

How to get the issue on the Media's Agenda

The media can be the target, ally and tool in gender and media advocacy. Gender and media activism worldwide has attracted media professionals who are strategic allies.

The news media provide gender and media activists with access to a wide audience. Media Watch Canada, for example, sees its relationship with the media as a key component of its gender and media advocacy initiatives. The organization has developed relationships with journalists who are sympathetic to their message. This has led to a mutually beneficial relationship whereby Media Watch is able to present relevant up-to-date information to the media which is always on the lookout for good stories.

Various approaches to woo the media have been adopted by gender and media activists. These include:

- **Special incentives** for journalists such as exclusive interviews, invitations to training, field visits or international conferences on gender issues.
- **Developing press kits** and other packets of information to facilitate the journalists' coverage of gender issues.
- **Training programs** for journalists on the relevant issues. Newsroom senior managers – editors-in-chiefs, sub-editors, frontline editors (news, features, sports, etc) however, seldom attend training programs and a different approach is needed. Gender Links, a Southern African NGO that advocates for gender equality in and through the media, has developed relationships with some media in South Africa that have now open their doors for in-house training (which reaches editors and a larger number of staff within a media house). This form of training also is likely to be more hands on and relevant to the day-to-day realities.
- **Creation of gender-sensitive media awards** – both Asia and Southern Africa has experience with such awards. And although the award was not specifically for gender reporting, the winning of the Pulitzer Prize in the 1990s by a paper in Dallas Texas for its series on violence against women worldwide was a clear illustration that the missing gender stories, reported accurately, fairly and sensitively, are the essence of good journalism.

Greater media interaction breaks down many of the myths of the media as an 'untouchable' institution and provides gender and media activists with the knowledge they need to engage in gender and media literacy with consumers of media.

Case Study

Cambodia: Gender Equity Media Awards

The Women's Media Centre (WMC) in Cambodia was born from a movement to increase women's participation in the democratic process during the UN-sponsored elections in 1993. The WMC delivers innovative, national awareness and informative programs on a diverse range of issues affecting contemporary Cambodia, with a special focus on the roles and rights of Cambodian women.

Since its inception in 1995, the WMC has produced high quality, innovative radio, television and video productions designed to educate and inform Cambodians on a wide range of issues impacting on women's rights and human rights including HIV/AIDS, trafficking, elections, domestic violence, decentralization and poverty.

WMC is also dedicated to promoting gender-sensitive reporting in the Cambodian media sector and to encourage journalists to mainstream gender in their reporting and coverage of women. In 2003, Ms. Sarayeth TIVE, Co-Director of WMC and Networking Manager, coordinated Cambodia's first Gender Equity Media Award, and in 2004, the Gender Equity Writer's Award.

Media monitoring was developed and a discussion forum was created to encourage journalists to portray women more positively. The forums provided the group with the opportunity to present their findings to the media and to discuss various obstacles media professionals faced.

The media monitoring findings were announced once a year at a press conference, and letters of appreciation were sent to the Editors-in-Chiefs of media which refrained from publishing stories that portrayed women as sex objects.

WMC's advocacy approach is to work with the media to try and find practical solutions to change the representation and portrayal of women in the media.

The Gender Equity Media Awards and Gender Equity Writer's Award were created to encourage all Cambodian journalists to write gender sensitive articles and to congratulate print media, television and radio organizations for supporting this positive form of reporting.

WMC received funding to coordinate the awards from donors, and worked with the Ministry of Information, the NGO, Women for Change, and a number of media outlets to effectively coordinate and produce the awards ceremonies.

Since 1996 the portrayal of women in the media has progressed a lot, especially the representation of women on radio and television.

WMC continues to encourage media monitoring activities, media internships, student visits to WMC, solidarity events with journalists and editors-in-chief, article solicitation, gender equity media awards, workshops and forums for journalists.

Activity – Discussion Points!

1. Make a list of the strategies the Women's Media Centre in Cambodia has used to engage the media.
2. What is the main philosophy of the approach used by the Centre?
3. What do the gender and media awards seek to do?

Getting News Coverage – What you can do!

Stage an event like a press conference, the launch of a petition or a protest march to a targeted media. Always prepare written material and/or press kits for the planned event. Ensure that you always have an up-to-date roster (list) of the key media in your country, including the names of journalists, editors, telephone, fax and e-mail details. Contact the media two to three days prior to the event and reconfirm attendance early on the day of the event.

Pegs: Use events like World Press Freedom Day, May 3, the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence (November 25-December 10), International Women's Day (March 8) or appropriate national holidays to peg gender and media advocacy issues on.

Get to know the media's deadlines: Check with your local media houses to find out their deadlines for news, features, opinion pieces or for arranging talk shows and current affairs discussions. Work to these deadlines when scheduling media events or planning to use the media to get out information on gender and media issues.

Write Opinion and Commentary Pieces: Use media monitoring findings to develop timely opinion and commentary pieces that can be marketed to the media. The Gender and Media (GEM) Commentary Service is an excellent example of how gender and media activists have claimed a space in the mainstream media. Go to www.genderlinks.org.za to find out more about the service, which can be replicated in other regions. Also write **Letters to the Editor** to highlight gender issues of concern in the media.

Be willing to be a source: Become a reliable and authoritative expert on gender and media issues and do not shy away from media interviews. Prepare for the interview and talk facts, figures and impact. Do not waffle of the top of your head.

Case Study

How to say NO to the Boss campaign

Between 1997 and 1999, women trade union coalitions in Slovenia and Croatia, ran a campaign on sexual harassment in the work place. Although organized by women trade unionists, the 'How to say No to the Boss' campaign was led by a project coalition in each country which include civil society, university students and a representative from the Chamber of Commerce(private sector) in Slovenia.

This campaign also included representatives from the media. In Slovenia, the male editor of the largest private television station was a member of the coalition and in Croatia, the female editor of a women's magazine, also joined.

Staging media events, preparing materials, making available to the media women leaders in the project for interviews and producing and disseminating popular campaign materials like posters and leaflets increased the public's awareness of sexual harassment as a serious violation of women's rights.

The coalitions successfully engaged the media to raise awareness of the issue of sexual harassment – six press conferences were held. The coalitions also mounted campaigns to get their issues covered in the media and in Slovenia, 95 articles were printed in the media, and the coalition was featured on seven television broadcasts and in several radio broadcasts. The campaign in Croatia resulted in more than 50 articles published in the print media, several broadcasts on national and local radio stations and four television broadcasts.

Key female figures within the coalitions were readily available to be interviewed by the media in events such as public forums and hearings which included women with first hand experience of sexual harassment, legal experts, governments. The groups prepared and disseminated to the media, laws, expert articles and speeches on sexual harassment, research findings on sexual harassment in the workplace, among other materials.

All of these tactics kept the issue on the media's agenda over the two-year period, and the public in both countries began to understand the serious dimensions of sexual harassment at work. "Underestimation, ridiculing and tolerance of the perpetrators at the beginning of the project were little by little transformed into the conviction that the problem is big, serious and difficult" for the women who are sexually harassed.

Source: Sonja Lokar, Coordinator of the 'How to say NO to the Boss' Project Coalition, Slovenia

Activity-Discussion Points!

1. What strategies did the coalitions use to get their issue onto the media's agenda? What were the results of their efforts?
2. Why do you think the media became 'allies' to the coalitions in this campaign? 3. What was one positive change that occurred because of the coalitions' work with the media?

Media Tips for Gender and Media Advocacy

- Remember, the media is always looking for **news** and a good story. "News is what is new, but this includes more than just what is happening now. What is new also can be a new interpretation of an event or issue".
 - Create a contact list of women who are willing to speak and who are accessible. This list can be sent to the media to help journalists and editors to build a network of women as sources whom they can contact on gender issues.
 - Go and look for the journalists/editors to give them story ideas and information. Establish a relationship. **BADGER** them. Don't just go once, but twice, three times, as often as necessary to form a relationship with journalists and editors.
 - Convene an "experts" panel of women to speak at a press conference on a key issue that has developed within your community, at the provincial level or even nationally. Such panels also can write statements to be given to the media.
 - Create information packets for journalists on gender issues, including gender and media areas of concern. But always ensure that the information you give out is factually correct and up to date. Wrong information can hurt an NGO's credibility.
- Have members of your staff, who may be responsible for media relations, take short courses on how to write a press release, or a basic journalism skills course. There are short courses on the Internet, or NGOs can also contact media training institutes within their countries for short courses. Several NGOs also can team up and organize a venue and resource person to provide a short journalism skills course for several groups. Courses on news reporting and writing opinions and columns would be valuable.
- NGOs should be careful not to repeat the "same" messages on gender issues over and over again. Remember, what is new. How much progress has been made on an issue? If things are static and there is a backlash or no change, why is this happening?
 - Do not give out figures without placing the numbers in a context – that is, what do the numbers mean? What story do the numbers tell? Always ensure that the

figures are accurate. Always provide the source of the data given to the media. NGOs can be a source of sex-disaggregated data.

- Provide the media with case studies that help to bring the human angle to an issue and to illustrate the impact of the issue or event on women, men, girls, boys, etc.
- **PREPARE! PREPARE! PREPARE! ALWAYS BE PREPARED WHEN YOU TALK TO THE MEDIA**

Tips for Writing Opinions and Commentaries

What editors look for?

- The argument of point of view should be right up front in the piece
- The argument must be strong
- A strong news peg (i.e. a piece which is based on an event, issue or trend that is topical in the society, as well as forward looking; also can be a new perspective or new/fresh insight into an event or issue)

How to pitch your piece:

- Call an opinion page editor, rather than sending unsolicited articles. Better tactic is to go and see the editor and be persistent
 - Have a 2-3 page brief with you when you pitch which outlines the article
 - Know the newspaper you want to publish your article in (know its values, editorial policy, its readers, etc); research the newspaper before you approach it.
 - Be brave when pitching your opinion
 - Know the area you are writing about; show that you know the issues well.
 - For dailies: allow three weeks lead time to pitch your piece. For weeklies: allow six weeks lead time

Structure (writing the piece):

- Start with a case study, anecdote or explain a scenario to lead the reader into the issue
 - Put your point of view high in the piece
 - Use statistics when appropriate
 - Give the context (why the issue is important)
- Give the history/background to the issue (not in abundance, but enough to help explain the issue)
 - Avoid jargon and when jargon is used, explain it
 - Avoid acronyms
 - Remember you are writing for general readers
- Write to length (i.e. find out from the editor how many word your piece should be and stick to the length given)
- Acknowledge and understand the editing process (do a self-edit on your piece for style, clarity). You may ask to see a pre-publication piece to see how the piece has been edited by the newspaper

What to avoid:

- Do not think that just because you write a piece, you are entitled to space. You must convince an editor why it is important to publish your piece. The piece must be compelling and informative
- Do not write a piece that is too specialized which can be understood only by a small audience
 - Avoid inaccuracies in facts and data
 - Avoid one-side and unfair arguments. Be balanced
 - Avoid a didactic/preachy/prescriptive tone in your piece

KEY POINTERS: BREVITY, CLARITY, KEEP THE ARGUMENT CENTRAL**Editor's Checklist for Newsworthiness⁴⁵**

Does the story offer new information?

Does it say something original?

Does it add to ongoing coverage?

Should it be told now?

What impact will the story have on the audience reading it?

Will the story make a difference? Will it change the way the issue is seen?

Does it indicate a movement of change?

Tips for writing a Press Release

Be brief and to the point

Ensure all facts, figures and information is correct

Answer in the first paragraph the following: Who, What, When and Where

Provide answers to Why and How in subsequent paragraphs

Put the important points first and high up in the release

Support data with quotes from spokespersons (ensure a balance of women and men, both experts and ordinary citizens)

Box 16: Using the Internet in Gender and Media Campaigns

The Internet is the biggest computer network in the world and can be used to put one's campaign on-line to inform wider audiences of your work at the national level. The Internet can be used to:

- Publish information cheaply and quickly, that will be accessible all over the world
- Find information fast from all over the world to help you research your campaign
- Share information and promote your organization and its work
- Find the people or projects that may be able to support or assist your organization

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⁴⁵ Adapted from Making the Most of the Media, Tools for Human Rights Groups Worldwide, cited in Making a Difference Strategic Communications to end Violence Against Women, Jenny Drezin and Megan Lloyd-Laney, editors, UNIFEM 2003

- Find options for funding and support from all over the world
- Co-ordinate international campaigns cheaply and inefficiently
- Exchange news, views and experiences with others in a world wide public forum

Source: Getting Smart strategic communications for gender activists in Southern Africa, Colleen Lowe Morna and Lene Overland, editors, published by Gender Links and Women's Media Watch, 2002