New information and communication technologies have brought new challenges as well as opportunities. The term “gender digital divide” is often used to point out that women participate to a lesser extent than men in the information society, although data that clarify the size and nature of this divide are scarce.²⁰ There are also gaps in access to more traditional media. The study, *From Digital Divide to Digital Opportunities: Measuring Infostates for Development*, prepared under the auspices of the International Telecommunications Union and UNESCO, includes an analysis of the available data on gaps in access to both new and more traditional media and provides the illustrations summarized below.²¹

- (In South Africa, nearly 40 per cent of household heads depend on public telephones for telephone access, and women have slightly less access to various forms of telephone access compared to men.
- (In Ethiopia, most of the population have no exposure to the traditional mass media, and this is even more pronounced for women: 86 per cent of women, compared to 73 per cent of men, did not read a newspaper, watch television, or listen to the radio at least once per week.
- (Data on mobile phone use in eight African countries showed a substantial gap between women and men, though there was no consistent relationship between the gender gap and the overall usage rates in any particular country. In Malaysia, women constituted only 39 per cent of mobile subscribers.
- (Many countries where Internet use remains relatively low show significant gender gaps: less than 10 per cent of the Internet users in Guinea and Djibouti are women, less than 20 per cent in Nepal, and less than one-quarter in India; the figures are not much higher in Greece (less than 20 per cent) and Portugal (just over one-quarter), both of which have somewhat higher overall Internet usage; and in China, where Internet use has increased sharply, women account for only 40 per cent of the Internet subscribers.

Clearly, a large proportion of the population have limited access to old and new technologies. While the new technologies have enormous potential as a means of information exchange and networking, there are gaps in access between regions, countries and people within countries. In addition to gaps in connectivity, costs may be high relative to incomes and many lack the skills and language needed to use computers and the Internet. Women’s lack of access to resources and training contributes to the gender digital divide and high rates of illiteracy among women in many regions are another factor that limits access.

Content of new ICTs

Access is an important issue, but there is also the question of the extent to which women are involved in generating internet content and whether the information available reflects women’s needs and priorities and is presented in forms they can use. Concerns have been expressed about the limited involvement of women in needs assessments related to the use of ICTs for development, about approaches that treat women as passive recipients of information rather than active information users and generators, and about the lack of opportunities for participation by women and women’s organisations in developing the sector and the policy framework for it.²²

Also of concern are ways in which women are portrayed in various forms of Internet content. For example, one study of the portrayal of women in web-pages in Croatia found that

women tended to be associated with subjects related to fashion, relationships and the family, and that almost one-quarter of pages reviewed carried nude or pornographic images. Another disturbing development is the increasing use of the Internet for sexual exploitation of women and children and for trafficking of women.²³

4. Strategies to accelerate implementation

The Beijing *Platform for Action* outlines a range of actions to be taken by media organisations, the private sector and non-governmental organisations to achieve the strategic objectives related to women and the media. It notes that the role of national governments in this area must be balanced with objectives related to freedom of expression, but highlights many areas in which national governments can encourage and support the efforts of other actors. Important partners for national governments in their work with the media are the women's organisations on media issues and organisations of media women that have been a major force in increasing awareness of gender equality issues in the management and content of the media, including both print and electronic forms.

Steps that national governments can take in support of progress on gender equality and the media include:

- (encourage media organisations to ensure that their print and broadcast outputs as well as any advertising carried is consistent with gender equality objectives, through partnerships or support to self-regulatory initiatives;
- (encourage media training institutions to incorporate gender perspectives in courses for journalists by assisting them in with the provision of materials;
- (engage the media in supporting public discussion on gender equality issues by providing information resources on gender equality concerns and specific issues;
- (support the efforts of organisations of media women to take an active role in publicizing and promoting action on discrimination against women;
- (ensure that gender equality perspectives are taken into account in the development and implementation of national policies, strategies, legislation, programmes and regulatory instruments related to information and communication technologies (ICT), and that women and gender equality advocates are involved in the development and monitoring of such policies;
- (enhance coordination among ministries responsible for ICT, national machineries for the advancement of women, the private sector and gender equality advocates, and strengthen the technical capacity of national machineries for advocacy in this area; and
- (support research into the information needs and interests of women and ways of adapting ICT to the needs of women, particularly poor and illiterate women.

Aspects of a number of these strategies are discussed in more detail below.

Media women contribute their expertise in advocacy campaigns

Organisations of women in media have been an effective voice in many advocacy campaigns. The work of the Tanzanian Media Women's Association (TAMWA) on female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is one example:

"TAMWA uses media campaigns to lobby and advocate for cultural, policy and legal changes to promote the human rights of women and children. In 2002, as part of the activities of the STOP FGM Campaign, TAMWA conducted a nationwide education and information campaign, using all the active media in the country and, particularly, those in the regions with a high prevalence of FGM/C, including Arusha (81 per cent), Dodoma (68 per cent) and Mara (44 per cent). TAMWA tackled the issue using what it labelled "bang-style" journalism, a strategy which relies upon the simultaneous dissemination of stories and information through various local media institutions, thus allowing greater outreach. Key to the effectiveness of TAMWA's activities is the use of social and journalistic surveys to promote community discussions and the involvement of communities in implementing and monitoring initiatives. TAMWA has also organized sessions for media practitioners, NGOs, community-based organisations and theatre groups to increase understanding of FGM/C and promote the use of appropriate language and approaches."

Source: UNICEF (2005). *Changing a harmful social convention: female genital mutilation/cutting*.²⁴

Government of Indonesia encourages the media to support gender equality

"The portrayal of women by the media is usually negative and causes adverse impacts on the process to empower women in general. Thus, in order to sensitize the media on gender issues and gender needs, the Government has carried out several activities namely:

- a. Media orientation programme designed to increase the knowledge of journalists, reporters, editors etc on gender issues and encourage gender equality opinions throughout the electronic and print media;
- b. Communication forum with the media (including radio, television) to discuss gender issues, such as pornography in the media, its impact on women and society, and its effect on women empowerment programmes;
- c. Dialogue and Public Debate on the anti-pornography draft law with media people, community and religious organizations and women's organizations;
- d. Formulation of media manual to provide guidance on treatment of gender-sensitive news;
- e. IEC on women children."

Source: National Report of Indonesia (2004).²⁵

Mainstreaming gender equality perspectives in training for journalists

Increasing the numbers of women journalists is likely to contribute to better coverage of women, more attention to women's views and more visibility to gender equality issues.²⁶ However, achieving more balanced and informative coverage of women and of gender equality issues should not be the province of women only, but understood as a professional responsibility of all journalists, both men and women.

A number of civil society organisations have developed experience in media training on gender issues through their work with media organisations and media training institutions. The South African organisation Gender Links, to give one example, has undertaken an initiative to mainstream training on gender equality issues into the work of a major national journalism

training institute and has also offered specific courses to media organisations. As highlighted in the box below, reaching media practitioners through regular training courses rather than separate gender training was found to be important to the effectiveness and impact of the training. Materials developed and lessons learned through this experience are accessible through the organisation's website and provide a major resource for similar initiatives elsewhere.²⁷

While national governments generally have a limited role in providing training to journalists, they can play a role in alerting journalism institutes to training resources that have been developed by others, facilitating linkages between such institutes and women's organisations, supporting pilot and experimental initiatives, and generally encouraging media efforts to develop a better understanding and coverage of gender equality issues.

Reaching media practitioners through media training institutions – South Africa

Gender Links (GL), a South African organisation that works to promote gender equality in and through the media, collaborated with the Johannesburg-based Institute for the Advancement of Journalism, to run a one-year pilot to mainstream gender perspectives in the courses offered by the Institute. The pilot project aimed to integrate a gender perspective into all major courses. For example, a session on investigative reporting looked at specific stories and considered how an exploration of gender equality issues and women's perspectives could change the nature of the story. A sub-editing course considered gender stereotyping in language, headlines and design.

As stated by GL, "An important lesson to emerge from the pilot project is the effectiveness of reaching media practitioners through mainstream media training. When such practitioners are invited to gender-specific courses, typically a handful of women and (already converted) men show up with the result that the trainer is preaching to the converted. The kind of media practitioners who really need such training are much more likely to come to a course on investigative reporting than to a course on gender and the media."

GL sees the mainstream media as an important target, and believes that both male and female journalists need gender equality training. One outcome of the pilot programme with the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism was a handbook,

countries found that only nine had policies on gender portrayal and only four of these were sufficiently specific to be operational (the four were all public service broadcasters, in Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom).

Experience in several countries (such as Jamaica, Japan, South Korea and Sri Lanka) suggests that a constructive approach to the development of media codes or guidelines is a participatory process that includes dialogue with stakeholders and the involvement of gender specialists. Such a process can support media enterprises and practitioners who have limited awareness of gender equality to develop their understanding and a commitment to implementation. National governments can play a supportive role in this process by facilitating linkages among stakeholders and access to information about experiences and practices in other countries.

Media organisations have also been urged to develop policies in support of equal employment opportunities. Many media organisations have human resource policies that include commitments to equality, and some more detailed gender equality objectives or guidelines. As in other sectors of employment, such policies are but a first step toward change. Implementation requires strong leadership from informed managers, who themselves get good advice and support. A European study of equality policies shows that an increase in the participation of women at management and decision-making levels had been achieved in broadcast organisations that had implemented a vigorous policy of positive action (in Denmark, Germany, Ireland and

The agreed conclusions of the 2003 meeting outline a range of issues that could be

- (access and usage (of Internet and telecommunications technologies);
- (content (what do users access and want to access);
- (employment (related to ICT manufacturing, programming, research);
- (education (for use of ICTs and for employment in the sector); and
- (participation in decision-making (in management of ICT companies, policy and regulatory bodies and ministries, technical standards setting organisations, industry and professional organisations).

Developing data and indicators and gender and ICTs – the South Korean example

South Korea is one country doing “substantial and interesting work on gender and ICT statistics.” South Korea collects and disseminates Internet usage statistics as a part of official government statistics. Since 1990, their national Internet development agency, the Korean Network Information Center has published quarterly surveys of Internet use that include about 20 categories of data disaggregated by sex. The availability of such data may be an important contributing factor in making South Korea one of very few countries “with a well-developed gender strategy as part of the national ICT plan.”

The categories of ICT data disaggregated

skills for gender activists and women in decision-making to better access and influence media content.”

- (WomenAction website, *Women and media for social change*, page on “Making media work for women: best practices of women world wide”:
www.womenaction.org/women_media/eng/2/index.html (accessed 5 July 2007). This site has sections on outreach to media, advocacy, media watch, media codes and standards, and use of ICTs.

Reports and tools

- (Lloyd, Fiona and Ross Howard (2005). *Gender, Conflict and Journalism: A Handbook for South Asia*. UNESCO. This document provides guidance to journalists working on issues of peace and security specifically in South Asia, but its information could be applied more broadly. unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001439/143925E.pdf (accessed 4 July 2007).
- (United Nations, Division for the Advancement of Women (2002). Expert Group Meeting on “Participation and access of women to the media, and the impact of the media and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women” (Lebanon, November 2002):
www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/media2002/documents.html (accessed 5 July 2007). Set of papers, including background paper by Margaret Gallagher, “Women, Media and democratic society: in pursuit of rights and freedoms,” and papers on regional or national experiences. The site also provides access to the final report of the meeting.
- (United Nations, Division for the Advancement of Women (2002). Expert Group Meeting on “Information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women” (Republic of Korea, November 2002).
www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/ict2002/documents.html (accessed 5 July 2007). This site gives access to background papers and papers by experts and observers. See in particular the final report on the expert group, which summarizes the substantive discussions and provides examples of different approaches drawn from the input papers and discussions.
- (United Nations, Division for the Advancement of Women (2005). *Women2000 and beyond: Gender equality and empowerment of women through ICT*. Review of the gender dimensions of ICTs and possible strategies to address the gender digital divide, including strategies at the national level. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/w2000-09.05-ict-e.pdf (accessed 4 July 2007).

Notes

¹ CSW agreed conclusions, 47th Session (2003): [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw47/AC-mediaICT-auv.PDF](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw47/AC-mediaICT-<u>auv</u>.PDF) (accessed 4 July 2007).

² World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), First Phase, Geneva 2003, *Plan of Action*. WSIS-

⁵ World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) , Second Phase, Tunis 2005, *Tunis Commitment*, para. 23. www.itu.int/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/7.pdf (accessed 5 July 2007).

⁶ Rana, Bandana (2005). "Feminist perspectives on media," in *Beijing: A decade under scrutiny*, special issue of *Women in Action* (No. 1, 2005):

²³ INSTRAW (2004). “Women and the Media: New Challenges,” *Beijing at 10: Putting Policy in Practice*, pp. 7, 10. www.un-instraw.org/en/images/stories/Beijing/womenandthedia.pdf