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MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NAIROBI FORWARD-
LOOKING STRATEGIES FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Second review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi
Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

II. CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN

J. Insufficient use of mass media to promote
women's positive contributions to society**

1. The many and complex issues that are raised in the phrase "women, media and development" are finally being recognized as central elements of local, national and international agendas of research, policy-making, funding and other action. This recognition reflects the immense burgeoning of women's own media-related activities world wide, the impact of feminist theory and research in gender and communications, and recognition of gender by international movements. The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women said very little about media and communication. In resolution 1990/15, regarding the review and appraisal of the Strategies, the Economic and Social Council mentioned media

* E/CN.6/1995/1.

** The text for this section has been derived from a contribution prepared by UNESCO for the 1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development in light of its relevance for the review and appraisal.

only in the context of elimination of violence against women, including the recommendation, in paragraph 23, that:

"The United Nations system, Governments and non-governmental organizations should study the relationship between the portrayal of violence against women in the media and violence against women in the family and society, including possible effects of new transnational transmission technologies."

In the mid 1990s, it is clear that the broad issues inherent in the concept of women, media and development demand and require serious analytic attention and policy support.

2. Media have been established in different parts of the world at different times, in different order, and are used differently within various social and cultural milieux. Commercial television delivery to the audience in the United States of America, familiar with the form since the 1950s and now watching an average of six hours a day, cannot be seen as the same phenomenon as the satellite-based television delivery now reaching some rural Asian populations, as yet unused to the form and just beginning to integrate it into their lives. Video use, which implies mainly time-shifting and ease of access for Europeans and North Americans, may have political overtones in more regulated cultural environments where video recorders and satellite dishes have been banned. Different political contexts and cultural milieux, the structures of media ownership and control, including tendencies towards concentration and globalization, differing legal and regulatory environments, and the availability of foreign cultural products all affect the nature of media provision. For women particularly, the impact and patterns of use around various media differ depending on the pre-existing cultural patterns, especially women's access to public space and participation in the public sphere. Thus, many crucial contextual differences require detailed investigation.

3. Media effects are also a contentious issue. Scholars debate how media texts circulate, with arguments ranging from the powerful hypodermic needle image of direct effect - what the media shows is what the audience absorbs - to a cultural studies approach which suggests that audiences are active and "read" media products differently, depending on their social and cultural locations. These arguments about cultural politics have implications for our understanding of women's media involvement and the nature of our concerns.

4. While globally, not everyone yet has access to mass media, everyone does have forms of cultural expression. There are oral traditions of story-telling, poetry and recitation; performance traditions of drama, dance, puppetry, melas (fairs), jatras (cultural walks) and cultural rituals; traditions of music and song etc. These forms can be used with great effectiveness, particularly by women to tell their own stories and histories, and should be taken on board in development-oriented campaigns by Governments, non-governmental organizations and others.

5. A focus on women and empowerment through communication leads to broader issues of women's participation in the development process; 1/ of access to economic resources 2/ and of political influence. 3/ As Heyzer says, 4/ it is

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increasingly recognized that "the women/media relationship can only be analyzed, and successful strategies for changing it can only be developed, if we take into account the entire cultural, political and ideological spectrum and study the economic context in which this particular relationship (between women and the media) is created and takes shape."

6. It must be acknowledged that women are the cornerstone of development and that the involvement of women in the planning and process of development has immense ripple effects. Women do not live alone but rather in families, tribes and communities, connected to many social networks and participants in civil society. Women's knowledge and achievements help everyone. Women are concerned with the basic needs of society, with the creation of life and the preservation of the environment. While the most urgent issues of poverty, illiteracy and malnutrition continue to confront developing countries, a broader framework suggests that much remains to be done in the economic, political and cultural spheres everywhere. Women are redefining development.

1. Measures of equity and empowerment:
two kinds of representation

7. The nexus women/media/development is of immense complexity. A large body of literature documents the many different kinds of involvement women have with the media. Unlike the provision of formal education, it is harder to see media provision as a simple, self-evident good. Given the hugely varying contexts of women's involvement with the media and the many issues involved, the criteria for judging good practice need to be examined. Two useful approaches to the situation of women have been labelled the "equity" and the "empowerment" approaches. The former argues a human rights position and supports a 50 per cent solution to certain areas of women's social practice - for example, women's access to media employment. This may be of greatest significance in industrialized societies with comparatively open political cultures and a history of women's rights, although this kind of argument is increasing world wide. The latter approach tends to suggest that women's self-defining activities - the development of alternative media, women's networks, for example - are a good thing in themselves and that simple equity may be a thin victory. This may be of greater significance in contexts of developing economies, of continuing cultural barriers to the promotion of women's status and of political environments in which human rights are problematic.

8. These two approaches reflect huge debates within global feminist movements, and each has its pitfalls. Mattelart ^{5/} has suggested that the media spectacle of egalitarianism, women in high visibility in mass media, actually invokes women as the "strongest redeemers of patriarchy". The tack towards difference supports arguments about women's unique contributions, women's voices and their perspectives on all issues. Yet concerns have been raised about the marginalization of women's voices and, consequently, of their real social and political impact. Perhaps the more quantitative orientation towards equity needs to be supplemented by the more qualitative orientation of empowerment, mutually necessary and supportive.

9. These two approaches also reflect the double meaning of representation. 6/ On the one hand, there is the notion of speaking out in political and social representation. On the other hand, there are the discourses and images of gender - how women are represented in mediated texts and cultural products. In both kinds of representation, the concern is that women represent themselves and be appropriately represented.

2. Kinds of systems and levels of analysis

10. An analysis of women, media and development has to take into consideration the different "levels" at which media can function, of which the three most significant are the local, the national and the global.

11. The cultural and regulatory framework for most media activity and development planning is most often dictated by government policy and, mainly, political considerations. The State's role as constructor of development priorities and allocator of resources needs to be interrogated in terms of gender-friendliness; definitions of national identity and development priorities have often neglected to include women's needs. Commercial, State and public-service broadcasting, none the less, may have different impacts on gender. A commercial media system may support certain kinds of freedoms, but the market does not necessarily reflect national developmental or women's needs.

12. The local, or community or grass-roots, level is where most alternative or participatory media projects occur. Here questions need to be raised concerning their influence in wider social and political arenas, the numbers involved and the range of impact.

13. At the global level, the ever more complex flows of media products and the diffusion of communications technologies are equally cause for concern, but they also offer promise for women. This is where issues about the role of the global international organizations, non-governmental organizations, regulatory frameworks, structural adjustment programmes and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and their impact on development, media and women need to be raised.

3. Positive contributions of the media to women and development

14. The significance of media for women and development are multiple:

(a) Media are increasingly important social institutions, act as definers of meaning and play a role in determining and maintaining cultural definitions of gender and sex roles. In a global media environment, there are concerns about conglomerization, monopolization and disempowerment as well as about the impact of foreign definitions of sex and gender systems on differing cultural milieux;

(b) Media can help to set the social and political agendas of the crucial issues of the day, define the salience of social and political issues, focus attention on issues of significance to women, and include women's voices and

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perspectives - or not do so. Media can foster debates on development and on human rights, including women's rights, and the position of women in society - or not;

(c) Media could provide a broad range of representations of women, reflecting the broad range of activities women actually perform in every society, including positive role-models: women experts, professionals, careers in both rural and urban settings;

(d) Media can provide information and understanding about the world, key resources and aids to empowerment. That information and understanding must be gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive;

(e) Media are in themselves potential sources of wealth-creation and employment opportunities. Women-owned and women-managed media structures could provide employment opportunities for women, as well as producing different content;

(f) Media can provide information and strategies towards wealth-creation and the elimination of poverty; media can raise the level of public discussion about women's roles and contributions to development;

(g) Media can be used in informal and non-formal education, health and other development campaigns, involving women and targeted towards them;

(h) Media are a resource for women to disseminate alternative kinds of information, imagery and analysis, and to build networks.

15. In this view, media are ends in themselves, influential sites of representation where gender sensitivity and new imagery, women's creativity and women's voices can be presented. Media are also means to other ends, vehicles to facilitate public debate about broader social issues and concerns - the eradication of poverty, sustaining the environment, health, peace - about which women have a great deal to say.

4. Change over the past two decades: mainstream and alternative media

16. One of the key things that needs to be said is that there has been great change, much of it positive, in the condition of women and media over the past 20 years, since the beginning of International Women's Decade (1975-1985). Women are active in every cultural and media practice, from the most local and indigenous of musical and theatrical forms (community theatre, video and film collectives) to radio and television broadcasting, magazine and journal publishing, news-gathering and networking at national, regional and international levels. "Most regions have seen a steady growth in the domain of women's alternative media, as well as in that of women's associations and networks. Almost everywhere an increase in the number of women working in mainstream media has been recorded. But the power to develop media policy, and to determine the nature and shape of media content, continue to elude women". 7/

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a. Mainstream media

17. In regard to mainstream media, research has had two major foci: one analyses the relative position of women within media organizations and other relevant organizations to examine the career paths and access opportunities for women. The other examines the images and manner of representation of gender in mediated content.

18. There is an acute lack of empirical data, even from Western industrial societies, concerning the situation of women in the media. Information on gender trends in employment within the media is equally patchy, data are seldom comparable, and definitions concerning categories of employment are not constant. Figures or tables contain estimations, compiled from several national and regional reports, and are merely indicative, rather than substantive.

19. Notwithstanding these caveats, there nonetheless appears to be a growing disjunction between the number of women in media training compared with the actual number employed in the media. Broad data on women and men from the UNESCO Communication Division databases on selected communication training institutions suggests that in four regions (Africa, Europe, North America, South America), in the institutions surveyed, women constitute half or more of those in media training. Even in Asia, which showed the lowest rate, the female figure is around 30 per cent.

20. Yet when that figure is compared with the figures for gender distribution in media employment (broadcast organizations only), the highest figure for female employment as a percentage of the total number of employed persons, without taking into account the type of function or level of position, is just over 30 per cent in North America (the highest figure), dropping to less than 10 per cent in Asia.

21. Even in developed countries and socio-political contexts where legislation for gender equality is more developed and women's movements are long-standing, evidence shows large gender differences in the kind of work undertaken and the levels reached. Thus, evidence from the European Commission, the United States ^{8/} and Australia shows female clustering in administrative jobs (secretariat, advertising, accountancy), low female presence in technical sectors, and an even lower presence in the top-ranking managerial positions. Across Asia, the number of women joining media organizations has increased, yet they still constitute a low percentage of active journalists, often with the unexciting desk-bound beats; rarely have they progressed to managerial levels. Similarly women represent less than 20 per cent of the workers in African media industries. ^{9/} There appears to be some indication that women progress faster in broadcasting organizations than in print, an issue that would be worth systematic research.

22. Equality between men and women in employment can be a useful goal, ^{10/} but one which needs to be put into effect at every level and in every area of media employment.

23. However, it is by no means clear that increased numbers of women employed leads to improved representation. There is considerable evidence that an

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increasing number of women employed in the media does not of itself translate into qualitative differences in programming (as in the Republic of Korea) or a radically altered news agenda of priorities (Australia). For most of Asia, the growing numbers of women journalists "has not made a significant change in the content, style or presentation of information. News decisions are still made by men; even if news is increasingly reported and edited by women, the employment of women has not radically altered news agendas or priorities." 11/ In Asia, most of the "soft sections" - the weekend supplements, the health, culture and education beats - are now "almost exclusively the beats of women; defence, commerce and foreign affairs are still largely male strongholds, as are the editorships of most general and specialized publications". 12/ Although statistics for training programmes "reveal that women are increasingly opting for careers in communications, the past experience shows that this is rarely converted into a restructuring of the media agenda". 13/

24. Mainstream media content does change, but slowly. Much of the concern is about stereotypes - that is, the narrowness of the range of representations of women in the media. For example, a broad critique of media representation in the Middle East is that it veers towards two narrow image-sets: "the conservative-traditional native woman, or the seductive foreign woman" and thus "the reality, complexity and multicultural dimension of gender roles is not addressed directly". 14/ Yet similar concerns are still raised about the skewed nature of women's representation in British media after many years of the women's movement and growing gender consciousness. 15/ An essential concern is that media should reflect a range of realistic and diverse representations of the complexities and variations in women's lives.

25. Another set of concerns in regard to popular culture is the sexually objectifying or violent gender imagery - women as objects of the male gaze, male sexuality, male violence. This is one of the most controversial areas of media content, even in the West where the debates about pornography and about the relationship between the effects of media representation of violence and real violence in society still rage. MediaWatch Canada is most explicit at arguing that such concerns are not about censorship but about human rights, including the right to be represented appropriately.

26. In regard to information genres, such as news, there is another set of concerns, which is essentially "where are the women?" The answer does not reveal significant North/South differences. For example, Adagala 16/ argues that in African media, news is urban-centric and stories of women are rarely treated as newsworthy. Recent reports from both the United States 17/ and Britain 18/ suggest that women are still sidelined into stereotyped roles, with far fewer women than men presenting or appearing in factual programming.

27. Some writers talk as though there are definable women's issues, while others ask whether media should try to reflect women's perspectives on all issues. The former position risks ghettoizing women's concerns and further devaluing the public saliency of many social issues. The latter reinforces the obvious but often-forgotten point that women are everywhere and that women's perspectives in regard to issues - political, economic and all others - must be heard.

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28. Thus in many regions, women still suffer both horizontal segregation, clustering in the lower-paying and lower-status jobs, and vertical segregation, clustering in women's assignments and "interests", not the "hard," socially significant, political and economic stories. 19/ This might partly be explained historically; having fewer women in the media has meant fewer opportunities to affect the organizational culture, management style, and actual media output. As more women gain access, the sheer weight of numbers may begin to change things. However, we should not underestimate the lethargy inside organizations, the dynamics of socialization and conformity within them, and the sheer desire to maintain the status quo. Active policies of equal opportunity, gender equity at each and every level of media organization, the identification of "glass ceilings" and the reasons for them are needed. Since it is often the "invisible barriers" 20/ of attitudes, biases and presumptions that hinder women, assertiveness-training and support groups within organizations can help women feel less isolated and alienated and empower them to try to behave differently. Women's professional organizations, such as the International Association of Women in Radio and Television also provide international solidarity and support.

b. Global communications

29. Current writing stresses the need to examine the relation of women to the media in a global context - specifically, the increasing presence and potential impact of "transnational materials" on women. 21/ Transnational media conglomerates can undermine attempts to develop national cultural and media policies; national broadcast norms concerning nudity or the advertising of liquor on television are flaunted through satellite broadcasting even in some countries that forbid this kind of imaging.

30. More problematic is that transnational media content works to further disempower the powerless. Groups - minorities, indigenous peoples and women - that have struggled for space to voice concerns, find that "with media structures changing and more sophisticated messaging entering even the hinterlands, the spaces constructed within mainstream and alternative media appear to be shrinking. The protection of constructed spaces will need the formulation of new strategies which can keep pace with technology." 22/ Advertising is problematic for the consumerist dynamics and sexualized imagery it promotes. Marketing managers are trying to mould all Asian markets into a single mass entity, using images of luxury supported by made-over European faces, a return to the conventional idea that sex sells.

31. The spread of media transnationals has raised considerable international concern for some time, including issues of cultural imperialism and the threat to diversity through a homogenizing global media culture; it is only recently that women are being written into the international debate. Yet there are also counter-arguments about heterogenizing tendencies, new sources of cultural and media production, and multiple flows, as well as the importance of creative "readings" and uses of media products. For example, anthropologists Abu Lughod 23/ and Davies 24/ show how Western videos are used playfully by women in some traditional societies to open up their private spheres to new images and ideas which patriarchal cultures still seek to control.

32. Recent studies on women and new communication technologies stress similar central dynamics - notably, problems of unequal development which creates technology and information gaps between peoples and the transnationalization and increasing concentration of media processes. 25/ At the same time, women are very effective networkers. The development and the spread of new technologies allow women to build networks as never before, creating a new kind of global alternative public sphere.

c. Alternative media

33. One phenomenon that very strikingly reveals the changes that have occurred over the past decade is the immense increase in the number of alternative media run by women which are neither part of the State or public-service broadcasting systems nor part of mainstream commercial production. This increase can be documented in all regions of the world and for all forms of media. The initiatives cited below are indicative of the range of activities that exist but are by no means exhaustive. 26/

34. The print media - newspapers, journals, magazines, newsletters, occasional monographs and leaflets - are perhaps the most established of the alternative media. Those with the widest circulation are in the United States and Europe, but there is significant development in the South. In 1990 the directory Third World Women's Publications listed over 300 titles. Some of the newer publications are Sister (Namibia), Speak (South Africa), Tamania Mars (Morocco) 27/ and Asmita (Nepal).

35. Print activity raises questions about the appropriateness of a medium - print in a context of massive female illiteracy? - and thus about intended audiences. The experiences of the Tamania Mars collective, for example, raise concern about the potential for dialogue among women across class and urban/rural divides and bring to light the problems that exist in obtaining financial support, both national and international, for women's projects. Tamania Mars demonstrates the many struggles involved in women's right to speak, argue, occupy public space and open up public debate, but also shows how much can be done and shared with others.

36. Services supportive of a feminist press have emerged around the world - such as DepthNews in Asia; the Women's Feature Service, based in New Delhi; the Women's International News Gathering Service (WINGS), in the United States; and FEMPRESS, in Chile.

37. One of the main questions surrounding these alternative news services is how much of their material actually circulates internationally and whether it ultimately makes its way into the mainstream press. Indeed, it can be asked whether their stories might become useful sources for broader discussion of the situation of women. Monitoring research on these issues would be useful.

38. Although electronic media have been utilized by women in North and America and Europe for some time, they are increasingly available in other regions and put to many different uses. In local contexts - as with the use of video by the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India or the use of video and radio by indigenous women in Bolivia and other parts of Latin America - they help

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women define their roles, develop skills and dispel fears, remember, and build for the future. ^{28/} There is Radio Tierra in Chile and Feminist International Radio Endeavour (FIRE) in Costa Rica, which aims to give voice to those who never had one. The FIRE collective conceives of radio as a process of meeting, dialogue, and participation with other women and puts great store in the transformational power of women's personal testimonies. Other radio projects are oriented towards more specific development needs and empowering women to play a role in development planning.

39. Radio remains one of the cheapest and most widespread forms of electronic media in the South, accessible to women and enjoyed by them. The Development through Radio project in Zimbabwe has created a unique way of communicating horizontally among communities, vertically up to responsible officials, and back down and out to the rural areas, yet its very success and its desire for expansion threaten to overburden the system in terms of demands on resources and personnel. As a model, it shows how to foster participation of women within their communities and how to link media to development efforts, one of the few precise examples of the women/media/development nexus.

40. Women are active in many other media also. Latin America is home to Cine Mujer, a collective of women film-makers, film being well-established and popular in many regions and all too often omitted from media analysis. Satellite EVE, based in Buenos Aires, has a national focus and aims specifically to stimulate women's creativity and ability to organize and use the power of the media for the construction of a more pluralistic and equitable society, using video, photography and investigative journalism as its main vehicles. WETV, being developed in Canada, intends to provide an alternative, global television service available on every continent through international satellite services, providing the first global access television service; it has a particular concern for women. The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), in Montreal, is a network of new communicators who identify themselves with the construction of a new world order in communication and in society, and also support initiatives to support women's voices on the global airwaves.

41. Women have shown themselves to be excellent networkers, living locally but thinking and acting globally, expressing solidarity across boundaries. Some of the networks with a focus specifically on women are the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA), Trinidad and Tobago; the Women and Development Unit (WAND), Barbados; SISTERLINK, Australia; the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW), Lebanon; and FEMNET, Kenya.

42. An organization such as the International Women's Tribune Center, New York, acts as a clearinghouse of information about women's activities globally. It also publishes The Tribune and manages Women, Ink., a marketing and distribution service funded by UNIFEM, which subsidizes distribution to the South by sale of publications in the North. Isis International, operating out of Santiago, Chile, and Manila, Philippines, was established as a non-governmental organization in 1974, as a women's information and communication service supporting the empowerment and full participation of women in development processes through the formation of networks and channels of communication and information. Isis has over 50,000 contacts in 150 countries, and it publishes

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Third World Women's Publications and Powerful Images (1986), which lists over 600 films, videos and slide shows by third-world women.

43. There are regional networks like the Asia Network of Women in Communication (ANWIC), New Delhi, which publishes Impact and aims to mobilize Asian women, through communication, to achieve a more equitable and just social order, recognizing the diversity present in the region. There are networks operating within a religio-cultural milieu, like Women Living Under Muslim Law (WLWML), which publishes a quarterly news sheet as well as monographs on varied topics, including violence against women, reproductive rights and disenfranchisement. They have strong links with women's groups in the North (Women Against Fundamentalism in the United Kingdom) whose focus is often on the dilemmas of women in minority ethnic groups whose voices are often not heard by the dominant culture.

44. Networking is facilitated by the use of the INTERNET and e-mail, with, for example, the Women and Environment Network (WEDNET) forging links between its Canadian base and African researchers, and Mujer a Mujer, a Mexican-based women's collective concerned with free trade and structural adjustment, coordinating projects in Mexico, Canada, the United States and Nicaragua. There are a variety of electronic bulletins: Women Envision, by Isis; the South East Asian Women's Information Project (SEAWIN), in the Philippines; feminist list-servers and discussion groups, many under the aegis of the Association for Progressive Communication. Electronic mail can be cheaper than the telephone, faster than "snail mail", and many women's groups are providing training for women activists and organizations on computers and e-mail.

d. Media monitoring

45. Another key activity that has increased in the past decade is media monitoring. One example is MediaWatch, Canada, whose goal is to transform the media environment from one in which women are either invisible or stereotyped to one in which women are realistically portrayed and equitably represented in their physical, economic, racial and cultural diversity. Monitoring bodies focus on specific areas for media change, such as the use of non-sexist and "parallel" language, depicting women as experts, depicting women realistically, depicting contemporary families, and seeking an end to the portrayal of women as sexual objects. They provide media-literacy training so as to empower audiences. Indeed, their materials could be used as the basis of clearly focused international activities to improve the media representation of women. Other organizations such as the World Association of Christian Communication (WACC), London, are also involved with media awareness training.

e. Indigenous culture and performance

46. One other area of alternative communicative activity that often gets overlooked but may be of special relevance for women is the use of and support for folk cultures and oral traditions in development-oriented and participatory communication projects - among them, dance in the United Republic of Tanzania 29/ and story-telling by African-American women. 30/ These are no-cost or low-cost, low-technology practices. They have the potential to ensure that one builds on the past and develops existing female knowledge and skills,

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creating dialogue and equal relations, and not separating media makers from media consumers. ^{31/} Indigenous modes of performance can also be used as a bulwark against cultural imperialism, encouraging women to take pride in their own authentic forms of expression.

47. One women's collective set out to weave performative narratives out of ordinary women's lives. Their experience raised many issues about self-management; internal democracy - in particular, the emergent class distinctions among women; the financing of women's groups - in this case, from external sources; and the need to become self-sufficient.

f. Blurring boundary between mainstream and alternative media

48. With the rise of so much activity, discussion increasingly revolves around the distinction between mainstream versus alternative media. The once clear, even radical, distinction seems increasingly blurred. A feminist publishing house that struggled at one time to survive financially, build a reputation and an audience and find manuscripts may at another become so successful that the main factor that distinguishes it from any other publishing house is that it is run by women (albeit an achievement in itself). The firm Kali for Women, in New Delhi, started in 1984 to support writing by and about women in the third world, had to raise funds for each publishing venture; by 1994, it was financially solvent. The Women's Press, Virago, and Sheba in the United Kingdom were created expressly to publish women's writing; now many mainstream publishers and booksellers do so as well. Recently, one of the first feminist book shops in London, SisterWrite, and one of the first feminist magazines, Spare Rib, ceased their activities, eclipsed by mainstream economics. The development of new commercially run cable channels for women in North America and Europe fit into mainstream patterns of organization and finance yet produce mainly for female audiences - an alternative in the mainstream?

g. Researching alternative media

49. One problem with the research done on alternative media is that much of it describes rather than analyses and can be too easily celebratory, without asking the difficult questions: who constitutes the audience for such media - that is, are they used only by women? are they internally democratic? do they represent the concerns of all subgroups (class, race, sexual preference) of women? do they aim to become redundant as the mainstream changes? do they remain marginal and serve to further marginalize the concerns of women? are they and the cultural practices in any one location translatable to others? do they really "empower" and, if so, what are the indicators of that empowerment? do they help women participate more fully in other areas of socio-economic, political and cultural life?

50. Critical and analytic studies are needed to answer these questions. The International Association for Mass Communication Research (IAMCR) has a network of researchers interested in gender issues, and a new network of feminist researchers in media was formed at the Bangkok Conference in February 1994. More and better trained researchers can play a significant role in asking important questions and producing new evidence.

5. Women as audience and cultural consumers

51. In the debate about women and the media, the lack of studies and information about women as audiences, women's cultural tastes and media habits, and what women like and want from the media is glaring. While audience studies and reception analysis have slowly become a more central part of the North American and European research landscape, "there are no documented data or literature on the topic of women or men in the audience of the media in the Arab World" 32/ and the same is true for other regions.

52. It cannot simply be suggested that all images of women are negative or disliked by audiences. Nor can it be suggested that women always read media content "critically" or "resistively". It is generally agreed that women hold views both at variance with the media and in conformity with them. This indicates that further and more profound research is needed on what women do like and how media are used and fitted into daily routines and family lives.

6. What still impedes women's media empowerment?

53. Many of the world's people have access to broadcast messages today, since radio and television, spurred by new systems of delivery such as satellites and cable, diffuse globally. But access to electronic media is by no means universal. Radio signals are globally available, and transistors have overcome any lack of infrastructure; nationally based television services have been established in all but the poorest and smallest of countries of the South. Yet actual audience access to television remains poor. For example, while the average number of television sets per 1,000 people is 783 in North America, the equivalent figure is only 13 in Africa, and 39 in developing countries as a whole. 33/ The provision of telecommunications, cinema seats and other kinds of media services are even more skewed globally in favour of the industrialized world.

54. Access may be inhibited in various ways - by, for example, a lack of national infrastructure (transportation and electricity) or a lack of the financial resources to purchase receivers. Access to print media (books, newspapers, magazines) and electronic print (computer technologies, e-mail, INTERNET) is denied to many because of the on-going problem of illiteracy, where women have an unequal share of the burden. Literacy is increasingly seen as the key to development. While "the extensive primary education of the past few decades has boosted literacy rates, particularly among young people, there are still far more illiterate women than men in every part of the world. Moreover, illiteracy rates have fallen faster for men, so the literacy gap between men and women is still growing". 34/ UNESCO confirms this view: "Female literacy is a problem in most regions, and especially so in the least developed countries ... one out of every three adult females in the world today is illiterate, compared to only one out of five adult males". 35/ Access to and development of the media - and social development as a whole - is predicated on far better access for girls and women to basic education, literacy programmes and other forms of technical training.

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55. Access to different forms of cultural consumption (cinema, theatre, opera, dance) is often denied through cost, difficulty of physical access, control over women's use of public space, and class-bound cultural habits. Access to media use is also denied through the sheer exigencies of time-consuming work, and lack of "leisure" time. Women often do an undue share of work.

56. Access to resources is also gender-skewed. Resources means funds to buy equipment, pay for travel, pay for salaries (is too much of women's activity volunteer?). Women often lack the political and social clout or the well-oiled networks needed to raise funds. Lack of funds then impedes access to other resources, such as information. The potential use of INTERNET to build global movements of solidarity breaks down when the actual grass-roots groups cannot afford the equipment or the sign-up costs.

57. Women's media activities are also determined by broader contexts, such as the scope of political democracy. Globally, many nations have embarked on difficult transitions to democracy. For many this has been the occasion to rethink their legal frameworks and structures and to formulate broader media laws, including the right of expression, as in article XIX of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In that work, it is vital for gender equity and the rights of women to be recognized from the beginning. As the Fiji Women's Rights Movement proclaims, democracy without women's human rights is not democracy.

58. A major concern must also be that, if a tyranny of political elites is overthrown, it must not be replaced by the more anonymous but all-pervasive tyranny of the global market. Bahsin, 36/ among others, warns about the trends toward centralization, monopolization, globalization, and the dispersal of power from, for example, national radio/television organizations to global media moguls. Here women should make common cause with other international organizations and movements concerned with national media policy-making and cultural heritage, and develop inventive strategies of audience response.

59. In parts of Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia, as elsewhere, it is sometimes traditional culture and traditional concepts of patriarchy that inhibit the free movement and self-expression of women. Across Asia, for example, "the portrayal of women and the representation of feminine values and attitudes towards women in media is governed by indigenous social norms ... cultural and religious traditions have governed the imaging of women by mass media in the region. The traditions have also influenced the participation of women in the industry as well as patterns of their social behaviour". 37/ Tamania Mars, the networks of Women Living Under Muslim Laws, and Women Against Fundamentalism are all involved in ongoing struggles to gain recognition for broad human rights movements and specifically to secure for women the right to speak and participate in the public sphere.

60. Feminist theory has long argued that the public and the private are not separate spheres and that, thus all attempts at regulating the public spaces of politics, employment, and media representation in a society will be meaningless if the private spaces of family and community life remain under traditional patriarchal control. Indeed, even in the "modern" West, public discourses about

family life, moral values and sexual violence remain strongly patriarchal - personal struggles continue over the kitchen sink and the remote control.

61. Economic inequality and rural poverty have a major impact upon women and media. Current funding mechanisms and structural adjustment policies employed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), often formulated to support human rights, appear to have quite the opposite results. Prices of subsidized materials rise so that paper becomes too costly or media projects have to be run at a profit in order to survive, and consequently, voices supporting democracy cease to be heard. Careful analyses of the impact of structural adjustment programmes on women and media and a rethinking of the conditions imposed for receiving aid are necessary. As Bam points out, "Elimination of discrimination against women cannot be fully realized when there is inequality among members within a society, which in turn is partly the cause of unequal relations among nations". 38/

62. In certain countries legislation and media guidelines or codes of ethics have been developed to improve women's representation; some of them may be applicable elsewhere. The Fair Exposure guidelines issued by the Status of Women office in the Australian Prime Minister's Secretariat or the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act passed in India in 1986 or the Canadian court's agreement that obscenity is to be defined by the harm it does to women's pursuit of equality are worthy of analysis as to their effectiveness, replicability and limitations. Similarly, citizen initiatives such as the Tokyo-based Forum for Citizens Television need to be studied.

7. Conclusions

63. The struggle for increased and enhanced access of women to relevant media work and decisions in media operations and to equity in all forms of freedom of expression is not finished but is a continuing endeavour. The vast number of women's media projects, movements, organizations and networks the world over have produced some significant successes, but it must be recognized that they are but a few steps in a long march towards women's equality and empowerment. However, perhaps now more so than a decade ago, political and economic contexts and new technologies are emerging which can be appropriately harnessed for women's needs. Based on the research and experience of the past two decades, the points outlined below may be considered for an eventual platform, a foundation for future strategies.

(a) Since functional literacy is key to social and economic development, programmes and projects which seek to strengthen the basic education and the training of girls and women to fulfil more dynamic roles in development and media production should be given priority. There is also need for teaching women media literacy and basic research skills as tools of empowerment;

(b) Women should have equal access to further training and higher educational opportunities as well as equal access to employment opportunities in the media, as elsewhere, at all levels and types of employment: technical, budgetary, managerial, administrative, creative, performative. Competence and

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quality, not gender, should be the operant criteria for employment or budgetary decisions;

(c) Women have the right to see the range of their values and perspectives and their varied lives adequately and appropriately represented in the mass media, with due respect for their ethnic and social backgrounds and their cultural, religious and ethical mores;

(d) Women's perspectives, views, experiences and expert opinions concerning any news issue should be actively sought and given equal importance to those of men; confining women to the role of dealing only with "women's issues" is an inadequate and impoverished solution;

(e) Women's work in alternative media has shown remarkable progress over the past 15 years and should be further strengthened in terms of financial, moral and intellectual support; where feasible and appropriate, these efforts should be more concretely integrated into development plans. As the distinction between mainstream and alternative media continues to blur, further support should be given to initiatives that encourage a full range of women's expression and creativity in all kinds of media operations, at national, regional or global levels;

(f) Development organizations and technical agencies should support positively those projects that seek to strengthen and secure positive and public roles for women in media and development. Conversely, they should be alert to the potentially negative effects of projects and programmes that isolate women and confine them solely to household roles, and should even abstain from supporting such projects;

(g) Research itself is a mode of empowerment, since enhanced knowledge of a problem can lead to more comprehensive and effective solutions. Basic research is still needed to monitor media employment patterns and media output for gender bias in every region. Concomitant with this is a need to develop more appropriate, feminist modes of research, with possibilities for issues to be defined by local peoples, and for the research findings to be fed back to the subjects of study. Research strategies need a more focused, comparative and analytic approach, particularly on the role of women as readers, audiences and consumers of cultural products, and in relation to the multiple flows of global media products. Given the too facile misinterpretations of data, quantitative research should be supported by qualitative studies. Research training programmes involving women trainers and trainees from all regions would greatly enhance this work;

(h) Although published research on women and the media has increased in volume, much of it is inaccessible, particularly to women in the South. There is need for further development of regional documentation centres and libraries, the publication of bibliographies of international research work on gender, media and communication, and better dissemination of research findings;

(i) The significant gains made by grass-roots activists, media researchers, non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups and policy makers show the need for ways to interlink them. Similarly, stronger links are needed

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across disciplinary and sectoral divides (media workers, development workers, health workers). If media can play useful functions in specific campaigns and if women are active in producing media content, existing positive activities could be directed to new issues and concerns, thus eliminating the need of putting up new structures;

(j) It is important to acknowledge the initiatives taken by major international and regional organizations in support of women's media and development activities. Given scarce resources, however, consolidation, partnership and twinning of efforts would result in more economic use of funds and more dynamic and solid cooperation. In view of the trickle-up effects evidenced by a number of women's media programmes and projects, it might also be considered whether a certain proportion of development funds should be earmarked a priori to favour those activities.

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