

## OVERARCHING CONCERN

In the years since the Beijing Conference, the women's movements have done their share in implementing the BPFA, and in some countries, have made an impact on national policies, industry-wide codes of conduct and media practices. Access to the global media has brought both positive and negative impact on these efforts and in turn has brought about new challenges. The convergence of traditional media and new ICTs is a potential force for leveraging and expanding political, social, and economic spaces and in increasing individual agency and public participation. The Internet has provided an empowering political space for women, including those living under repressive and fundamentalist regimes. Women's organizations were the first to maximize these new spaces to mobilize support, strengthen South-South networking and advance dialogue on women's rights and empowerment.

Communication rights for women must be recognized to mean not just freedom of speech and opinion, but the right of access to information on matters of public interest as well as access to public means of disseminating information. They also consist in the right to a safe environment in which participation, tolerance, and respect make real communication possible. The language used in mass media and ICT sector, coupled with a low level of education and literacy of the majority of women in the South, prevents many women from communicating and accessing information. In other societies, social controls emanating from family, tribal, religious and other factors also serve as obstacles to the realization of women's communication rights.

Digital technology has changed the parameters of military warfare and armed conflict. It has become an invasive weapon that threatens the privacy, security and human rights of the individual citizen. Censorship and filtering mechanisms, however, are increasingly deployed to control online content published, disseminated and mirrored by women and women's rights advocates.

## GAINS

- There has been increased monitoring and analysis of women's representation in the news, as well as in mass media organizations. More women's groups have used the results of monitoring research to lobby government and media councils in their countries for the development of effective self-regulatory codes on gender-sensitive reporting and media portrayals.
- Media education is enhancing the capacity of audiences, especially the young, to talk back to media. Many women media practitioners have made considerable impact on media's coverage of women's issues and representation of women's views.

- More women are now in key positions of power but they still constitute a small minority.
- Gender equality advocates are working closely with civil society to ensure that gender issues in ICTs are understood and remain on the main agenda of governments, and in relevant fora like the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). Significantly, new feminist perspectives on the inter-linkages of media and ICTs with economic globalization, fundamentalism, and militarism have begun to inform women's activism.

## GAPS

- Male domination of mass media persists. Women media practitioners continue to experience discrimination in various forms: sexual harassment, lack of job security, low wages and limited opportunities.
- Two global media monitoring projects (World Association for Christian Communications 1995 and 2000) show that women's representation in the news hardly changed in the intervening years. Results of monitoring studies in the region were used to stimulate interest in the development of new regulatory codes and policies on women's representation in the media but women have yet to see effective implementation and positive results.
- Cultural barriers to women's education and related taboos have served to censor women's communication and women's access to information.
- Lack of cultural, religious, and racial diversity in the content of mass media and the Internet still prevail.

## EMERGING ISSUES

- The increasing concentration of global media ownership has led to difficulties in ensuring media accountability. In the ICT sector, the dominance of multinational corporations in technology development is making it more difficult for developing countries to maximize their potential for economic and social development.
- The benefits of ICTs are unevenly spread between and within countries, deepening the gender divide, as well as the class and North-South divide even among women. Women in the South and in the rural areas are least able to access new ICT's. In general, women have not been able to participate in technology development, as well as in policy formulation at the global, regional and national levels.
- ICT spaces have also been used to further exploit women and to perpetuate stereotypical roles and images.

## RECOMMENDED LANGUAGE

### Beijing Platform of Action Strategic Objective J 1, J 2

*By Governments, the UN system, and Civil Society:*

- Increase women's participation and access to expression and decision-making through the mass media and new communication technologies
- Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the mass media
- Aim for gender equality in making appointments to public media institutions.
- Continue media monitoring and intensify research on women's representation in the media; examine why women are under-reported and how news reporting may be more gender-balanced.
- Build partnerships and dialogue with journalists, perhaps through an association of media women, on the coverage of women in the mainstream media and on possible journalism codes of ethics.
- Acknowledge and support gender-sensitive reporting through various means (e.g., citations and awards).
- Promote media literacy programs to build an active audience.

### Concentration of ownership and control of mass media and the ICT No reference in BPFA Document

*By Governments, the UN system, and Civil Society:*

- Examine the impact of the globalized media and ICT industry on the status of women
- Ensure the protection of knowledge from the global South
- Implement measures to accord the South its legitimate space in the global information society architecture.
- Promote traditional, alternative, and independent community media, alongside new ICTs, as tools for expression and empowerment of men and women, especially those from the global South.

*By Governments:*

- Democratize the information sphere in terms of its ownership, control, and use.
- Develop a holistic ICT policy that is people-centered, informed by local contexts, and committed to the advancement of marginalised women.

*By Civil Society:*

- Strengthen the Southern feminist perspective and identify the different impacts of globalized media and ICT systems on women and men.
- Maximize the potential of ICT to restore plurality and reinvigorate social linkages in the South.

**Absence of ethical framework in ICT development, access, and control.**  
**No reference in BPFA Document**

*By Governments, Regulatory Bodies, and Media and Communication Industries:*

- Develop gender-aware universal access policies that will stress public access points as an alternative to more capital-intensive choices (e.g. one line/home) and compel telecommunications firms and Internet service providers to attend to underserved areas.
- Provide funds for research, development, and testing of technology that will serve women, especially those from rural areas.
- Ensure increased representation of women in mechanisms that develop and regulate new information and communication technologies.

**Maximize potential of ICT for women's economic empowerment of women**  
**No reference in BPFA Document**

*By Governments:*

- Pass enabling legislation for e-commerce that will support entry of small and medium enterprises in ICT and communications businesses (e.g., e-commerce, telecenters, wireless company ownership) especially those owned by women and women's groups
- Develop and implement programmes that expand economic opportunities for women in the ICT industry including training and business development.
- Allocate a number of telecommunications licenses to women-owned businesses.

**Censorship of women through social controls and state imposed mechanisms**  
**No reference in BPFA Document**

*By Governments, the UN, and civil society:*

- Address social and cultural barriers to women's right to communicate.
- Eliminate state-imposed mechanisms that limit the ability of women journalists to communicate.

**Digital technology and militarism**  
**No reference in BPFA Document**

*By Governments:*

- Develop transparent and accountable legal measures when balancing issues of national security and individual privacy.
- Ensure non-violation of the right to freedom of expression.

Thematic Focal Point for Women and the Media  
Association of Progressive Communication - Women's  
Networking Support Program (APC/WNSP)  
ISIS International - Manila  
World Association for Christian Communications