

# **WOMEN AND THE MEDIA: NEW CHALLENGES**



**BEIJING AT 10 :  
PUTTING POLICY INTO PRACTICE**

## Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action



### Critical Area J: Women and the Media

*Women should be empowered by enhancing their skills, knowledge and access to information technology. This will strengthen their ability to combat negative portrayals of women internationally and to challenge instances of abuse of the power of an increasingly important industry.*

Beijing Platform for Action (paragraph 237)

The mass media and the new information and communications technologies (ICTs) have great potential as agents for change with relation to gender equality; however they can also contribute to spreading a stereotyped image of women that reinforces their subordination in a patriarchal society. Since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action (PfA), the rapid development of ICTs and the concentration of the media have left unfinished some of the points described in Critical Area J. During the five-year review of the Beijing PfA (Beijing+5) the issues of women and the media, and women and ICTs were separated due to the importance that each area had acquired, their differential impact on women and the potential of each for women's empowerment. In this text however, the two topics will be reunited under the framework of Critical Area J.<sup>1</sup>

*During the past decade, advances in information technology have facilitated a global communications network that transcends national boundaries and has an impact on public policy, private attitudes and behavior, especially of children and young adults. Everywhere the potential exists for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women* (Beijing PfA paragraph 234). The Beijing PfA highlighted the potential of new information technologies for the empowerment of women worldwide. However, throughout Critical Area J the topic of ICTs and gender; that is the impact of these new technologies on women and their use for women's empowerment was not dealt with in-depth, but rather as one component of the women and media relationship. ICTs are included in the area's two specific objectives, which urge States to: increase women's access and participation in the expression of their ideas and decision-making in the media and through them, as well as in new information technologies; and foment a balanced and non-stereotyped image of women in the media.

The women's movement has been a pioneer in the utilization of ICTs to give a voice to their visions and demands in the public sphere, showing the enormous potential of ICTs as a tool for social change. ICTs have facilitated the creation on a worldwide scale of networks for the promotion of gender equality and the demand for women's rights. However, it is women themselves, above all poor women from developing countries, who face the greatest

<sup>1</sup> For a broader issue of gender and ICTs, see INSTRAW's Occasional Paper #2 *Overcoming the Gender Digital Divide: Understanding ICTs and their Potential for the Empowerment of Women*. Santo Domingo: INSTRAW, 2003. [http://www.un-instraw.org/en/docs/gender\\_and\\_ict/Synthesis\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.un-instraw.org/en/docs/gender_and_ict/Synthesis_Paper.pdf)

barriers to their access to the benefits of new technologies and who are at greater risk of becoming even more marginalized from the social and economic advances fomented by the new digital revolution.

Networks acquire a special relevance to the implementation of Critical Area J. Among the advances made during the last decade, the creation of national, regional and international networks of journalists is worth noting. These networks deal with women's issues, and through their reports seek to promote women's rights and gender equality and push for change in the treatment of information in the conventional media in favour of a more equitable and integrative perspective. Moreover, the advocacy work of these groups and of the women's movement has been fundamental, in recent years, to the achievement of substantial changes in the area of women and the media.

Over the last decade several monitoring efforts have been implemented, some of them at the global level. The purpose of these efforts has been to gather concrete, quantitative examples of: i) the discrimination still aimed at women journalists in newsrooms and, above all, in decision-making positions; and ii) of the sexist reports that broadcast traditional stereotypes about femininity and masculinity are reproduced, reinforcing social inequalities between men and women. The global monitoring carried out during 1995-2000, by MediaWatch Canada<sup>2</sup> and the World Association for Christian Communication<sup>3</sup> (WACC), revealed, respectively, that women comprise seventeen percent and eighteen percent of news subjects among the media analyzed. During 2005, WACC will carry out the third global monitoring in 100 countries.

The Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) was a definitive step for calling attention, on an international level, to how the media can either perpetuate the subordination of women or play a pivotal role in promoting women's rights. Almost five years later, the UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW - through WomenWatch) carried out an on-line discussion, which concluded that there were few advances in the representations of women in publicity or the news, and that women journalists still occupied few decision-making positions within the media.<sup>4</sup> At Beijing+5, the multiple opportunities offered by ICTs for the empowerment of women were recognized (including information exchange and the creation of networks and electronic trade, among others), though it was also stated that poverty, lack of access to infrastructure, illiteracy -including digital illiteracy- and language obstacles prevented women's taking full advantage of these technologies.

During the forty-seventh session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women<sup>5</sup> (CSW) held in March 2003, the importance of recognizing the gender dimension of ICTs was reaffirmed, in order to ensure that they became central tools for gender equality and the empowerment of women, and to avoid their contributing to the perpetuation of existing inequalities. During the session, recognition was also given to the increasing sexual exploitation of women through traditional media and new technologies, and more research was requested on the impact of the media and the ICTs on women and girls.

To support the CSW, DAW organized a meeting of experts in Lebanon (12-15 November 2002) on "Participation and access of women to the media, and their impact on and use as

<sup>2</sup> Global Media Monitoring Project: *Women's Participation in the News*. Toronto: MediaWatch Canada, 2001. <http://www.mediawatch.ca/research/gmmp/>

<sup>3</sup> WACC Women's Programme: [http://www.wacc.org.uk/wacc/our\\_work/projects/gender](http://www.wacc.org.uk/wacc/our_work/projects/gender)

<sup>4</sup> Rodriguez Bello, C. *Women and Media: Progress and Issues*. Toronto: Association for Women's Rights in Development (WHRnet), 2003. <http://www.whrnet.org/docs/issue-media.html>

<sup>5</sup> *Secretary General's Report: Participation of women in the news media and in the information and communications technologies and women's access to them, as well as their repercussions on the advancement and empowerment of women and their use for these purposes*. New York: United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, 2003 (Doc E/CN.6/2003/6). <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/47sess.htm>

an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women,”<sup>6</sup> and another one in Korea (11-14 November 2002) on “Information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women.”<sup>7</sup>

The materials and documents prepared for these meetings served as inputs for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS - Geneva, 2003) which brought together actors from government, civil society and the private sector with the aim of laying the foundation for an information society focused on people and aligned with the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The CSW recommended the integration of a gender perspective in all aspects of the WSIS. Thanks to the efforts of organization such as the Gender Strategies Working Group<sup>8</sup> and the WSIS Gender Caucus<sup>9</sup>, the adopted Declaration of Principles<sup>10</sup> and Plan of Action<sup>11</sup> contain many positive references on the gender dimension of the information society. They do not however recognize gender equality as a central political element in the ICT sector nor do they assume specific commitments to advance the role of women in the information society. In addition, many gaps remain with respect to gender - such as exploitation, violence against women and sexism on the Internet - which the final documents do not contemplate.

The second phase of the WSIS, which will be held in Tunis in November of 2005, represents a unique opportunity for women’s organizations to insist that gender equality and respect for women’s human rights become basic principles in the definition of this new society.

## Strategic Objective J.1

### **“Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication”**

Actions to be taken by governments, national and international broadcasting systems, non-governmental organizations, professional news associations and other actors include to: support women’s education, training and employment to promote and ensure women’s equal access to all areas and levels of the media; support research into all aspects of women and the media; encourage and recognize women’s media networks; and develop regulatory mechanisms, including voluntary ones, that promote balanced and diverse portrayals of women by the media and international communication systems.

The first of the two strategic objectives on women and the media focuses on promoting women’s access and participation in the whole communication process and the expression of ideas through the media. At the DAW expert-group meeting in 2002, one of the points examined in depth was ‘Access, employment and decision-making.’<sup>12</sup> During the DAW on-line discussion it was pointed out that, despite the fact that the presence of women in the media has increased in recent years, there is still a clear gender imbalance in decision-making and policy- formulation positions.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> “Expert Group Meeting on ‘Participation and access of women to the media, and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women.’ November 2002.Beirut, Lebanon. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/media2002/documents.html>

<sup>7</sup> “Expert Group Meeting on ‘Information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women.’ November 2002.Republic of Korea. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/ict2002/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> WSIS NGO Gender Strategies Working Group <http://www.genderit.org/wsisis/index.shtml>

<sup>9</sup> WSIS Gender Caucus: <http://www.genderwsis.org/>

<sup>10</sup> Declaration of Principles. Building the Information Society: a global challenge in the new Millennium. Geneva: World Summit on the Information Society (Doc: WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/0004). [http://www.itu.int/dms\\_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsisis/doc/S03-WSIS-DOC-0004!!PDF-E.pdf](http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsisis/doc/S03-WSIS-DOC-0004!!PDF-E.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Plan of Action. Geneva: World Summit on the Information Society (Doc: WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/0005).

[http://www.itu.int/dms\\_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsisis/doc/S03-WSIS-DOC-0005!!PDF-E.pdf](http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsisis/doc/S03-WSIS-DOC-0005!!PDF-E.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Crossette, B. Access, Employment and Decision-Making. Prepared for the Expert Group Meeting on ‘Participation and access of women to the media, and the impact of media on, and its use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women’. Beirut, Lebanon. November 2002. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/media2002/reports/EP1Crossette.PDF>

<sup>13</sup> Cabrera-Balleza, M. Report from the Online Discussion on “Participation and access of women to the media



Following the Beijing Conference, numerous studies have been carried out in every region on access to the media. Keeping in mind the economic, social and cultural differences between countries and regions, the results are not so disparate. According to Barbara Crossette, 'virtually everywhere, women are leaving news organizations because they feel the road to the top is blocked by male establishments, with outdated ideas about the news, who makes it and how it should be presented'<sup>14</sup>.

On the other hand, an increase in the presence of women in newsrooms, and even in decision-making positions, does not guarantee that women will have more visibility in reports, that representation of women will be less stereotyped or, less still, that reports will promote gender equality. The first global monitoring of communications media, coordinated by MediaWatch Canada<sup>15</sup> in 1995, revealed that, among the seventy-one participating countries, women represented forty-three percent of journalists interviewed and seventeen percent of the news subjects of radio, television and press reports analyzed. In February 2000, the second global media monitoring project, organized by the World Association for Christian Communication<sup>16</sup> (WACC) in which seventy countries participated, concluded that women represented eighteen percent of news subjects of reports, while men made eighty-two percent. According to the WACC study, women represented forty-one percent of active journalists. Meanwhile, the International Federation of Journalists<sup>17</sup> pointed out, in 2001, that women occupied one percent of the management, editorial and ownership departments of the media, but more than a third of the journalists all over the world.

In addition to collecting concrete information on the participation of women in the media and the manner in which they are represented, monitoring has become a useful tool for reinforcing the solidarity of and knowledge about journalism. The organizations and the hundreds of volunteers from each country who have participated in these projects have created networks and, at the same time, mechanisms for analyzing and criticizing the content of the media, and in this case advocating for gender equality.

These examples have served as a model for similar experiences in other countries. Women's Media Watch<sup>18</sup> (WMW) began its work in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1995. WMW's activities include media monitoring, advocacy, activism, training workshops on gender and communications, as well as the production of bulletins, documentaries and radio programmes that promote gender equality and equal opportunities for men and women. The African Women's Media Center (AWMC)<sup>19</sup>, part of the International Women's Media Foundation<sup>20</sup> (IWMF), has worked since 1997 in favour of African women journalists. Since its creation, more than 900 women have participated in AWMC's programs and workshops. A study conducted in 1990 on the status and roles of women who work in the media in seven African countries (Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe) revealed that men constitute eighty-five to ninety percent of workers in the most technical positions of the media (publishers, editors, editorial bosses, directors...), whereas women hold the majority of administrative posts. None of the countries analyzed

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and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women." Prepared for the Expert Group Meeting on 'Participation and access of women to the media, and the impact of media on, and its use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women'. Beirut, Lebanon. November 2002. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/media2002/reports/BP2Mavic.PDF>

<sup>14</sup> Crossette, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> MediaWatch, 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Global Media Monitoring Project. WACC, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Equality and Quality: Setting Standards for Women in Journalism. International Federation of Journalists, 2001.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.ifj.org/default.asp?Issue=mainresult&Language=EN&subj=GEND>

<sup>19</sup> South African Media and Gender Institute: <http://www.womensmediawatch.org.za/>

<sup>20</sup> African Women's Media Center: <http://www.awmc.com>

<sup>21</sup> International Women's Media Foundation: <http://www.iwmf.org/>

has come near equality in the access and participation of women in the media. Namibia has the highest number at thirty-five percent, and Malawi the lowest at sixteen percent.<sup>21</sup>

In 1999, Isis International-Manila produced a report on Women and the Media in Asia, concluding that "Although the number of women entering media is increasing, women have not gained much parity with men in terms of participation and decision-making in media. Top management is still largely male-dominated and patriarchal even as a few women hold senior positions in media organizations."<sup>22</sup> The study also pointed out that in some countries, such as South Korea and Cambodia, the number of women in the media has decreased due to salary differences, sexual harassment, sexist and stereotyped attitudes, gender hierarchy, and fewer opportunities for promotion. According to a study conducted in Australia by Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (1996), twenty-three percent of women journalists interviewed stated that they had left their jobs due to discrimination.

Nearly forty-five percent of women journalists interviewed by the American Press Institute and the Pew Center for Civic Journalism<sup>23</sup> (2002) expected to be offered a job in another communications medium or leave the industry for good. Another report, *The Glass Ceiling Persists*, revealed that women occupied sixteen percent of presidential positions in broadcast and cable television and ten percent of the editorial positions;<sup>24</sup> and that in 2004, the percentage of women who worked for newspapers increased slightly to 37.23 percent, after falling for two years.<sup>25</sup>

These few advances in women's access to and participation in the media reflect the same patterns seen in the women's access to ICTs. The opportunities offered by ICTs to create networks of political pressure, access basic services, share information and make women's voices heard in the public sphere are immense, and many initiatives are utilizing and developing this potential. However, the obvious achievements of these initiatives should not obscure the fact that only a very small percentage of the world population has access to new technologies. The population of Africa in its entirety represents only one percent of the world's Internet users. Whereas in the United States there are 113.4 telephones for every 100 inhabitants, in Africa that density reaches only 7.36.<sup>26</sup> The average monthly cost for access to the Internet in the US represents 1.2 percent of average monthly income, compared to 278 percent in Nepal or 191 percent in Bangladesh.<sup>27</sup> More than 2/3 of the 960 million illiterate people in the world are women.<sup>28</sup> The gap between the countries, regions and people who have the necessary resources and training to access knowledge through ICTs, and those who lack these resources and training is known as the "digital divide." The divide is multifaceted; reflecting existing country, social, class, sex, age, ethnic, caste, and geographic inequalities that run through every society. Though there are no statistics or reliable indicators, it seems evident that it is women in developing countries who are hardest hit by the digital divide.

<sup>21</sup> "Employment Patterns in Media Organizations in Southern Africa." International Women's Media Foundation.

<http://www.iwmf.org/resources/africastats.php>

<sup>22</sup> *The State of Women and Media in Asia: An Overview*. Manila: ISIS International, 1999.

<http://www.isiswomen.org/advocacy/media/1999/com00011.html>

<sup>23</sup> *The Great Divide: Female Leadership in US Newsrooms*. American Press Institute and the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, 2002.

[http://www.americanpressinstitute.org/curtis/Great\\_Divide.pdf](http://www.americanpressinstitute.org/curtis/Great_Divide.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Falk, E. *The Glass Ceiling Persists: The Third Annual APPC Report*. Philadelphia: Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, 2003.

[http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/04\\_info\\_society/women\\_leadership/2003\\_04\\_the-glass-ceiling-persists\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/04_info_society/women_leadership/2003_04_the-glass-ceiling-persists_rpt.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> "Newsroom employment drops again; diversity gains" American Society of Newspaper Editors News Release, 20 April 2004.

<http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?id=5145>

<sup>26</sup> ITU Statistics. International Telecommunications Union, 2003. <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/>

<sup>27</sup> Primo, N. "Gender issues in the information society" Prepared for the World Summit on the Information Society. Paris: UNESCO, 2003.

[http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/file\\_download.php/250561f24133814c18284feedc30bb5egender\\_issues.pdf](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/file_download.php/250561f24133814c18284feedc30bb5egender_issues.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> *Progress of the World's Women 2002*. New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2002.

[http://www.unifem.org/index.php?f\\_page\\_pid=10](http://www.unifem.org/index.php?f_page_pid=10)

Beijing+5 denounced the multiple socioeconomic, cultural and political barriers that women face in accessing the benefits of ICTs; barriers which continue to exist. The lack of infrastructure, high cost of equipment and connection to the Internet, lack of familiarity with the use of ICTs, and the predominance of the English language in the content of the Web are among the factors that prevent large sectors of the population, primarily in developing countries from having accessing and using new technologies. These obstacles are especially serious for women since, in addition to the technological and socio-economic barriers; they also face cultural and gender discrimination that result in: higher indices of illiteracy; less access to and control over resources; less free time to train and acquire new skills due to their double or triple roles; cultural and social surroundings that limit their mobility and schedules and restrict their interaction with men in public; the persistence of discriminatory laws, practices, and stereotypes about women's roles and their technical capacity; limited political participation and little representation in power structures; a de-valuing of their knowledge and skills; and a lack of consideration for their information needs. Any serious attempt to promote women's access to ICTs must be firmly directed towards eliminating these barriers.

#### Areas for Future Action:

- The development of ICTs has revolutionized the world of communications the scope of Critical Area J. should be broadened to reflect the new reality created by technological development and the concentration of the media, either through the incorporation of another chapter or an amendment;
- Promote the employment of women in the field of communications and adapt legal measures and codes of conduct in order to reverse the historical pattern of labor segregation by sex;
- Accompany any initiative that promotes professional women in communications to decision-making positions with training on gender relations and the media.

## Strategic Objective J.2

### **"Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media"**

Actions to be taken by governments, the mass media and advertising organizations, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and other actors include to: promote research and implementation of a strategy of information, education and communication aimed at promoting a balanced portrayal of women and girls and their multiple roles; encourage gender-sensitive training for media professionals, including media owners and managers, to encourage the creation and use of non-stereotyped, balanced and diverse images of women in the media; Promote the concept that the sexist stereotypes displayed in the media are gender discriminatory, degrading in nature and offensive; develop, consistent with freedom of expression, professional guidelines and codes of conduct and other forms of self-regulation to promote the presentation of non-stereotyped images of women [and]...that address violent, degrading or pornographic materials concerning women in the media, including advertising; develop a gender perspective on all issues of concern to communities, consumers and civil society.

"To exercise an inclusive journalism implies making part of our task the subtle edges of life and human coexistence; recognizing the differences inherent to people and their realities, and representing them in a fair dimension; taking into account the traditionally excluded voices so that they enrich us but, above all, so they do not continue to be marginalized (...). That is, let our work reflect the world just as it is and, even more importantly, the people

just as they are. A journalism that questions the uniformity that classifies people as rigid models impossible to imitate.”<sup>29</sup>

Guatemalan journalist Laura Asturias synthesizes in this reflection one of the major concerns of those who have been devoted, from the journalistic profession or from the women's movement, to advocating a journalism that gives a voice to everyone and represents them in an equitable way; so that within their articles or audiovisual or radio materials they do not reflect or reinforce stereotypes about men and women and the relations between them that replicate inequalities traditionally unfavourable to women.

The same pattern is repeated in the new communications media derived from the Internet. For example, a study carried out in Croatia<sup>30</sup> that analyzed the image of women on twenty-one national web pages, showed that women generally appear associated with subjects such as fashion, sentimental relationships and family. Moreover, almost a quarter of the Webpages analyzed contained images of nude women or women in pornographic poses. The study also analyzed how the main print media reflected the relation of women to the Internet, and concluded that these media are directed mainly toward a masculine audience; that women are portrayed as having few technological skills; that the use women make of the Internet never appears to be linked with leisure, and that images of semi-nude women are frequently used to sell computer equipment.

Amnesty International in Spain, through the report *Con la violencia hacia las mujeres no se juega* (“Don’t play with violence against women”)<sup>31</sup> provides another example of how a stereotyped, sexist, and often degrading image of women is presented by the new electronic media. The report analyzes the representation of women in a representative sample of videogames – some on sale in stores and others accessible over the Internet or in videogame arcades – and of magazines that specialize in videogames. The report concludes that the majority of videogames constitute one more element in the re-creation of discriminatory stereotypes against women that perpetuate and trivialize abuses against their human rights. The videogames analyzed show women as passive characters and victims of the plot; they are moved to secondary roles or they are simply removed to absolute invisibility; or they are converted to objects at the mercy of the masculine characters who may end up raping, torturing or murdering them. In one of the best-selling videogames (*Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*) the player can hire the services of a prostitute and later recover his money by beating the woman to death.

As discussed, the invisibility of women in the media was demonstrated through the results of the first two global media monitoring initiatives, which revealed that only seventeen percent (MediaWatch Canada, 1995) and eighteen percent (World Association for Christian Communication, 2000) of subjects in the reports monitored were women. Women's opinions of the facts reported, their voices, are not reflected in the conventional media. They are seldom represented as politicians, experts, economists, businesswomen or other in other positions that have traditionally been attributed to men. In 2003, the Media Institute of Southern Africa and Gender Links conducted the *Gender and Media Baseline Study*<sup>32</sup> in twelve Southern African countries, which looked at the representation of women in the media and concluded that women represented only nine percent of information sources for the political stories that were reported.

<sup>29</sup> Asturias, L. *Un periodismo que refleje el mundo*. Santo Domingo, 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Mihalec, K. and N. Sudar, *Women and Internet: Croatian Perspective*. Women's Information Technology Transfer, 2004 <http://www.witt-project.net/article64.html>

<sup>31</sup> *Con la violencia hacia las mujeres no se juega. Videojuegos, discriminación y violencia contra las mujeres*. Spain: Amnesty International, 2004. [http://www.es.amnesty.org/esp/docs/videojuegos\\_2004.pdf](http://www.es.amnesty.org/esp/docs/videojuegos_2004.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS). South Africa: Media Institute of Southern Africa and Gender Links, 2003. <http://kabaso.misa.org/Gender/baseline-study.pdf>



In many cases, information that focuses on women or makes them the subjects of the news, presents stereotypes that reinforce the roles that have historically limited women as human beings and prevented them from fully exercising their rights. In recent years, the proliferation of national and international networks have played a crucial role in making women more visible in the media and creating spaces in which their voices and opinions can be heard and their needs taken into account. There are also numerous examples of organizations that seek to sensitize on the matter of women and the media, using as support and reference the agenda and strategic objective Critical Area J.

In Latin America, women's information agencies include a broad cross-section of women, such as the Women's News Service (Servicio de Noticias de la Mujer)<sup>33</sup> in Costa Rica; Adital;<sup>34</sup> the Latin American International Information Agency (Agencia Latinoamericana de Información Internacional);<sup>35</sup> Women's Communication and Information<sup>36</sup> (Comunicación e Información de la Mujer-CIMAC) in Mexico; or PULSAR<sup>37</sup> in Ecuador. On an international scale, InterPress Service (IPS),<sup>38</sup> among others, disseminates information on gender and women's issues to a global audience. Several Internet-based women's information networks have been created to disseminate information on women's human rights, including: AVIVA<sup>39</sup> (UK); DWPress<sup>40</sup> (Italy); Feminist Majority<sup>41</sup> (United States); Modemmujer<sup>42</sup> (Mexico); Women in Black<sup>43</sup> (Israel); or Network of Women<sup>44</sup> (Mujeres en Red), among others.

Numerous organizations, associations or networks of journalists are working along these same lines, including some of those already mentioned such as CIMAC which also belongs to both a Mexican network of journalists, and the Red de Periodistas de México, Centroamérica y el Caribe (Network of Journalists from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean). Among other networks and organizations working on a worldwide level are; the Red Dominicana de Periodistas con Perspectiva de Género<sup>45</sup> (Dominican Network of Journalists with a Gender Perspective) in the Dominican Republic; the Association for Women Journalists<sup>46</sup> in the United States; the African Women's Media Center;<sup>47</sup> the International Women's Media Foundation<sup>48</sup> in Washington; MEDiterranean MEDIA<sup>49</sup> in Italy; the Red Nacional de Mujeres Radialistas (National Network of Women Broadcasters) in Mexico; the Society of Women Writers and Journalists<sup>50</sup> in England; the World Association of Women Journalists and Writers;<sup>51</sup> the Network of Women in Media<sup>52</sup> in India; the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press<sup>53</sup> in the United States; Women Journalists in Finland;<sup>54</sup> the Women's International News Gathering Service;<sup>55</sup> the Asociación Española de Mujeres

<sup>33</sup> Servicio de Noticias de la Mujer: <http://www.noticiasdemujer.com/index.html>

<sup>34</sup> Adital: <http://www.adital.org.br/site/>

<sup>35</sup> Agencia Latinoamericana de Información Internacional: <http://alainet.org/>

<sup>36</sup> Comunicación e Información de la Mujer: <http://www.cimac.org.mx/>

<sup>37</sup> PULSAR: <http://pulsar.amarc.org>

<sup>38</sup> InterPress Service: <http://www.ips.org/>

<sup>39</sup> AVIVA: <http://www.aviva.org/>

<sup>40</sup> DWPress: <http://www.mclink.it/n/dwpress/>

<sup>41</sup> Feminist Majority: <http://www.feminist.org/>

<sup>42</sup> ModemMujer: <http://www.modemmujer.org/>

<sup>43</sup> Women in Black: <http://www.womeninblack.net/>

<sup>44</sup> Mujeres en Red: <http://www.nodo50.org/mujeresred/>

<sup>45</sup> Red Dominicana de Periodistas con Perspectiva de Género: <http://www.aprimeraplana.org/>

<sup>46</sup> Association for Women Journalists: <http://www.awichicago.org/>

<sup>47</sup> African Women's Media Center: <http://www.awmc.com/>

<sup>48</sup> International Women's Media Foundation: <http://www.iwmf.org/>

<sup>49</sup> MEDiterranean MEDIA: <http://www.medmedia.org/>

<sup>50</sup> Society of Women Writers and Journalists: <http://www.swwj.co.uk>

<sup>51</sup> World Association of Women Journalists and Writers: <http://orbita.starmedia.com/~ammpe/>

<sup>52</sup> Network of Women in Media: <http://www.nwmindia.org/>

<sup>53</sup> Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press: <http://www.wifp.org>

<sup>54</sup> Women Journalists in Finland: <http://www.naistoimittajat.fi/womenjournalists.html>

<sup>55</sup> Women's International News Gathering Service: <http://www.wings.org>

Profesionales de los Medios de Comunicación<sup>56</sup> (Spanish Association of Professional Women in the Communications Media); the Red de Mujeres Periodistas del Mediterráneo<sup>57</sup> (Network of Mediterranean Women Journalists); the Media Institute of Southern Africa;<sup>58</sup> ISIS International in Chile, Manila, and Uganda;<sup>59</sup> and the World Association for Christian Communication in England.

As a result of the efforts of these and many other organizations all over the world to share information, give a voice to women, make them visible and reflect their issues, needs, interests, and conceptions, a proliferation of publications, both printed or electronic, disseminate information about women, gender equality and women's rights. Some of these publications deal in a more concrete manner with the issue of women and the media, as in the case of *a primera plana*,<sup>60</sup> a three-monthly newspaper that aims to bring "to the front page" information on gender and communication in the media of the Dominican Republic.

Since 1995, these publications have played a fundamental role in making women and their contributions to society more visible. In the 1970s, alternative communications (women's newspapers, magazines and radio programs) had already begun, hand in hand with the feminist movement, to publicly express new social proposals and, at the same time, collaborate on implementing them. Although the contributions of this alternative, feminist journalism are unquestionable – in terms of newly explored news angles, a broader and more integrated look at events, a more complete, non-stereotyped representation of the interviewee or newsworthy subjects – the feminist focus or gender perspective must still be included in the everyday work of the journalists who work in mainstream and mass media. There must be a fundamental change in the way the news is presented so that it integrates the voices and opinions of a wider audience and represents them without resorting to stereotypes.

With the aim of transforming the focus of reports in favour of a more equitable and integrated communication from within the media, in 2001 the Dominican Network of Journalists with Gender Perspective emerged, composed for the most part of journalists who work in conventional media. The work of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and Gender Links in South Africa is also worth noting, in particular the *Gender and Media Baseline Study*<sup>61</sup> (August 2003), composed of different media and/or organizations to address gender and communications issues. The *Gender and Media Baseline Study* pointed out that the black women in southern Africa, who make up forty-six percent of the population, represent only five percent of news subjects, and six percent of media employees. The study also highlighted the importance of integrating new perspectives, such as race, class or sexual orientation, into analyses of women and the media in order to acknowledge and address the distinct types of discrimination aimed at different groups of women. The conventional media and new ICTs must reflect the diversity which exists among women, as well as differences between women and men. In this sense, ICTs offer multiple possibilities to give voice to the most marginalized groups through spaces that reflect their needs, achievements, interests, etc. while respecting their cultural diversity and using local languages.

The creation in 2003 of the South African Gender and Media Network (SAGEM) has contributed to strengthening work on gender and the media throughout the region. In

<sup>56</sup> Asociación Española de Mujeres Profesionales de los Medios de Comunicación: <http://www.nodo50.org/ameco/ameco.html>

<sup>57</sup> Red de Mujeres Periodistas del Mediterráneo: <http://www.mediterraneas.org/>

<sup>58</sup> Media Institute of Southern Africa: <http://www.misa.org/>

<sup>59</sup> ISIS International (Chile) <http://www.isis.cl/>, (Manila) <http://www.isiswomen.org/>, Uganda (<http://www.isis.or.ug/>)

<sup>60</sup> *a primera plana* <http://www.aprimeraplana.org/>

<sup>61</sup> GMBS, 2003.

September 2004, SAGEM held the first *Gender and Media Summit* in Johannesburg; during which the first South African Gender and Media Awards were distributed in recognition of outstanding journalistic work in favour of gender equality and women's rights.<sup>62</sup> In addition to strengthening the networks and organizations that work in the area of gender and the media, these activities also offer concrete examples and data on good and bad practices in relation to the representation of women in the media, facilitating advocacy work on sensitizing mass media journalists.

Several advances in the establishment of codes of conduct and self-regulation of the representation of women in the media are worth noting. It is challenging to define specific codes and limitations in this area without infringing on freedom of expression; a supreme merit of journalism that tends to take precedence over the regulation of sexist imagery. There are examples of media codes that take women and gender relations into account, for example the Australian Code of Ethics for Publicity, which includes references to gender relations.

In the case of ICTs, codes rarely include gender considerations; and references to images of women in the media are usually made from a moralistic perspective denouncing the use of "obscene" or "provocative" images, which is of little benefit to women's struggle for the vindication of their bodies and the right to enjoy a free sexuality. Self-regulation codes do exist for some software, interactive and videogame companies, though in general they are not respected.

One of the most negative aspects of the ICT revolution is the growing use of the Internet for the sexual exploitation of women and children.<sup>63</sup> New technologies enable people to effortlessly buy, sell and exchange images and videos of sexual exploitation, publicize sex tourism trips, or offer services that find partners for purposes of sexual exploitation (for example, e-mail-order brides). Even more worrisome is the utilization of the Internet for trafficking of women, through for example, web pages that advertise false job opportunities for young women who, once in the receiving country, are forced to work as prostitutes.

The gravity of this situation caused the Council of Europe, in 2000, to establish a working group to study the impact of ICTs on the trafficking of people for purposes of sexual exploitation. The results of the study are presented in a report<sup>64</sup> that identifies: which techniques are used, the main users and their motives, and what legislation exists at national and international levels. The report also describes the effects of ICTs on trafficking victims; questions the role of the media, the Internet and freedom of expression; and presents proposals and recommendations for action and research in this area.

There is an obvious need to regulate the content and use of ICTs. One of the principle components of the debate on human rights in the information society is how to regulate the use of ICTs in such a way that they are not utilized as tools for the violation of human rights, while at the same time preventing governments from taking advantage of regulation measures to institutionalize State intervention and censorship. In general, existing legislation in the majority of countries is open to interpretation in terms of what the State considers "pernicious" or "illegal" practices. This raises the possibility of censorship of information on political opposition, sexual and reproductive rights, or sexual diversity;

<sup>62</sup> For more information on the Gender and Media Summit or the South African Gender and Media Awards, visit:

<http://www.genderlinks.org.za/gemsummit/>

<sup>63</sup> Hughes, D. "The Use of New Communications and Information Technologies for Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children," *Hastings Women's Law Journal* 13(1), 2002. [http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/new\\_tech.pdf](http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/new_tech.pdf)

<sup>64</sup> *Group of Specialists on the Impact of the Use of New Information Technologies in Trafficking of Human Beings for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation: Final Report*. Council of Europe, Division for Equality between Women and Men, 2002. [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human\\_Rights/Equality/05\\_Trafficking\\_in\\_human\\_beings/096\\_EG-S-NT\(2002\)09revE.asp#TopOfPage](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/05_Trafficking_in_human_beings/096_EG-S-NT(2002)09revE.asp#TopOfPage)

depending on the degree of political and social liberty that exists in each State.<sup>65</sup> An additional challenge of regulating Internet content is the decentralized nature of the Web; which allows a web server to be physically situated in a different country from the people who visit the web page, who may have access to services or information considered illegal in their country, but not in the country that hosts the server.

#### Areas for Future Action:

- Based on existing successful experiences, increase efforts to sensitize mass media journalists and those who work in ICTs to gender and women's issues, placing special emphasis on how the media contribute to reproducing stereotypes of men and women that reinforce inequalities between the sexes;
- Increase monitoring of the media, and recognize and reward good practices in journalism from a gender perspective in order to collect concrete examples to strengthen the sensitization of journalists;
- Develop Internet content relevant to women and useful for women, especially in developing countries, that reflects their knowledge and specific needs and recognizes diversity – and make the content available in different local and indigenous languages;
- Develop, with the participation of all relevant actors legal instruments and codes of conduct that regulate the use and content of the Internet within the framework of human rights, including the right to privacy and confidentiality, freedom of expression and opinion and freedom from discrimination and violence, among other human rights.

## Conclusion

Throughout the last ten years on an international scale, different organizations and journalism networks have carried out model activities in the promotion of women's rights and gender equality through the media, both alternative and conventional. These groups have also taken a new stand on how to integrate a gender perspective in journalistic and communications work so that it reflects a more equitable view of the world. Different global and regional monitoring projects have provided data on an issue that is difficult to quantify. Perhaps more importantly, these monitoring projects have identified concrete examples of good and bad examples of communications practices and products with regard to representation of women; the reproduction of traditional stereotypes that reinforce the subordination of women; the invisibility of certain subjects of interest to women; and the promotion of women's rights, among others. The monitoring and advocacy efforts of these networks and organizations have provided the discourse on women and the media with tools for social and political change through the presentation of a more equitable image of gender relations.

The two strategic objectives of Critical Area J. that relate to women's access to and participation in the media and the representation of women in the media are also of particular relevance to new and existing Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs). However, when the Beijing Conference was held in 1995, the use of ICTs was still very limited and the potential for the growth of the industry and its applicability to development and empowerment were barely understood. The rapid development of ICTs,

<sup>65</sup> Ramilo, C. "National ICT Policies and Gender Equality. Regional Perspective: Asia" Prepared for the Expert Group Meeting on 'Information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women.' November 2002. Republic of Korea. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/ict2002/reports/Paper-CRamilo.PDF>

together with other processes such as the concentration of the media, has revolutionized the world of communications. The subject of ICTs has been brought to the forefront, not only in relation to women's access to ICTs and their potential uses for women's empowerment, but as a central axis for the rest of the critical areas in terms of social, political and economic empowerment. In November 2005, the second session of the World Summit on the Information Society<sup>66</sup> (WSIS) will take place in Tunis, providing governments, NGOs, the international community and media organizations and actors with a crucial forum to ensure that gender issues are fully integrated into communications practices, content and media.

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<sup>66</sup> WSIS <http://www.itu.int/wsisis/>