

**United Nations
Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)
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
12 to 15 November 2002**

**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**

**United Nations
Department of Public Information**

The United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) is the principal arm of the Organization's outreach to the world, providing services to the media, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and the general public. Its mission is to help fulfil the substantive purposes of the United Nations by strategically communicating the activities and concerns of the Organization to achieve the greatest public impact. The critical work of the Department is to disseminate throughout the world the core messages of the Organization. In this effort, DPI's communications outreach includes breaking news from the Organization, as well as a focus on the long-term challenges faced by humankind and how the United Nations is addressing them.

Promoting the Millennium Development Goals

The United Nations is resolved to work for gender equality and the empowerment of women as vital tools to combat poverty and disease, and to achieve development that is truly sustainable; equally, it is determined to build on the contribution of women in managing conflict and building peace. The overall agenda of the United Nations is the Millennium Declaration – a blueprint for improving the lives of people everywhere in the twenty-first century. In this connection, DPI is promoting the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals - global targets that the world's leaders set at the Millennium Summit in September 2000. These Goals make up an ambitious agenda for reducing poverty and its causes and manifestations. DPI will support the Millennium Campaign, which is aimed at building awareness and creating coalitions for action on the Millennium Development Goals, in both developed and developing countries.

The eight Millennium Development Goals are inextricably linked to each other and to the broader purposes of the United Nations. DPI is promoting the message that each and every Goal is relevant to the lives of women, and that several of the Goals are specifically aimed at improving the lives of women and girls:

- The first Development Goal – to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger – is especially relevant to women. Of the world's 1.2 billion poorest people, an estimated three-fifths are women and girls.
- The second and third Development Goals – to achieve universal primary education and to promote gender equality and empowerment of women – are central to the overall task of development. In 2000, an estimated 120 million children were not enrolled in school. They joined the ranks of nearly 1 billion adults who cannot read or write – most of them women.
- The fourth and fifth Development Goals aim to reduce child mortality, and reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio, respectively. Every minute of every day, a woman dies because of complications during pregnancy and childbirth. The majority of these deaths are preventable.

Conveying the message of gender equality

The approach of DPI to the issue of women and the media has several dimensions. These include promoting the impact of major issues – the eradication of poverty, conflict prevention, sustainable development, human rights, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the battle against international terrorism and the needs of the African continent – on the lives of women.

A key message that DPI conveys to the media and other redisseminators is that women and girls are equal citizens, and that their participation in the life of their societies is vital to development. DPI also promotes the message that women's rights are human rights, and that women are entitled to the enjoyment of all human rights, including those relating to economic development and resources.

DPI undertakes programmes and activities dealing specifically with women's issues. In its advocacy and promotion of the advancement of women, DPI undertakes ongoing multimedia communications activities to support the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, both at Headquarters and in the field through its network of UN information centres and services in over 70 countries. It does this through a wide range of activities, including media outreach, meetings coverage, print products, special events, radio and television programmes, Internet services, electronic transmissions, collaboration with non-governmental organizations, visitors services, briefings, lectures and seminars, media training for journalists, and through "The UN Works" promotional programme.

Another approach involves the Department's programmes and activities on the issue of women, which are mainstreamed into its many other thematic programmes and activities, such as ageing, disabled persons, the economy, crime prevention and criminal justice, drug abuse prevention, the question of Palestine, peace and security, disarmament, indigenous people, youth and the environment.

A major focus of the Department in October 2002 was the promotion of the launch of the Secretary-General's report on women, peace and security at UN Headquarters, which delineates action-oriented recommendations for stepping up implementation of Security Council resolution 1325, and of the Secretary-General's study on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, the role of women in peace-building and the gender dimensions of peace processes and conflict.

Generating media coverage on women's issues

The media is the principal redisseminator of United Nations information to the public. Central to the strong efforts to both deepen and broaden direct links with news media worldwide, as well as with other key public opinion-makers, DPI has established a daily news service on the UN website (<http://www.un.org/News/>). It is designed to facilitate reporting on the United Nations around the world by disseminating quickly, in an accessible news-focused style, coverage of the entire range of United Nations activities, including those pertaining to gender equality and the advancement of women.

The Department of Public Information generates media coverage of women's issues and events, at Headquarters and in the field, from its meetings coverage of intergovernmental bodies, including the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on the Status of Women, and the treaty bodies such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The UN News Service focuses on women's issues regularly in its coverage of the work of relevant UN bodies and various other events and activities devoted to the promotion of women's rights. The Communications Campaign Service undertakes media outreach on a variety of topics of relevance to women, for example by organizing press conferences and maintaining contacts with journalists who cover women's issues. The issue of advancement of women is routinely addressed as a regular output of DPI's Video Section.

Women and the media in peacekeeping

In resolution 1325 (2000), the Security Council expressed its willingness to incorporate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations and urged inclusion of a gender component in peacekeeping operations. One key issue would therefore be to take account, within this purview, of relevant public information policies and strategies that can be formulated to address specific gender needs in each mission area.

Women are being increasingly placed in positions of responsibility in peace operations. Of the 15 peacekeeping missions currently in operation, four have had women at the helm of their public information offices during this year -- the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) and the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET). It has been demonstrated that the presence of women in peace missions, while enriching those operations, also contributes to placing fundamental issues pertaining to women in conflict situations on the mission agenda. Gender focal points have been appointed to each peace operation and it is expected that they will be able to further guide public information components in adopting appropriate strategies.

Earlier this year, in Timor-Leste, formerly East Timor, one of the most effective public information strategies targeting women was carried out by UNTAET, in collaboration with UNFPA, in the launching of a major nation-wide campaign earlier this year to raise awareness on how to prevent domestic violence and to inform victims on ways of seeking assistance. The mission used all media channels, including through posters and public service announcements, and helped train local journalists on gender-sensitive reporting of such crimes. Women candidates for Timor-Leste's popular consultation were also facilitated with special airtime. Results indicated that women constituted about 30 per cent of the membership of the new Constituent Assembly.

In Kosovo, the first mission to adopt a formal strategy to advance the status of women subsequent to Security Council resolution 1325, affirmative action measures were used to ensure reasonable representation of women in the National Constituent Assembly. In addition to quotas, extra airtime on UN broadcast facilities was provided for female candidates. (It is interesting to note that women comprised 27 per cent of elected representatives in the

Assembly.) The public affairs section of the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH) also launched a visible national campaign on women and violence. Through the use of television spots, posters, billboards and bookmarkers, among other publicity strategies, a number of safe houses were established for victims of violence and training of appropriate public and social service components was ongoing.

Through a newly-created community outreach unit and Radio UNAMSIL, Sierra Leonean women have been mobilized to participate in issues relevant to peace and governance. One of the visible results was a women's march for peace which was organized at Makeni.

An earlier example of the effective use of a public information strategy was the broadcasting by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) Radio, in 1992 to 1993, of a daily segment on some of the specific difficulties faced by Cambodian women and the impact on their ability to vote in the upcoming general elections. As a result of this and other targeted strategies, a large proportion of the female electorate participated in the May 1993 elections.

Much remains to be done. Peacekeeping operations are currently in the process of developing public information capacities to explain their mandates to the populations they serve and to counter misinformation disseminated about them. Women and girls must receive information of specific relevance to their situations, including on opportunities available in new political and judicial structures, the nature of criminal and war crime investigations against perpetrators of gender-based violence, and the kinds of services -- economic, civil, political and judicial -- that may be provided through the peace operation.

Journalist training programmes

All of DPI's programmes and activities include the participation of women. As an example, women comprise half of the young journalists invited to the annual Training Programme for Broadcasters and Journalists from Developing Countries held at UN Headquarters in New York. The Programme brings together junior and mid-level media professionals who are chosen on a rotating basis of countries, with the assistance of UN field offices. As of 2002, 393 broadcasters and journalists from 141 countries have taken part in the Programme. Of these, 205 were women.

Women journalists are also included in DPI's Training Programme for Palestinian Media Practitioners held in New York each year. The aim of the Programme is to strengthen professional capacity as information media personnel. Twenty-one women broadcasters and journalists have participated in the training programme since 1995. The number of journalists being trained in the above-mentioned programmes has declined each year, as costs have increased within a static budget.

UN Radio

Radio remains one of the most cost-effective and far-reaching traditional media available to DPI and an important instrument in United Nations activities, such as development and peacekeeping. Taking advantage of its linguistic diversity and multicultural outreach to far-flung audiences all over the world, United Nations Radio is using new technology to expand its news-gathering and dissemination capacity to achieve timely delivery and optimal impact. The Department has established partnerships with over 265 radio stations to carry its broadcasts with a potential to reach as many as 180 million listeners worldwide.

The programmes are distributed to 185 countries and more than 2,000 broadcasting stations in 15 languages (Arabic, Bangla, Chinese, Dutch/ Papiamento, English, French, French-Creole, Hindi, Indonesian, Kiswahili, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Turkish and Urdu). All programmes are available free of charge to broadcasting stations around the world.

The UN Radio programme “Women” has been instrumental in getting women’s issues on the air all over the world for more than two decades. “Women” is produced twice a month on taped programmes, and is sometimes included in the live daily broadcasts, at the discretion of the producer. DPI also ensures the incorporation of women’s issues in all other radio programming. Cross-cutting issues relevant to women are given high priority in both coverage and in-depth production of UN radio programmes in multiple languages. UN Radio also covers the work of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and the special event organized at Headquarters each year to observe International Women’s Day.

UN Radio is also reaching out to local community radio stations. A concrete example is the rapport which has been established with “WINGS” (Women International News Gathering Service) in the United States. This women’s broadcast network, funded by women’s groups, redisseminates United Nations programmes locally and internationally. Initiatives such as this could be replicated in other countries.

As UN membership grew over the past five decades, so did the outreach of UN Radio programmes. Initially, news bulletins and feature programmes were broadcast via shortwave. UN Radio news is now transmitted to many regions of the world by telephone and Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN) lines and via satellite. Feature programmes are distributed by tape and cassette. UN Radio also uses the Internet to broadcast and transmit its programmes (<http://www.un.org/av/radio/news/latenews.htm>).

Special events and observances

Occasions such as International Women’s Day on 8 March each year constitute important United Nations observances. The special events connected with the observance of International Days which are organized at UN Headquarters and also by most United Nations information centres and services, attract media attention, and are an excellent tool to promote various issues related to the achievement of gender equality and the advancement of women.

At the local level, a large number of UN Information Centers, UN Information Services and UN Offices organize a wide variety of special events to observe International Women's Day, and undertake media outreach to publicize the Day. Such activities include organizing media campaigns and media events; producing radio programmes; participating in seminars and panel discussions; translating into local languages and dissemination of the message of the Secretary-General for the Day, as well as DPI publications on the subject of women, peace and security; organizing roundtables and other discussion groups; organizing concerts to mark the Day; and mounting photo and poster exhibits on women.

In 2002, the theme for the Day's observance was "Afghan Women Today: Realities and Possibilities." The event featured a short DPI video, an opening ceremony with the participation of the Secretary-General and the First Lady of the United States, and a panel discussion chaired by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, with the participation of Ms. Sima Wali, President, Refugee Women in Development, who is from Afghanistan, addressed by Queen Noor of Jordan. More than 800 people attended this event, which drew considerable attention in print and broadcast media.

DPI is attempting to leverage events held at Headquarters to global audiences through video-conferencing and other means. As an example, to maximize the reach of the International Women's Day programme at Headquarters this year, the broadcast media, including major television syndicators, such as AP television, Reuters television and CNN, were alerted in advance of the significance and newsworthiness of this event. In addition, with the help of the Better World Fund, a five-minute summary for television stations around the world was prepared and disseminated via satellite to 88 countries. In these countries, information centres and other United Nations offices provided local broadcasters with the translated text for national use.

Coverage of the event in the United States was excellent, with 82 different broadcasts about the event in 38 cities nationwide. CNN, CNN Headline News, CNBC, MSNBC and C-Span were the national outlets that aired coverage of the event. Most of the coverage in the 38 markets was provided by network affiliates in each city. In many cases, more than one affiliate aired coverage of the event.

DPI staff and gender parity

The Department of Public Information was one of the first UN Departments to achieve parity between men and women at the professional level, and this parity continues to be maintained. According to a recent report issued by the Secretary-General in October 2002, the gender distribution of Secretariat staff is 50.9 per cent to 49.1 per cent, in favour of women. In DPI, as of 1 July 2002, women made up 51.7 per cent of all Professional posts subject to geographical distribution. There were ten female Directors in DPI, compared to seven male Directors (58 per cent female). Of the 76 Heads of UN information centres, UN information services and UN Offices, 22 were women. The increased participation of women as public information officers and spokespersons within DPI has brought about a more balanced portrayal

of women by the Organization. At two of the three global conferences in 2002, women served as spokespersons.

Conclusion

The overarching strategic vision of the Department remains that contained in General Assembly resolution 13 (I) of February 1946, which created DPI: “to promote to the greatest extent an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations”. In order to achieve this objective, DPI will continue to work through important intermediaries, such as the media, non-governmental organizations and educational institutions, to achieve the greatest possible impact on the peoples of the world. At present, the Department is being repositioned to work more strategically, as an effective vehicle to communicate the work of the United Nations. It will continue its efforts to reach people in every region of the world and to garner support for the work of the Organization to achieve gender equality and to promote the advancement of women.