Transforming the Media through Policy

Advocacy and lobbying strategies focused on persuading the media to develop gender work place and editorial policies, and/or guidelines, have been key in starting consistent and sustained dialogues with the media community, regulatory bodies (where they exist), the government and the public on many of the gender and media issues highlighted in the GMMP 2005 (see Chapter 4 in Section One).

All of the gender and media advocacy efforts over the years have focused on: • changing the negative portrayal of women
 • including in larger numbers the voices and perspectives of women

   • increasing the numbers of women in the media in senior, middle management and other positions within the media where their numbers are low

• the fact that changing the use of language that fosters discrimination and perpetuates gender stereotypes will yield inconsistent results if the media do not put in place policies that make change a consistent reality.

The blueprint for ensuring checks and balances within the media are systems of self regulation and codes, which take shape in the form of workplace and editorial polices. Policy is important for the media for the following reasons:

Media accountability
The media's responsibility should not stop with its own stated role of being a watchdog in the public's interest. Media also must be accountable to their audiences and stakeholders and as an institution, should practice good governance, transparency and promote human rights within the workplace and in and through the news content.

Trust and credibility
If the public begins to identify gender, cultural, racial, religious or other forms of biases in the source of its news and information, then the media will lose audiences confidence and trust, and this can lead to declining audiences and shrinking markets. Credibility among all sectors of society is what many media build their sales and marketing pitches on.

Likewise, if the media do not see potential segments of society as the sites for potential new markets, or have the insight to stay on top of changes in the public's needs, they will not remain viable businesses.

Box Thirteen: Gender can affect the bottom line

In Australia, media analyst Misha Schubert, notes that the business case for a fair portrayal of women in the media is increasingly replacing the justice plea: "as the principal household shoppers in 90 percent of homes, women form the primary target group for the majority of advertisers. Research has been successfully used to challenge sexist advertising and programming."

Source: Report of the Gender in Media Symposium, Commission on Gender Equality, Johannesburg, September 26, 1997, quoted in Whose News? Whose Views? edited by Colleen Lowe Morna, Gender Links, 2001

Ensuring Diversity and Equal Opportunity in the workplace and output The media's workplace and leadership should be reflective of the society in which it operates. The media's output should also reflect this diversity. If not, the media needs mechanisms to help bring about a fundamental change.

In an article on *What the United Nations Should Do, Marginalization of Women in the Media,* Sonia Gill, the Assistant Executive Director of the Broadcasting Commission in Jamaica, argues for more media advocacy and lobbying to ensure gender is inclusive to media and communication policy development. This will require however different skills from those that traditionally have been found in activists groups, Gill says.[43] These new skills include:

• The ability to understand and analyze policy-making structures and to assist with the formulation of policies that encompass gender concerns.

• New research that moves beyond the existing pattern of gendered media studies, which are largely limited to descriptive assessments of the portrayal of women, to studies that relate issues identified to national media policy in a way that provides for recommendations for feasible policy amendment.

• The ability to open a dialogue with professional media associations and national regulatory bodies on setting and monitoring compliance with standards which speak to gender awareness of media entities.[44]

[43]Sonia Gill, What the United Nations Should Do, Marginalization of Women in the Media, UN Chronicle Online Edition, Issue 4, 2003

[44] Sonia Gill, What the United Nations Should Do, Marginalization of Women in the Media, UN Chronicle Online Edition, Issue 4, 2003

Activity- What policies are in place?

Gender and media activists should do an audit of the internal and external media and communications policies, codes and guidelines that exist in their countries. Knowing what exists and what is missing can help to identify strategic areas for lobbying and advocacy initiatives. Some key questions include:

1. What does the Constitution guarantee in terms of freedom of expression and free speech?
2. Are there industry codes, guidelines and policies that guide professional standards on portrayal, language, coverage of violence, sexism in advertising, etc?
3. Do media houses have workplace and editorial polices and codes? Are these inclusive of gender? Are they published?
4. Are there regulatory bodies in place to ensure enforcement of policies, guidelines and codes?
5. Do licensing policies include gender and diversity criteria?

Troubleshooting

Like all institutions confronted with the need to change, either from the inside or externally, there will be resistance and counter-arguments from the media. Calling for a change in media policies to change the portrayals of women and men, women's limited access to expression, women's limited access to leadership and management positions within the media, among other issues, requires that gender and media activists know the issues, have their facts and figures correct, and have plenty of examples from the media to illustrate their arguments and points. This is why research, understanding the media, and engaging with the media to have allies within with whom strategies can be discussed and refined are important to any successful gender and media advocacy.

Women's Media Watch Jamaica, which has years of experience in lobbying the media on gender issues, provides several challenges in its 1998 training manual, *Whose Perspective? A guide to gender-sensitive analysis of the media*, activists are most likely to meet when lobbying the media for policy, guidelines and changes in the way they do their work. These challenges are common responses from media managers, editors, journalists and other media professionals, and the pointers offered can help to prepare activists to think of how to troubleshoot when they engage the media on gender issues.

Challenge 1 – *The media does not influence behavior, people know it is not reality.*
• Advertisers spend billions of dollars a year to persuade consumers to buy products and services in the belief that ads influence consumers. Often advertisers link their products to a certain lifestyle and image.

Challenge 2 – *Producers of media messages do not intend the meaning that you're reading into it.*
• Think about the not so obvious effects: many messages aren't immediately evident, but after frequent viewing, we absorb their underlying meaning • Think of an example of a media image and its possible interpretations • Why are the same images used over and over? What is the cumulative effect of repeated messages? Do they create stereotypes?

Challenge 3 – *The media just reflects what's going on in society.*
• The media reinforces as well as reflects stereotypes
• The media are NOT representative – older women, fat women and people with disabilities are virtually absent from the mainstream media (yet all exist in the very society the media says it reflects).
    • The news is very selective. Think about what is covered, how it is covered, the time allotted to news items, the order in which they are presented
• Who are the decision makers in the media?

Challenge 4 – *Aren't men objectified in the media as well?*
• Yes, it is dehumanizing for any human being to be turned into an object. BUT men aren't objectified as often as women, or in the same way as women • The objectification of men is not as threatening, because men are a powerful group in our society

Challenge 5 – *Using women to sell products does work, why should advertisers stop?* • The media is sometimes sensitive to issues of race. Is the same level of sensitivity shown towards sexism?
    • If the media continues to demean women, half the population, what will stop it from treating other groups within society in the same way?
• Exploitation, by the media, of women's insecurities about their physical appearance, is what sells beauty products
• The media will only change if its financial interests are threatened; if viewers stop watching a program, refuse to buy a product or service
• Growing consumer awareness has on occasions led to ads being pulled out or changed. One company moved from showing women draped over tires, to highlighting the quality of the tire. Media Watch in Mauritius also has had sexist advertising removed by mobilizing public opinion and taking complaints to the advertising regulatory body in the country.

Challenge 6 – *This sounds like censorship – media houses and advertisers have the right to produce what they want, and I have the right to read, watch, and listen to anything.*
• Censorship is not being advocated by gender and media activists. An alternative approach is to balance responsibility and sensitivity with marketability. • Many racial stereotypes in the media have become unacceptable. • Media managers often have

considerable power over a publication's editorial content, and therefore, decide what is published.

Challenge 7 – *Aren't the women the ones who allow themselves to be exploited by the media?*
• Women are socialized by the same media into thinking that this is the correct and acceptable thing to do
  • The media often glamorizes these images, making them seem more attractive.

Box 15: Country and Regional Experiences in Engendering Communication and Media Policy

CANADA has one of the most comprehensive systems of gender and media policy, which has evolved out of a partnership between government, the media and non governmental organizations. The balance between government legislation and industry self-regulation makes this system work. (*See case study on Canadian approach*)

AUSTRALIA's government, through the Office on the Status of Women, initiated in 1986 a consultation with 26,000 women and found that women wanted the media to portray more realistic and positive images of women. In 1988, the government established the National Working Party on the Portrayal of Women in the Media and two working parties operated until 1993. These parties produced guidelines on sexist language, how to report on violence against women and on sexual exploitation in advertising. Changes in government however, have led to concerns among activists that many of the gains made are being reversed.

SOUTHERN AFRICA, where gender and media activism has taken off in the years following the publication of the 2003 Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS), saw in 2005 the launch of the Media Action Plan (MAP) on HIV/AIDS and Gender. MAP brings together a partnership between the media industry, civil society and the international community (UNAIDS, the PANOS Institute, for example) to improve the quality of media reporting on HIV/AIDS and gender. One of MAP's key objectives is to ensure that 80% of media institutions in the region have workplace-based and editorial policies and programs on HIV/AIDS and gender by the end of 2008. The engagement with media houses to develop these policies will begin in 2006.

Source: adapted from WACC internal reports from regional conferences on Gender and Communication Policy experiences and MAP documents for Southern Africa.

Case study

Canada - 'Enforced self-regulation' and public advocacy to transform the media

Canada's approach to gender communications and media policy development is seen as a model. The Canadian system is based on government legislation and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which provides that "freedom of opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication" is subject to "such reasonable limits…as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society". Freedom of expression, therefore, is not defined as an absolute, opening the way for regulations and standards on program content.

The country also has several regulatory bodies created by government and private media players. These include: the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications (CRTC), the agency responsible for broadcast legislation; the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC), created by private broadcasters to promote self-regulation in programming. There also is an Advertising Standards body, the advertising Standards Council.

Therefore, Canada's policy environment is enabling for gender and media advocacy because it has:

• A communications policy that acknowledges the negative impact of a sexist media environment
• A broadcast industry which voluntarily drafted sex-role portrayal guidelines and set up its own industry watchdog to ensure that broadcasters followed the guidelines
• A regulatory body with the potential power to revoke a broadcast licence if sex role codes and guidelines are not followed.

Media Watch, Canada, the first organization set up with the aim of eliminating sexism in media content promotes change through activities grouped into three broad programs – **Advocacy, Education and Research**.

Advocacy – the public advocacy program encourages the general public to actively take part in shaping their media environment, because the media does care about what their audiences think;

Education – this program makes people aware of how the media operates by building media literacy among the consumers of media and the training of public speakers on media literacy issues; Media Watch trains volunteers as public speakers on media literacy issues. Empowering consumers to critically analyze the media environment and advocate for change is an effective means to bring about change.

Research - regular studies of both media content and audience opinion are commissioned, and the findings are used to lobby the media industry. Media Watch views research as an important tool in successful lobbying. The results of research studies helped ensure that gender equity language was included in legislation and guidelines. The gender and media advocacy group uses research to strengthen its arguments with the media industry. Besides media monitoring and other research techniques such as content analysis, Media Watch also conducts audience research. A

survey of Canadian women was used to show advertisers that more than half of the women surveyed, "quietly vote with their wallets by boycotting products whose advertising has offended them".

Engaging the media – Media Watch has worked to foster positive relationships with journalists who may be sympathetic to their message. They then develop a mutually satisfying relationship whereby the organization is able to present relevant up-to-date information to the media.

Media Watch also engages with industry and regulatory bodies, pressuring them to meet their obligations under existing guidelines and regulations on gender portrayal.

The results of this strategy include voluntary industry codes of ethics and guidelines on sex-role portrayal, violence and advertising.

Formal lobbying is often done by Media Watch and individual members of the general public through the public consultations process established by the Canadian Radio television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), the broadcast regulator. Media Watch has frequently intervened with the CRTC on issues such as television programming, regulation of the Internet, among others. Media Watch often submits briefs on the various issues and advocates strongly for the CRTC to play a strong role as regulator and to resist industry pressure to deregulate.

Through its own monitoring of the media and on behalf of the public, Media Watch files complaints to the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC) when broadcasters are deemed in contravention of the Sex Role Guidelines. The gender and media advocacy group also facilitates consumer complaints to the Advertising Standards Council (ASC) and has been successful in the removal of offensive advertising from the public realm.

Sources: adapted from Margaret Gallagher, Gender Setting, New Agendas for Media Monitoring and Advocacy, ZED & WACC, 2001, Media Watch Canada, 'Our Lobbying Experience', presentation during WACC Regional Conferences on Communications and Gender Policy

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Activity – Discussion Points!
1. Why is the external policy environment in Canada conducive to effective gender and media advocacy? What's in place?
2. What are the three pillars of gender and media advocacy for Media Watch Canada?
3. What have been some of the successes of gender and media advocacy by Media Watch Canada?
4. What lessons can you learn from this approach for your lobbying and advocacy?