

Cyber dialogues summary six MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

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Theme: Media and communications

Panelists: Colleen Lowe Morna (Executive Director, Gender Links), Jennifer Radloff (Co-coordinator, APC Africa Women), Lynn Muthoni Wanyeki (Executive Director, FEMNET), Ruth Ojiambo Ochieng (Director, ISIS-WICCE, Uganda) and Maria Suarez (Co-Director, FIRE, Costa Rica)

Quote for the day: *"Today we are dealing with the big thing - communication- your right to reason and be your self."*

1. Has there been any change in the way women are portrayed in the media since the Beijing Conference?

- The majority of participants said that there had been no change. A participant from Mexico gave the example of coverage of International Women's Day the day before. One channel showed its respects by having two women reporters covering sports - but they covered only men playing sports: "There was very little about recognising rights and nothing about the commitments that the government made towards women." Clearly, the participant said, the news content of the day was "for women- celebrating what good moms and pillars of the community they are" - not by women.
- One participant noted that there is a tendency to "portray women as without brains or just as beginners who need to be helped."
- Another said that TV lacks good family education programmes and that these are oriented towards American or Western ways of life.
- Participants agreed that the mainstream media is still largely controlled by men. "This therefore means that even when our women journalists or gender sensitive male journalists file great stories with their media houses, the same is either obliterated or given very small spaces or mention."
- One participant commented on how gender imbalances in the media cut across every geographical area: "What is interesting coming from Southern Africa and being in the US is to find they have the same problems we have; worse maybe because I don't think they have figured out how to approach the problem. So one study here found 14 % women sources in prime time news; in our region the Gender and Media Baseline Study showed 17 % sources and recent monitoring is now more like 20-25 %."
- One felt there has been improvement in access to Information and Communication Technologies as a tool for social action but that the mainstream media is still under strong corporate and male control.
- On a positive note, a participant felt that "there has been a slight shift--while the traditional women's sections remain, many of the mainstream papers have also added content addressing more feminist concerns--coverage of violence against women, for example has increased."
- Other positive developments noted include the use of radio talk shows to raise gender issues; the presence of women in community media; the development of

- women owned press agencies like CIMAC in Mexico; and use of new technologies e.g. in web casting (such as FIRE in Costa Rica.)
- The chat included a discussion on why there are so few women newspaper readers, with the majority blaming this not on lack of education or interest but on lack of time due to the dual role that women continue to play.

2. What are some of the ways of bringing about gender balance and sensitivity in the media?

- Give women the opportunity to become journalists by offering training.
- Women need to be represented at all levels within the media--not just be reporters on 'soft' issues.
- Having women-only media. This can help spark change in the mainstream (public and private) media.
- Having strong women's media associations.
- Research, like the GMBS: "Nothing like figures to wake up our dozy male media fraternity."
- Get gender activists cracking and thinking media. Work together with media on campaigns, like the Sixteen Days. Media is practical, no good trying to engage theoretically.
- Training: Work with media training institutions. Get to the young journalists, they are the future. With working journalists, newsroom training may be best; get them at their place of work with their decision-makers.
- Link training to policy, otherwise "change" rests on a few individuals. Get media houses to build gender into editorial guidelines, codes of ethics, human resource policies, sexual harassment policies etc.
- Monitoring: Keep showing if change taking place or not.
- Awards: Affirm good practice. An example was given of Gender Links and the Media Institute of Southern Africa that ran the first gender and media awards last year and got great response.
- Use consumer feminist power: "One case was racist sexism in Costa Rica in selling a cleaning product that portrayed a black woman as a "negrita" cleaner that is a slave. We stepped in by way of consumer choice and took the case to constitutional court afterwards. We won the case, legally and culturally, because people in general stopped buying the product!"
- The use of alternative media and community radio stations; training women to create their own media through the use of tape and video recorders, perhaps using drama as well as radio listening clubs.
- The *I Stories*: "We have worked with women to write about their personal experiences of violence, and then placed these articles in the mainstream media."
- The media pool at Beijing Plus Ten. This is an initiative joined by some 60 women's media and info/com organisations and networks to share information about the conference; to help younger journalists to be able to cover the meeting; to share strategies and to organise a lobby to governments about Women in Media. The pool shared and translated stories for each other and for the mainstream media.

- Focusing on communications as a HUMAN RIGHT according to United Nations conventions, because this focus allows women to recognise their sense of entitlement to speak, be heard, produce news and access it: "that is a monumental revolution in the case of women because we have been led to believe that our experiences and what we have to say is not important and no one cares to listen to us anyway."

3. What new challenges and opportunities have been posed by ICTs - Information and Communication Technologies?

- Developing countries are still grappling with extreme poverty and the urgent need to provide basic necessities. Access and use of ICT's is still a dream for many.
- Access and not everyone in the media is tech savvy. The opportunities have been better reach and of course the opportunity to network within the media and also outside on a global level.
- The dominant language of English excludes many.
- Many ICT programs tend to lend their voices to the women they claim to serve, instead of letting these women voice their own voices. And when they have the opportunity these women know better than anyone else how to word their problems and how to touch the responsive chord of other women.
- ICT's have in many ways been used to denigrate women. But they can equally be used to promote women's rights as we are doing now. "We need to "appropriate" things like Micosoft's cute chat software to our causes. Imagine the possibilities of this chat technology if we can really get it to take off, and get more people involved."
- Other opportunities include the fact that "ICTs enable our issues to become visible. Women have been able to use the technology to access job opportunities; stop a theft or a violation of another woman; access information about their health and their bodies."

4. What strategies can be used to give women greater access to and facility with ICTs?

- Tech savvy is developed by doing it...there is very little "science" to it when we harness it to do what we need to get done. Most new technologies are self taught, what we need to do for women to get into it is demystify technologies...we have to let the "girl" in us surface....she is curious, daring, valiant and accepts mistakes as part of process.
- Need to focus on what can/should be done by our governments to ensure rollout of ICTs in areas without electricity, without telecommunications infrastructure in a way that reaches women.
- We need to think long-term...where do we want African women to be in 10/20 years with respect to technology? Do we want us to continue focusing on how best to consume content and technologies generated elsewhere? Or do we want to focus on how we can produce not only content but also technologies. The real economic benefits of the so-called Information Society come not from use but from ownership...of software, hardware. How do we position ourselves, our

lobbying strategies so as to ensure that the next generation of African women both accesses and controls ICTs?

- Going from access to relevance: Beyond finding ways of getting women to access the Internet, there is need to ask how relevant the content is; and how much content there is by and for women.
- For there to be good women's content WE ALL have to get our stories there, and frame them ourselves...from users to producers..that is the way. We get the voices of illiterate women into the Internet by documenting their experiences though radio and combining radio with internet, for example. And we do the other way around when we use the internet as a source of information for our radio programmes.
- We must come up with new and more aggressive means of pushing for our issues. We must be more daring, more courageous to do the unthinkable and indeed, have fresh ideas of grasping the media attention and have also rapid response mechanisms in place to respond when issues are still hot.
- Evaluation is critical for our work as gender activists using ICTs for women's empowerment. We need to see if our use of ICTs is REALLY changing the lives of women. We also need to gather "evidence" and case studies to use as tools for our lobbying and advocacy efforts.

Examples of working with women and ICTs

- The ISIS WICCE experience working with women shows that they are always ready to take up new challenges, they are creative and with a very high sense of imaginations: "I have seen rural pick up a technology and within one hour they are ready to operate it. Actually as you say if they had the time they would use the ICTs more appropriately (for development) than their counterparts: the men."
- Gender Links has been working with women councilors on IT and this has been a revealing experience: "We found for a start that while the City of Johannesburg claims to be the e city of Africa none of the councilors had an E Mail address! Documents are delivered to them by courier. One councilor had a laptop and ISP and a phone at home but could not figure out how to get on the Internet. I find its often about the little things than the big things; helping women to make the connections literally and figuratively in safe spaces."
- Women's Mayors Link worked on getting women mayors connected throughout CEE.

5. How can we get women involved in the formulation of ICT policies? How do international policies affect policies at national level?

- There is a broader issue around women and policies. Often we are torn between the practical and the strategic, and err more on the side of the practical because our lives are so day to day driven. We as advocates and activists need to start putting policy (that very male of spaces) more at the forefront; to recognise that we won't win on the practical front if we don't start by creating the so called "enabling" policy environments.
- The Women's Media Pool had a meeting on this and concluded that it wasn't just about disinterest on the part of UN agencies like UNESCO (which should have taken the lead in preparing for the process) or DAW and the regional

- commissions (which should have included questions on Section J issues in the questionnaires governments filled out). It was also about the fact that many women's development communications, media and ICT organisations didn't jump into the review process at the national and regional levels. Even here in New York, many are busy covering the process, but not participating in it. Its only when we organise that we a) deepen our analysis of why women are where we are with respect to access to and control of ICTs and b) strategise on how to move that analysis into lobbying around relevant laws and policies.
- FIRE is convening an AMLAT women's seminar next October because we need to strengthen our involvement in policy making. Women are challenging privatization of /telecommunications in our region. Costa Rica women are challenging the law on spectrum allocation for radio, and we might win a constitutional court case these coming months, but involvement in ICT policies is still to come...

6. What strategies and action points can you suggest for advancing gender equality through the media? What would you like to see in Section J?

- Building on the gender advocacy work in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS): "Although there is not much optimism around inserting strong gender language in the final WSIS outcome, it has built networks, activities and awareness around lobbying for gender in ICT policies."
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- Linking with the women doing research on women and ICTs...how it's rolling out in the south, for example the work of IT for Change in India. APC WNSP has recently launched a gender and ICT policy portal www.genderIT.org for research, information, which is who etc and want this to be a useful tool for women's organisations to engage with ICT policy and for policy people to learn about gender.
- B+10 final recommendation/text must have strong language on using BPFA commitments and CEDAW as the gender equality benchmarks for MDGs. Use ICTs for a sustained advocacy and accountability to gender in the MDGs.
- Continue the cyber dialogues for the post event review of this Beijing + 10 and possibly incorporate it as a strategy for continued involvement of women in some of the major events like the MDG + 5 review in September. Deepa from India offered to set up a list.
- Commitment from governments, especially Ministries of Gender, Finance and Planning to actively participate in the cyber dialogues. For the Africa region, we could build this within the NEPAD programme and for UNIFEM in East Africa. Offer to mobilise IGAD, EAC and COMESA.
- Don't just use ICTs to monitor MDG's without measuring ICTs as one of the tools for women's empowerment.

7. Responses to the poll question

The majority of people who responded to the poll question felt that empowering women in the use of ICTs in the South is a key strategy in a package of strategies for women's advancement.

