



UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC
AND CULTURAL ORGANISATION

TORONTO PLATFORM FOR
ACTION

Adopted by the participants in the International Symposium:
Women and the Media, Access to Expression and Decision-making,
held in Toronto (Canada) from 28 February to 3 March 1995.

INTRODUCTION

In the past twenty years, the world has seen an explosion in the field of communications. With advances in computer technology and satellite and cable t.v., global access to information, when democratically used, continues to increase and expand creating new opportunities for the participation of women in communications and media and for dissemination of information about women. However all these developments bring about new threats. They may affect negatively the existing cultures and prevailing values of receiving countries. With the reemergence in some countries of reactionary beliefs, media are also becoming a weapon of domination and obscurantism. Finally the present global situation in the media shows the perpetuation and reenforcement of negative images of women that do not provide an accurate or realistic picture of women's multiple roles and contributions to a changing world. Even more insidious are the use by media of women's bodies as sex objects, and violence against women as "entertainment". Greater involvement by women in both the technical and decision-making areas of communication and media would increase awareness of women's lives from their own perspective.

I GLOBAL ACTIONS

1. We the participants in the *International Symposium: Women and the Media, Access to Expression and Decision-Making*, held in Toronto (Canada) from 28 February to 3 March 1995, propose the following actions with these long-term objectives in mind:

1.1 To increase women's access to expression in and through the media;

1.2 To increase women's access to and participation in decision-making and management of the media, so as to encourage media to promote women's positive contributions to society;

1.3 To use communication as a driving force in the promotion of women's active and equal participation in development in a context of peace and equality, while preserving freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

1.4 To recognize the importance of women's media networks worldwide, both those that supply news in women's activities and concerns to media outlets, and those that utilize alternative media channels to reach women and women's groups with information that assists and supports them in their personal, family and community development activities.

1.5 To recognize the rights of all women to have access to expression and participation in the media, in particular those from discriminated groups such as other-abled, indigenous, women of colour and women of diverse sexual orientation.

2. We, the Toronto Symposium participants, encourage media enterprises to undertake the following actions, where they do not already exist:

2.1 Adopt positive action programmes, including equal pay for equal work, equal access to training, fair and transparent promotion procedures, targets and timetables to achieve a fair proportion of women in decision-making positions, action against sexual harassment, so that women can reach their full potential as media professionals.

2.2 Adopt gender-awareness programmes targeted at both female and male media professionals to encourage equality and variety in the portrayal of men and women.

2.3 Develop editorial policies that are gender-sensitive and reflect gender equity, so that women's perspectives are included in all topics.

2.4 Sensitize media managers and professionals to increase coverage of women's points of view, especially in political, economic, business, and scientific news.

2.5 Recognize women as authoritative information sources, experts, and opinion makers, therefore news sources on any issue and not confine women to the role of speaking only on "women's issues."

2.6 Prepare in cooperation with journalists' organizations guidelines against gender-biased treatment of information and checklists against gender-biased language for reporters and editors to use when writing and reviewing stories.

2.7 Include media women in media self-regulatory committees and other executive committees that draft programme guidelines, budgets, contracts, and personnel documents.

2.8 Encourage media employers to print in recruitment advertisements and personnel materials the fact that they are equal opportunity employers.

2.9 Avoid the requirement of facts, such as gender and marital status, in job applications.

2.10 Take steps when feasible towards providing food service and childcare, in view of the unpredictability of schedules for covering breaking news.

2.11 Urge the definition of ethical guidelines adapted to all types of media, including on-line technologies and virtual reality, as well as monitoring mechanisms with respect to images that are discriminatory or that violate children's and women's rights in information, advertisements, marketing, and entertainment; this not with a mind to restrain freedom of expression and of the press, but rather to ensure the respect of human rights and dignity.

2.12 Maintain and promote the idea of public service. Encourage information and education programmes on, among other topics, those concerning women.

2.13 Publicize legislation and international conventions on women in local languages so as to educate women about their rights.

2.14 Educate women and men, young and old, about all forms of violence against women and emphasize solutions to eliminate this violence.

2.15 Design gender-sensitizing programmes for media managers and train them to be vigilant decision-makers against discriminatory and stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.

2.16 Examine how media when dealing with topics of violence against women, can do it in an educative and non-exploitative context.

3. We, the Toronto Symposium participants, encourage professional media organizations to undertake the following actions, where they do not already exist:

3.1 Establish and increase the membership of local, regional, national, and international networks for women media professionals in order to address professional concerns, form mentoring programmes, promote contacts for professional training and advancement, and develop women's sense of pride and professionalism.

3.2 Promote active North/South and South/South cooperation between journalists' organizations, women's professional media associations, women's legal groups, and women's political associations.

3.3 Lobby for the creation of advertising standards councils to develop regulations against the use of sexist, gender-biased language concerning women and images of women in advertisements.

3.4 Advise smaller media, especially reaching women in rural and marginalized urban areas, on questions, such as available technology optimal for their needs.

3.5 Encourage the adoption of guidelines on gender portrayal in consultation with media women, which support the representation of women in their diversity and recognize their fundamental rights to equality, security and dignity, and to assist in putting these guidelines into practice.

4. *We, the Toronto Symposium participants, encourage educational and media training institutions to undertake the following actions, where they do not already exist:*

4.1 Encourage dialogue between the media sector and the field of education in general to raise public awareness of the portrayal of women in the media.

4.2 Promote media literacy programmes for the public at large, in particular children, in order to develop critical faculties among society for the reception of messages disseminated in the media, as well as awareness of discriminatory and stereotyped images that feed inequalities between the genders; and to prevent prejudices that may be caused by television's depiction of violence against women.

4.3 Adopt gender-awareness programmes and local history and cultural diversity programmes targeted at both female and male media professionals at all media training institutions.

4.4 Organize and encourage the training of women in journalism, radio, film, videomaking, mechanical and technical media skills, and in specialized subject areas, such as culture, education, science, technology, environment, economics, politics, business and sports.

4.5 Train women media students and professionals in management and related subjects, such as interpersonal communication, and decision-making skills, with a view to promoting women's media enterprises.

4.6 Sponsor short-term or longer term professional internships or exchanges to expand the professional skills of women media professionals.

4.7 Encourage the development of women's participation in electronic discussion groups, computer bulletin boards, electronic newsletters, fax newsletters, and other alternative media and new information technology.

4.8 Develop and support monitoring bodies that survey media and advertising content concerning gender portrayal.

5. *We, the Toronto Symposium participants, encourage governments to undertake the following actions, where they do not already exist:*

5.1 Include women on a parity basis in government reform committees, parliamentary, advisory, policy-making and other regulatory bodies that consider advertising and communications policy.

5.2 Assign programme budgets to allow for the equal access of women to telecommunications and to training in computing, among other communications technologies.

5.3 Review and enforce pornography legislation, in consultation with concerned citizens and groups.

5.4 Abolish those laws which effectively curb freedom of expression, freedom of association and those laws that result in discrimination of women.

5.5 Establish a legal framework which guarantees the right to freely seek, receive and impart information to men and women and to refrain from defining journalists' ethics, which is a matter for those engaged in journalism.

6. *We, the Toronto Symposium participants, encourage international and national governmental and non-governmental organizations, including research bodies, to undertake the following actions, where they do not already exist:*

6.1 Interlink more effectively grassroots workers and volunteers, media researchers, NGOs, advocacy groups, alternative media networks and policy-makers concerning women and the media.

6.2 Set up an international on-line network for exchange of information on portrayal of women in the media and information on women's media enterprises.

6.3 Develop and strengthen traditional forms of communication such as story telling and drama, especially for rural women.

6.4 Introduce, support and extend community radio stations as a way of increasing women's participation and contribution to the media and local economic development, especially in areas of high illiteracy rates.

6.5 Establish in cooperation with broadcasters an international video library on the portrayal of women to be used in seminars and workshops aimed at raising awareness of media professionals and the general public.

6.6 Ensure that international governmental and non-governmental organizations, which address issues of communication, aim at equity in the participation of women and men in programmes, wages, and career advancement opportunities.

6.7 Encourage procedures for adequate consideration of consumer complaints lodged with media enterprises or advertisers against media content or advertisements that portray women in a discriminatory way.

6.8 Promote the free circulation of information regarding funders interested in the development of communication projects relating to women.

6.9 Expand data banks and develop research on gender and media, for wide distribution.

6.10 Develop follow-up and evaluation systems as part of research in women's communication programming to know what works and what needs improvement.

6.11 Support the publication of studies relating to women's images in the media, audience studies, listening, viewing, and reading patterns, media policies and patterns of media ownership; all these as an investment in building up a base for evaluation and planning.

6.12 Conduct research into various alternative, traditional, local, and folk forms, as well as new communications technologies used by women.

6.13 Collect and distribute annual bibliographies on major research activities and findings concerning women in communication and development.

6.14 Undertake research studies on the impact on viewers of the content of media products, especially violence against women.

6.15 Support efforts by NGOs to provide technical assistance and training in communications methods and technologies to local and national groups that are attempting to reach out to otherwise isolated communities, using appropriate languages and channels not available to regional and international networks.

6.16 Promote dialogue between the representative organizations of journalists and media employers to discuss a joint approach to journalists' ethics concerning gender portrayal.

6.17 Include a communication dimension in development programmes, in particular those addressing women.

6.18 Condemn all types of extremism, in particular religious extremism, which jeopardizes the rights of women and democracy.

7. We, the Toronto Symposium participants, encourage media enterprises, professional media organizations, international and national governmental and non-governmental organizations, educational and media training institutions, and governments to undertake the following action:

7.1 Involve men in action towards the achievement of women's equality in the media, as equality between men and women concerns all people and touches upon the very functioning and development of our societies.

7.2 Develop educational and training methodologies to enable women's organizations and community groups to effectively communicate their own messages and concerns and access to existing media.

II SPECIFIC AND IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

1. We, the Toronto Symposium participants, encourage UNESCO to:

1.1 Form an open network WOMMED/FEMMED beginning with Toronto Symposium observers and participants in order to work together to achieve proposed actions.

1.2 Establish a Women and the Media videolibrary and documentation depository, containing in particular the submissions to the Toronto Symposium's parallel activity "Demystifying Media for Social Change."

1.3 Present the "Toronto Platform" for endorsement by the UNESCO General Conference and upon its approval, request that its implementation be monitored regularly.

2. We, the Toronto Symposium participants, encourage media enterprises to:

2.1 Establish and diversify media products and services reflecting local cultures and languages in order to encourage local women's participation.

2.2 Adopt equal opportunities programmes to ensure that women have equal access to decision-making in the media.

2.3 Develop in cooperation with journalists' and media professional organizations guidelines on gender portrayal.

3. We, the Toronto Symposium participants, encourage professional media organizations to:

3.1 Promote equal opportunity hiring and promotional policies, and guidelines for non-sexist reporting.

3.2 Publish directories of women media professionals to act as a networking tool; provide gender sensitization workshops for media professionals; and promote media skills training for lay women's groups.

4. We, the Toronto Symposium participants, encourage international and national governmental and non-governmental organizations, including media training institutions, to:

4.1 Ensure that several themes on women's contributions to the media are adopted for World Press Freedom Day and other relevant observances.

4.2 Involve men in action towards the achievement of women's equality in the media, as equality between men and women concerns all people and touches upon the very functioning and development of our societies.

4.3 Monitor and denounce attacks on media professionals or users who expose or speak out against extremists, be they political, religious, racist, etc.

4.4 Continue expanding community radio projects in view of high illiteracy rates in rural and urban areas.

4.5 Sponsor training in Desktop Publishing techniques and marketing for new small media run by women, especially in rural areas.