



# STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE J

## WOMEN & THE MEDIA

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES J

**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.

**Objective J.2** Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.

*'.. advances in information technology have facilitated a global communications network that transcends national boundaries and has an impact of public policy, private attitudes and behaviour, 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 Platform for Action (BPFA))*

### OVERARCHING CONCERNS

The media is a powerful driver of public opinion and attitudes; it can be a very effective tool for promoting positive social attitudes, and building a safer and more respectful environment for women and girls. Media has a strong influence on how women and girls perceive themselves, their place within society and their options for the future.

New media, or Internet Communication Technology (ICTs) and mobile technology is a good tool for leverage for the expansion of women in political, social and economic spaces, it increases women's individual agency and political participation, and provides women access to information on matters of public interest as well as being a means of disseminating information.

The growth of the internet and mobile technology has impacted severely in both public and private spheres of life and has brought substantial shifts in ways of working, social relationships and communication. Globalisation is acting to transform the nature and structure of the media from a public service to a transnational business enterprise. The pervasiveness of the media into everyday lives, such as music videos, news reporting, sports coverage, etc, influences the way people act and react to situations.

There is a lack of a coordinated effort aimed at improving and changing the status of women in the media industry. Sexual harassment of women in media organisations is widespread as female employees continue to be treated in a sexualised manner by their male colleagues and superiors. This is a denial of women's human rights and acts to hinder women's full participation in the media industry. This treatment of female employees actively discourages women from entering and occupying key positions within the media industry. The cultural diversity and varying realities of women's lives remain absent from media representations of women.

Women continue to have limited participation and access to decision making in the communications industry and in governing bodies that influence media policy. The

absence of a critical mass of women results in a lack of gender sensitive analysis of media issues and policy.

Negative and stereotyped representations of women in the media continue while the cultural diversity of women's lives remains absent from the media. Media codes of conduct have not been effective in ensuring positive portrayal of women in the media. The proliferated utilisation of the internet to connect buyers and sellers in the trafficking in women for internet brides, pornography and paedophilia has exacerbated the unregulated and unpenalised exploitation and intensifies risk for women and girls. Negative images and in some cases media targeting of indigenous women, older women, lesbian, refugee and migrant women, contribute significantly to social exclusion and self worth.

As the media is an ever more powerful force in shaping what the world should be like, an individual's struggle to maintain a unique identity and self-understanding apart from the media influence becomes increasingly difficult, especially for young women and girls. Many young women who feel they can't live up to these stereotypes are becoming socially isolated by turning to virtual social networks where the imagery is of secondary importance and cartoons and avatars replace reality. The result of this social exclusion into a virtual world is tragically resulting in cyber bullying, 'happy slapping' and in some cases suicides .

For women with disability 'Disabling stereotypes which medicalise, patronise, criminalise and dehumanise disabled people in books, films, TV and press, are the bedrock on which the attitudes towards, assumptions about and expectations of disabled people are based. They are fundamental to discrimination and exploitation which disabled people encounter daily, and contribute significantly to systematic exclusion from mainstream community life.

Male dominated reporting of 'normalising' sexual violence against women especially in the context of sport and sporting personalities, proliferates a culture that sanctions such violence in a subtle yet powerful way. Such media reporting fosters a sense of privilege and entitlement for male athletes who demonstrate violence and aggression within the context of sport and which acts to normalise and excuse violent behaviour in a social context.

## GAINS

- ✿ There has been increased NGO and academic monitoring and analysis of women's representation in the news, as well as in the mass media organisations.
- ✿ There has been active discussion in the media about the impact of ICT's and social networking sites on young women and an increasing investigation into the causes of cyber bullying and related suicides.
- ✿ Young women especially are beginning to use the ICT's and new media as a form of expression and lobbying for social issues and social change. New technology has been implemented via mobile phones, Twitter, and You Tube, to reach instantaneously to a new audience of young people who will support positive social change.
- ✿ A small number of gender equality advocates are working with civil society to ensure that gender issues in ICT's are understood and remain on the main agenda of the government.

## GAPS

- ✿ There has been very little evidence of government action on this area.
- ✿ Male domination of the mass media persists. Women media practitioners continue to experience discrimination in various forms; sexual harassment, low wages, limited opportunities and lack of job security.
- ✿ Women's media literacy remains weak. Without the means to understand and to influence the media, women remain without the resources to question a media that inundates them with damaging stereotypes and narratives.
- ✿ Women remain harassed in the workplace.

## EMERGING ISSUES

- ✿ Sexualisation of younger women through targeting of the younger audience in fashion and sexual behaviour.
- ✿ 'Happy Slapping' – where a girl attacks another girl and gets a friend to video it on her mobile phone, then these images are uploaded to 'You Tube' and circulated via mobile phone throughout the school.
- ✿ ICT spaces are being used to further exploit women and to perpetuate stereotypical roles and images.
- ✿ Trafficking of women via internet marriage sites which bring women to Australia to be married where they are then used for prostitution.
- ✿ Lack of regulation and legislation to support women affected by on ICT's and measures to address the growing impact of ICT on young women.

## SUGGESTED UN LANGUAGE FOR KEY PRIORITY AREAS FOR ACTION

- ✿ Calling on governments to undertake substantial gender-disaggregated research to inform national public policy addressing media portrayal of all women.
- ✿ Calling on governments and media corporations to include a gender perspective and harness the active participation of women in the development of all media including ICTs and to examine why women are underrepresented, especially women from specific social groups, and how reporting may become more gender-balanced.
- ✿ Calling on governments, academic institutions, corporations and media organisations to increase women's participation and access to expression and decision-making through the mass media and new communication technologies.
- ✿ Call on governments and UN agencies to develop legislation and guidelines to combat ICT related violence and exploitation of women which includes, reporting procedures (schools and police), support services for those affected by cyber bullying and punishment for perpetrators of cyber bullying.

- ✿ Acknowledge that eliminating stereotypes calls for deep societal change that needs to be supported through the development of strategies to eliminate gender stereotypes in all spheres of life. Foster the positive portrayal of women and girls at all levels, including leaders and decision makers. Promote diversity in all forms of the media.
- ✿ Calling on governments to develop and implement appropriate legislation, policies and programmes, as well as awareness campaigns, to address stereotypical attitudes and behaviours that contribute to discrimination and violence against girls, including a full review of advertising standards as it related to young girls.
- ✿ Urge governments, media organisations and UN agencies to encourage cooperation and dialogue between Governments and all relevant actors so that media contents, including the portrayal of gender stereotypes, prejudices and violence are reviewed, consistent with freedom of expression and that the quality of programmes and advertising can be improved. Promote an association of media women, consisting NGO, Media, business and government representatives for the coverage of women in the mainstream media and on journalism codes of ethics.
- ✿ Calling on governments and civil society to target and work with men and boys, as well as women and girls and other members of society such as teachers, sports men, religious and traditional leaders and educational, sporting and media institutions to address stereotypical attitudes and behaviours.
- ✿ Calling on governments and media industry to resource a broad community media literacy programme to inform women of their rights, how to monitor and how to address media misrepresentations and to build an active and informed audience.

## UN REFERENCES

### BPFA

Strategic Objective J.1 Action 239 (c) (d) (e) (g) , Action 240, Action 242 (a) (b) (c)  
 Strategic Objective J.2 Action 244 (a) (b) (c) (d)  
 Strategic Objective D.1 Action 124 (c) (k) (l) , Action 126 (a)

### B+5 OD

B+5 IV Action 67 (b), 82 (j) (k), 100 (a) (b) (c)

### CEDAW

Article 5, 6, 11

### MDGs

*No reference to these issues found*

### Reference in other documents

E/ESCAP/BPA/2009/CRP.1 para 32, 43, 44

### CSW Outcomes Documents 2005 – 2009

E/CN.6/2006/15 para 7 (r) (q) (w) , 17 (r) (v)  
 E/CN.6/2007/19 para 14.2 (c) (f), 14.3 (a) (b) (e)  
 E/CN.6/2009/15 para 15 (oo) (nn) (pp) (rr)