REPORT ON THE LESOTHO MEDIA LITERACY COURSE
SEPTEMBER 2009
Executive Summary

This report details the activities of the Lesotho Media Literacy training course conducted in September 2009. The course which was run by Gender Links in collaboration with partner organisations, Gender and Media Southern Africa Network (GEMSA) Lesotho and the Institute for Extra Mural Studies (IEMS) was conducted over a five day period. The course attracted a variety of participants Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), students and members of the general public. The course was made possible with support from the Department for International Development (DFID).

The Lesotho project is part of a series of regional workshops being run in the Southern African region with GEMSA as the main implementing partner. The course in Lesotho was run on a pilot basis. The course was first piloted by Gender Links in South Africa in 2006. Since then the organisation has extended the course to eight other countries in the SADC region.

Media literacy is one of several strategies being used by Gender Links to shift power from media producers to consumers/audiences. Until recently, much of Gender Links (GL) work has focused on media producers and media content. This course therefore is part of larger efforts towards citizen empowerment and participation.

This course was necessitated by a desire to empower citizens to say out what they want to see in the media. The Gender and Media Audience Study (GMAS) that found out that women are grossly under-represented and misrepresented both within newsrooms and in editorial content in Southern Africa opened a new area of work for GL. It was evident from this study that audiences were dissatisfied with media content being churned out. The organisation therefore designed a media literacy tool kit for use in the media literacy training course.

The course is aimed at sensitising and educating members of the public to understand what is meant by media literacy, empower media consumers to engage critically with the media, encourage the public to interact with the media through writing articles, opinion pieces and letters to the editor and to raise awareness on how to hold the media accountable among others.

Initially this course was scheduled to be run in Lesotho over a ten week period comprising 2 hours each Saturday beginning Saturday 12th September to 14th November 2009. The in-country environment however made it impossible to attract enough participants to proceed as planned. The course schedule was then changed to run for five days comprising six hours day. The course was conducted from 29 September to the 3rd of October 2009. The last day was devoted to the more demanding IT module.

During the course of the week, participants were excited to discuss topics on gender and to practically engage in production of media materials responding to the new concepts they learnt. They identified gender stereotypes and socially constructed identities that classified certain roles and attributes as belonging to each sex. Participants were able to give examples that differentiated biological characteristics of males and females from socially constructed roles of males and females.
Objectives of the training

- Empower participants to understand the concept of media literacy
- Discuss how to engage critically with the media through writing and creating your own media
- Explore and discuss the key provisions of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development
- Measure participants knowledge and skills on gender and the media
- Understand gender and media in a broader context and be able to apply it in their daily lives

Process

Participants were invited to the course through a partnership with CARE Lesotho-South Africa and two Maseru based Local Government Councillors namely Ms. Moseme and Ms Tsuene. The original plan had been to run the course in partnership with IEMS, with IEMS providing the training facility, the participants and the facilitators. However, this did not work out and a venue was sought at Lesotho Association of Non-Formal Education, LANFE. Finally, three facilitators were recruited through the IEMS gender focal point person Ms Maraisane.

There were 14 participants drawn from Civil Society and the Media. Participants’ level of education ranged from Primary to tertiary with one post graduate degree holder at Masters Level. Participants felt that their lives were changed positively by the course. They were more aware of the media, of what it was saying and how it was saying it as well as what it was not saying and what the implications and underlying motives were.

Most of the participants had never engaged with the media, let alone think about media operates. They therefore found this course an eye opener.

The IT module which was conducted on the last day of the training was the most empowering according to what participants said at the end. They had never gotten an opportunity to explore what Information Technology offers or what it can do to advance gender equality. But the unavailability of appropriate instructional technology imposed a limitation on what the course could
achieve. For example the coordinator had to rent an internet cafe for this module as the venue, LANFE, did not have adequate facilities for the session to take place there.

The course was run using a local adaptation of the GL media literacy toolkit, *Watching the Watchdogs* and using local facilitators with Lesotho examples to bring images and messages closer home. Participants found it easier to relate to examples that were familiar to them. It was however noted during the training that Lesotho media heavily relies on South Africa for news thereby depriving audiences of local news.

**Challenges**
The initial target at the beginning was to attract 20 members of the public who were interested in being media literate. However this target could not be met as only 14 people were trained. The initial dates of the workshop and format had to be changed in an attempt to attract more people. Even with these changes the numbers still did not go up.

The venue that was used for the training did not have adequate computer facilities to allow for a smooth flow. As such the IT module was conducted in an internet cafe which did not offer a conducive learning environment.

The low levels of IT literacy among most of the participants meant that they could not be given individual projects to work on. Most of the participants had never used a computer before and as such they could not fully grasp all the IT concepts in one day.

Language also proved to be a barrier during the training. Most of the participants preferred to communicate in Sotho. This proved to be a challenge as the module are in English. The facilitators however to translated the key concepts into Sotho as need arose. Some participants preferred to write their assignments and special projects in Sotho which made it difficult for the Gender Links office to do a quality check. For opinion pieces especially, it limited the extent to which these could be distributed under the GL opinion and commentary service as there are very few main stream media houses publishing in Sotho.

**Outputs**
- Letters to the editor
- Opinion and commentary pieces
- Flyers
- Posters on gender based violence
- Individual email accounts created.
- 14 knowledge and Attitudes and Skills questionnaires completed

**Outcomes**
- 14 members of the general public empowered with skills to critically engage with the media
- Awareness on the provisions of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.
- Participants IT literacy skills enhanced
- Enhanced understanding of the impact of the media literacy course
Facilitators’ Comments

Given that the Course was designed to be run for 10 weeks but was finally run over four days, participants gained a lot in terms of practice received despite the short time and theoretical learning demonstrated by the majority of right responses to questions. Almost all modules were completed in the four days leaving the last and fourth day for IT training.

Comments from Participants:

They felt that learning occurred best when they were open and being treated in a friendly manner. They felt that the facilitators made the material understandable and they felt motivated to monitor the Media consistently. Prior to this they had taken the Media like a God whose truth cannot be questioned but after this they realized this was not so that the Media can sometimes get it wrong and sometimes get it right and the media can sometimes not be sure. What they liked most is that their feelings of discomfort can now be dealt with by responding directly to the media as watchdogs of the watchdogs. The participants felt they will in future question most of what they hear and read.

One of the young girls who participated in the course says, “I am very happy to have been one of the learners here. It is a great pleasure and great honour to have met the teachers and the people who made this workshop a success. The experience I found here is the one that is going to help me always be alert. Thank you. It was a great opportunity. I wish that this can go further.” Ntsieleng Mehlolo.

Media Literacy Course 28th September- 1st October 2009.

Some of them are saying they never had care for listening to, reading or watching the news but after Media Literacy, they find themselves eager to hear what the media is saying and how it is saying it. Whether it has spoken or written well about women or simply forgot to mention some of the great things women do. Others are excited about the Internet and that they can access news about overseas countries in any cafe for 5 maloti.1

Participants thanked the organisers and Tutors of the workshop facilitated by GEMSA and sponsored by Gender Links.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

The course held in Lesotho was successful. It ran smoothly. Its limitations must be understood contextually in that some members were not highly educated (they were members of the public usually found in Community Councils) which leads to a conclusion that the course can successfully be taught to Local Government Councillors. The minimum required level of education for a councillor is literacy in Sesotho which constitutes basic literacy and numeracy- to be able to read a Sesotho newspaper and a Bible and do simple arithmetic computations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

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1 Loti is a currency used in Lesotho. Maloti is the plural form of the currency. It is equivalent to the south African rand.
The course can be taught over a period of a week depending on the targeted group and their background (academic and occupational). The problem with long courses is that people drop out because of other engagements. It can also be taught to IEMS journalism students and practising journalists and editors especially since gender is a new field in most traditional African universities or institutions of higher learning.

Our plan is to begin to recruit local Government Councillors for the Course and work over the same period of time of four days graduating on the fifth day. We would like to make it a 30 hour course of 6 hours a day.

We would also like to introduce the course to the Management of IEMS or ask Gender Links to make the necessary arrangements at an appropriate level for the Course to be institutionalised.

Another option tested is the possibility to take the course to High Schools that have a computer facility. The Course can run every year at all these institutions and lead to Advanced Media Literacy Course with more detailed Gender and Media analysis.
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ANNEX B: SUMMARY OF EVALUATIONS
Lesotho Media Literacy course
3 October 2009

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COMMENTS

1. Which session did you find most useful? Why?
   - Introductory module on what is media literacy
   - Where are women and men in the news
   - Media monitoring: Finding women and men in the news because it open my eyes to the gender discrepancies in reporting
   - All the sessions were useful because they were well organised, facilitated and they were conducted in an environment that allowed for everyone to comprehend them
   - What is media literacy?
   - Gender stereotyping: subtle and blatant stereotypes
   - What the media says about women and men

2. Which session did you find least useful? Why?
   - None because all sessions were educative
   - Every topic was relevant
   - None
   - Session on ‘what is beauty’ which was under visual literacy
   - Visual literacy because women have the power to refuse to be used

3. How will you apply what you have gained from this engagement?
   - By responding to the media and applying gender analysis of media outputs
   - Interacting more with the media
   - To write a report at my workplace that will alert the media to issues of gender
   - I will always deconstruct news
   - I will be more critical of things I see on TV and read in the newspapers and I will help other people to ‘read’

4. Any other comments
   - More follow up courses will be appreciated
   - I would like to thank the facilitators and organisers of the workshop