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Access, Employment And Decision-Making

Barbara Crossette[*]

[*] *The views expressed in this paper, which has been reproduced as received, are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.*

Access to the media for women nearly everywhere in the world is not unrelated to the relative power, or lack of it, that women have in newspaper and broadcasting newsrooms, as well as in the offices of general interest magazines, book publishing houses and the increasingly powerful advertising and marketing departments whose decisions influence, if not actually dictate, editorial coverage.

But access in itself, and the presence or receptivity of those women who do have the power to make news and feature-writing decisions, are not the only factors determining how women are treated by the mainstream media. The ways in which women, as individuals or in advocacy groups, approach press and broadcasting organizations or magazine and book publishers, are also important determinants. Often, the wrong approach to news organizations undermines a good cause, no matter whether the editor or producer across the desk is male or female.

This paper will summarize some of the bleak news – and some high spots – around the world in efforts by women to increase access to media and their footholds in the press, broadcasting and the new forms of communication based on the Internet. It will also illustrate how successful advocates for women have greatly professionalized their outreach to the media, even if they may still be meeting resistance and disappointment.

All of this is set against a media world where, except for a very few countries or companies, large news organizations are still largely in the control of male publishers, business executives and high-level editors. A generation of changes in hiring or promotion or the provision of better working environments for women has still not significantly altered that basic reality.

The Journalists' World

No discussion of access to the media – by women, minority groups or others who feel that they are always on the margins of news – can take place without an understanding of the milieu in which many journalists are forced to work. This is not irrelevant to women's concerns. Knowing the landscape should be the first priority is planning a media strategy.

In a substantial number of countries, including some where women feel they are most neglected by the media, newspapers and sometimes television or radio stations fight merely to stay alive and out of trouble. Many editors and producers – those same people to whom women would appeal for greater or better coverage – may be harassed by governments or armed guerrillas, and may even be the targets of assassination. Or they may feel pressure from media owners or local business interests or professional groups to steer clear of certain topics like consumer protection, sexual intimidation, poor health care, equal pay and other issues that touch women's lives every day.

The result is often a surfeit of male-dominated, straightforward event-driven news or superficial political reporting that avoids or brushes aside social and economic issues important to women and their families. The spaces between such event-driven reports are often filled with "safe" foreign news picked up from international or national wire services or news agencies.

International news agencies do not force newspapers or broadcasters to use their services. The reports are chosen by local editors everywhere, often as cheap alternatives to hiring more reporters, especially correspondents abroad, who are often too expensive for a news organization to afford. Feature writers who would be expected to focus on social issues more than reporters are also often in short supply in newsrooms. Women have to work exceptionally hard to secure a niche in the attention of the people whom academics like to call "gatekeepers" – the people who decide what's news.

Here and there, there are signs of change and relaxation of controls on the media that could open new spaces for women, as journalism becomes a less hemmed-in profession for all. In its *Annual Survey of Press Freedom 2002* the New York-based organization Freedom House saw gains for press freedom around the world. In Ghana, Peru, Romania, Sri Lanka and Vanuatu, among other places, laws were changed or journalists released from detention or the media simply given more freedom to report and be critical of authority if necessary in doing their jobs.

Yet large gaps remain. Of the 46 Islamic-majority countries surveyed by Freedom House, only one – Mali – had a free press, though Jordan and Kuwait were ranked as "partly" free. And in many countries around the world, journalism remains a physically dangerous occupation. In the decade from 1991 to 2001, at least 389 journalists were killed in the line of duty, 77 percent of them targeted for assassination because of their work, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists in New York. Only 16 percent died in action while reporting conflict. The most dangerous places to work were Algeria, the Balkans, Colombia, Russia and Turkey, the organization said in its most recent report, *Attacks on the Press in 2001*.

In tension-filled or physically dangerous environments, the challenge for women – some of them among the journalists under attack – is to make editors understand that women share their concerns because women are often the first and most numerous victims of conflict or repression. They may be targets of systematic sexual abuse in civil wars or be stripped of their civil rights, as in Afghanistan under the Taliban. They certainly lose homes, livelihoods and family members in huge numbers. Now, they are fast becoming the people most vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which is some parts of the world is truly becoming a "woman's disease."

Some of the most remarkable work and trenchant analysis of their role in societies under pressure are being undertaken by women in Islamic nations where militants are bent on reducing female rights as they remake culture through a narrow or even mistaken interpretation of religion. Broadening Muslim women's access to media worldwide is not only critical to them in their home countries, they say, but also important in getting their message to opinion-makers and security analysts abroad who look for ways to find and support a moderate political centre. In politics, women can make a difference, as they did in Iran when they voted in great numbers for President Mohammed Khatami.

In some regions, notably in Africa, women are also arguing that they can help bring stability by taking part in peace negotiations and being included among experts called together to rebuild shattered communities or countries. Their fresh perspectives should be news

everywhere. In the mainstream media, however, and particularly in the media in industrial nations, their voices are seldom heard. They are not alone. Women in more peaceful but still troubled places – across Central Asia's nations in transition, for example, or in the richest industrial countries – may also feel frustration when they confront powerful media organizations, from outside and inside. Many men share this frustration, polls find. In the summer of 2002, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, an American polling group, found that the public generally thought big news organizations were short on "compassion and morality," among other traits. Only 30 percent of those polled said that the news media "care about the people they report on."

How Bad Is It?

After the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women adopted the Beijing Platform for Action, major studies of media access and the role of women in news organizations were done in almost every region. Assuming some adjustments for economic and cultural differences, reflected in the variety of emphases in questions asked from place to place, the findings are not dissimilar. There seem to be no shortcuts to more increased influence on the media by women, as recent efforts to compile a global snapshot of the situation demonstrate. Virtually everywhere, women are leaving news organizations because they feel the road to the top is blocked by male establishments with outdated ideas about the news, who makes it and how it should be presented.

In this worsening climate, surveys show, for example, that the mere presence of women in newsrooms does not, for a variety of reasons, mean more visibility for women in news reporting. Even when women are represented in sizeable numbers in news organizations, women do not frequently get interviewed or quoted as news sources or experts. Looking over the globe, the Canadian organization Media Watch, using the News Monitoring Guide developed by Erin Research, found that 43 percent of journalists worldwide are women, but only 17 percent of interviewees. Moreover, 29 percent of those women interviewed were in the news because they were victims of accidents and crimes or figured in another news event. There was little or no correlation between the percentage of female journalists and female interviewees. South Asia and the South Pacific had by far the largest percentage of women among journalists, but North America, the Caribbean and Africa had the largest percentage of women quoted in news reports. It can be a struggle, as many women in journalism can attest.

In many places, including in the United States, Canada and Europe, research organizations or think tanks whose experts journalists seek out for comment have relatively few women, which at least partially explains their absence as news sources. The same is often true of large financial institutions, scientific bodies, the law and other areas. Women who have expertise are rarely as aggressive as men in promoting themselves as news sources, or they are not being promoted by the institutions with which they are associated. This situation is changing, but slowly and unevenly. Meanwhile, many of the most often-quoted women are in organizations largely devoted to women's issues – not infrequently by choice – rather than in generalist think tanks, where they can be made to feel marginalized.

A summary of Asian research, *The State of Women and Media in Asia: An Overview* – prepared for the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific by

Mari Luz Quesada Tiongson of Isis International-Manila – found that in this region of the world, with three-fifths of the global population, women were entering careers in news organizations in increasing numbers but that they hold few decision-making positions. When a woman rises to the top of a media organization, it is often through her share in the ownership of the operation. The heavy domination of governments, the military or large public conglomerates in the media industry in Asia has not made it easy for women to exert influence, the report said.

In some countries, including Cambodia and South Korea, the report found, women were actually losing ground numerically. Across Asia, women cited the barrier of stereotypes, sexual harassment, unequal pay and lack of family support as reasons for leaving or not choosing jobs in the media. Women who do work in news organizations said they are often assigned "soft" stories on culture or lifestyle while men get the political and economic beats. Where women do get into mainstream "hard" news reporting and try to expand the field to include gender issues, they often run into editors with traditional ideas about what constitute news, and are thwarted.

Women surveyed in Asia, seeing that governments had failed to rectify gender discrimination or exclusion, did not want to depend on governments to open access for them in the future. "Women media practitioners have generally expressed preference for self-regulation of media institutions; e.g., establishing codes of conduct on media's portrayal of women, over state regulation that is deemed as a threat to freedom of expression and women's rights," the report said.

In a conclusion that is echoed in other regions of the world, the Asian report said: "Women's groups share the observation that women media practitioners are not automatically gender-sensitive by virtue of their gender, and that feminist perspectives find space in the media not only because of women being in positions of editors or director. Even so, it is recognized that there is a value to having a critical mass of women in media who with a sharpened gender lens can challenge existing discriminatory practices and catalyze changes"

In Australia, a recent survey of women in the media by the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance found that more than one-fifth of women who responded to a questionnaire had left jobs in newspaper, radio and television because they felt that they were being discriminated against in promotions. Like women in the Asian survey, Australian women said they were still being shunted into traditional female areas of reporting that editors regarded as less important that areas like politics and sports, which were dominated by men. Sexual harassment remained a concern, and many women seemed resigned to it being part of the work culture. Australian women also cited problems with childcare or other family responsibilities. Journalism is not a profession that lends itself to regular hours or predictable long-term schedules, and since women around the world normally have to carry a large responsibility for children and the running of a home, it is doubly difficult for them to juggle erratic schedules.

In the Arab world, a comprehensive review of the treatment of women in the media was completed in 2000 by the Center for Media Freedom – Middle East and North Africa. The report, *Women's Rights and the Arab Media*, written by Dr. Naomi Sakr, an expert on the regional media, explores in some depth both the treatment of issues important to women and the roles women play in news organizations. It is very critical of both governments and media

outlets. "The Arab media is in general the most hostile in the world toward women's rights and freedoms," it says. "It does not just ignore women's expression and their struggle against exploitation and domination, but some media actively engage in the distortion of women's discourse and their images and launch campaigns against women's rights to vote, divorce, choose her partner, work, travel and even drive a car." As for the cinema, popular films often bordered on the "misogynist" in their treatment of women, the report said.

It is this reality, experienced to one degree or another by most Arab women, that has perhaps made them as resolute, inventive courageous as they often are as journalists, authors of books and teachers of other women as well as young men. Women have reached high positions in several government information ministries, and the radio and television services of several nations, among them Egypt and Morocco But the report, which also studies United Nations' treaties and other international agreements relevant to women and the media, warns against complacency, adding that the rapidly growing number of satellite television networks in the Arab region have not helped improve the image of Arab women but instead "led to an explosion in the volume of negative stereotyping appearing on television screens."

In 1995, just before the Beijing women's conference, the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), helped pull together statistics on women in journalism in western Asia and the Mediterranean Arab states. Its report noted that at international meetings on women in the media, there was often a death of Arab participants. At a symposium in Toronto in 1995, UNESCO reported that while women in journalism in Egypt represented 28 percent of the profession, in Jordan they accounted for less than 10 percent of accredited journalists, less than 15 percent in Morocco and about 21 percent in Tunisia. Many women leave the profession, UNESCO reported, because they see no future for themselves. UNESCO subsequently began journalism training programs and workshops for Arab women. Independently, women in the region were establishing their own networks. The report mentions several of them, including Collectif 95 Maghreb Egalite, which serves as an umbrella organization for women's rights groups in North Africa.

Space is too short here to mention other initiatives, groups and individuals active in the region, but suffice it to say that the Center for Media Freedom-Middle East and North Africa report is a mine of information that reveals how much work is being done, and against what odds. In some countries since the report appeared in 2000, some wives of government leaders and other politically or socially prominent women have joined in efforts to improve the image and role of women in the Mid-East media. In February 2002, several of them took part in a forum on the issue held in Bahrain, sponsored by the United Arab Emirates, the Arab League, the Egyptian National Council for Women and Al Hareeri in Lebanon.

Women all over the world will be interested to know that even in the richest countries, the climb to the top of media organizations is very steep and rocky indeed, and that those who command the heights do not on the whole have a good record at reaching down to help other women up. There can be no complacency in most industrial nations, least of all in the United States, where women have won lawsuits against news organizations to demand more hiring and promotions of women only to see their gains turn out to be very flimsy and sometimes short-lived.

There have been at least three major reports on women in the American media over the last year, 2002, documenting the stagnation or decline in the numbers of women in management positions in news and other media organizations. A study by Northwestern University's Media Management Center found that over the previous two years the percentage of women in top jobs had declined from 25 percent to 20 percent. Not long after that study was released, the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania reported that barely one in five board members at major entertainment and communications companies is a women. Women's Enews, an American newswire focusing on women's issues, quoted Susan Ness, director of the information and society section of the Annenberg center, saying that for the most part, the American media had not moved "beyond tokenism." At some of the largest and most wide-reaching entertainment companies there were no women at all in the top ranks. Only in book publishing did women seem to be doing reasonably well, the study found.

Perhaps the most damming report as far as the news business is concerned came from the American Press Institute and the Pew Center for Civic Journalism. Their joint study, *The Great Divide: Female Leadership in U. S. Newsrooms*, found a clear division between women who were confident of their careers and those who for a variety of reasons were not. But all women "regardless of their attitude toward advancement" predicted that they would leave the newspaper industry at some point, the report said. "Ninety-three percent of all women reported a less than *definite* expectation of moving to the next level at their current newspaper," the study found. Forty percent of those women said that they just did not see opportunities for advancement and, of these, 64 percent of said that management appeared to prefer promoting men. Only 6 percent of male editors questioned saw the situation that way were willing to acknowledge that management preferred to advance men.

Women who were more confident in their careers appeared in this survey to have adopted male priorities, making themselves more familiar with business management, legal issues and competitive "page one" thinking. But the fact that even these women were prepared to leave the profession should be a warning, the API-Pew report concluded. "Overall," it said, "the industry should be concerned about losing these women because they show more interest in connecting with readers in ways that may prompt civic behavior, a way to help newspaper differentiate themselves from emerging mass media." In other words, strong women with broad interests could help prevent news organizations from sliding even more precipitously into coverage influenced by the entertainment industry.

This API-Pew warning is all the more ominous for those women in the press who have already seen a trend to more "celebrity" reporting – with reporters sometimes themselves becoming celebrities who socialize with the people they write about – and have found there is less opportunity, space or appetite for more serious writing on social or economic issues of interest to women – and men. Women in newsrooms have also seen male management tinker with statistics to make it appear that there are more women in top news jobs. The reality often is that women ranked for the charts as holding executive or senior positions are found in feature sections, not hard news. In newsrooms, women who hold high-level titles frequently have little power to go with those descriptions in day-to-day decision-making. Many women in journalism find the constant internal politicking and jostling for position tiring and distasteful.

Pioneering women who risked, and often ruined, their newsroom careers by taking part in class action suits against newspapers and other news organizations a generation ago are now bitter that their impressive victories have so frequently been diffused by male resistance to fundamental changes in attitude toward women as journalists, readers or viewers.

Approaching the Mainstream Media

Given the pressures under which many journalists work – from physical danger to financial constraints to resilient sexism and the trivialization of news as lines blur between news and entertainment – how much chance do advocates for women's issues have of being heard in today's media world? The situation may not be as hopeless as it would seem. There are many women, individually or in organizations formed to promote women's issues, who have surmounted multiple hurdles to be recognized in the mainstream media. They can be found in Africa, Asia and Latin America as well as in the industrial countries of the North. They may be in politics, self-help economic organizations, the environment movement, legal associations, health groups or other fields.

Women who have successfully breached the newsroom walls often use very similar and important strategic and tactical methods. As diverse as these women are, their experiences could together serve as a primer for others.

First of all, successful advocates, not only for women's issues, study the media where they are and devise strategies to fit the reality – or realities – of what they have to work with. In any given city or town, there may be one or more "establishment" or government-backed newspaper, plus more neighbourhood-based, community-centred publications and perhaps magazines aimed at either a general readership or specialized interests. One campaign does not fit all of these, as any advertising or marketing director would know. Television and radio – and lately the Internet – offer another range of targets.

Suppose, for example, a local clinic mysteriously runs out of a particular medication or birth control device. That might interest a neighbourhood newspaper. But a citywide, regional or national paper or broadcast newsroom might be more likely to pay attention if evidence is presented that other local clinics do not have the same problem. Is there discrimination in the public or private health service? Is a politician involved? Or a group opposed to family planning?

Before any request for coverage or idea to be considered is presented to a news organization, effective advocates or public relations officers are sure to get a name and title of the person to whom a letter or e-mail or phone call should be directed. Journalists find it very annoying and time-wasting to be selected apparently at random, just to be asked, "Whom should I contact if it isn't you?" Or worse, "Will you pass this message on to the right person?"

Groups or individuals who have done their homework stand out because they know whom to address. They have given priority to reading as many publications as possible – regularly – and to monitoring television and radio programs. By becoming familiar with all available media outlets, effective women's organizations know what has or has not been covered in the past, and where gaps in attention are largest. They learn the style and tenor of a

publication and its numerous departments well enough to know where a piece of news or idea for a feature would or would not "fit." Even then, they recognize that there will be many misses to every hit when trying to attract attention. They don't give up.

Peppering a professional news organization with home-made, handwritten leaflets is usually counterproductive. In a computer age, good advocacy groups either have or try to get someone to volunteer to prepare a professional-looking letter or press release. Press releases need to be short, with relevant information clearly stated. They are not the place for rambling dissertations on an issue, however important. Both press releases and fact sheets handed out at briefings or news conferences need to contain names and phone numbers, addresses and/or e-mail addresses for future reference. A reporter who does not write something on the spot may on another day look for someone to interview on the issue and will have a name and contact information at hand. Make that point when handing out information sheets or business cards. Say that you or your group will always be on hand to help in the future, even if there is no story published today.

Good statistics are important. Not all groups or individuals have the wherewithal to compile reports, but those who do can find them helpful in attracting attention. Any report or fact sheet given to journalists needs to be credible. If a reporter finds that facts have been inflated or twisted – and perhaps a publication embarrassed because it used them – the source of the information will not be trusted the next time. Whether large or small, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) all over the world that establish a reputation for credibility often come to be relied on heavily by reporters who do not have time or expertise to compile the kinds of statistics or first-person testimony that dedicated groups do.

NGOs, numbering in the untold thousands, have become important independent sources of information for the media. Putting globalization to good use, they form networks that can function as alternative international newswires, especially through the use of the Internet. Just as they are exchanging and sharing more information among themselves, NGOs can also disseminate news to the media. NGOs, not only large ones, publish documents that can be found on newsroom bookshelves in many countries.

The best NGOs, not always the richest, try to choose well-trained people with professional skills to interact with the media. Many foreign correspondents from industrial nations prefer to call on local NGOs to act as guides and interpreters when reporting an issue the local advocates know best – an environment story or health campaign, for example. Good relations between local groups and even large media organizations can be built up over time this way.

The most successful advocacy and research groups do not bombard the media with too-frequent releases and incremental reports but save their ammunition for more occasional, more solid surveys that may be news stories in themselves. Of course, when there is a "breaking" story – a refugee crisis, an epidemic or other ongoing event – good NGOs with relevant expertise know how to shift into a faster mode to develop daily or even hourly information sheets. But again, accuracy and credibility is the key.

In some countries, NGOs ask, "What do we do if the reporter wants money to put our story in the paper or on the air?" The answer should be: "Never give in to that kind of deal. Look for another reporter." Another difficult problem for some NGOs is how to raise money without becoming beholden to a government, business interest or powerful person. Groups or individuals have to make their own decisions, based on local circumstances, but many NGOs get around their fears of appearing to be "bought" by stating clearly in their brochures or press releases where their support comes from. They also tell donors that decisions will be made objectively and will not be influenced by contributors. Groups often lose money, but add to their credibility, as a result. When talking with journalists, representatives of NGOs should be open about stating who supports them if this is relevant to the issue at hand. For example, if it is a story about health or medicine, is there a pharmaceutical company among the donors?

A significant if not large number of women's organizations around the world have been very successful at balancing all these decisions and challenges. While singling out only one of them is unfair to all the others, for the purposes of a concrete example it is useful to look at Equality Now, a small women's rights group, based in New York and Nairobi but with global reach. It has a staff of professionals, including a number of lawyers who are able to deal skilfully with law enforcement officials, courts and international treaty bodies. The organization gets support from a wide range of sources: mainline foundations, rich individual benefactors, celebrities who attract media attention and many ordinary working women who give time and money. All of this does not translate into huge flows of funds. On the contrary, the group struggles to maintain financial support. But Equality Now does have a large circle of well-wishers. And it has targeted the media with well-organized campaigns, among them aid for female lawyers in Afghanistan and support for women's groups in Africa and elsewhere who oppose female genital mutilation.

The FGM campaign, more than a decade old, has been a learning process not only for Equality Now but for women across the industrial world, and it is an interesting case to study. When the practice of genital mutilation began to be a focus of feminist attention internationally, women in the global South and North quickly became cautious about condemning a practice that was often described as culturally important in the developing countries were it was common. When, during the 1994 United Nations Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, two American women who were members of the United States Congress wanted to visit Egyptian clinics opposed to the practice, they were at first advised by staff members that this might be a culturally-insensitive step. Leaders of Egyptian NGOs were adamant that they wanted outsiders to be see what they were doing and to carry away their message that a procedure so dangerous and painful to girls should not be permitted to go on just because it may have been traditional. The Congresswomen paid their visit, and it turned out to be beneficial to both sides. The American delegation who visited the clinics and a medical school, accompanied by a few journalists whom they invited to join them, came away with an appreciation for how and why the practice of genital mutilation continued and what Egyptian women were themselves doing to counter it in their own way. Egypt's Supreme Court ultimately ruled against FGM. In the United States, Congress later outlawed the practice to stop its spread in immigrant communities.

As a leading NGO fighting FGM, Equality Now made it a rule to be guided by local women in countries where girls were subjected to the practice. In African societies as diverse as Uganda and Senegal, grassroots groups took charge of the issue and worked within the framework of local customs and traditions to bring about change. Groups like Equality Now and the International Women's Health Coalition, also based in New York but linked to local organizations around the world, passed on to journalists in North American the knowledge of the issue as seen through the eyes of women – and later sympathetic men – in Africa and Asia. Cultural collisions were largely averted.

In an age of globalization in not only economic affairs but also in the spread of borderless information technologies and cultural swaps, it no longer seems to make sense to treat the media in the global North as an enemy – certainly not on issues of women's rights and status. The mainstream media attention in the industrial world given to the plight of women under the Taliban in Afghanistan did a lot to harden opinion against that regime long before Al Qaeda was the issue. It is possible to argue, in fact, that the rights of Afghan women were so much the focus of attention that much else that was happening in Afghanistan was overlooked, along with the country's history, religion and traditions, in the rush to condemn one short-lived regime that hadn't invented repression of women, only intensified it. Now, other issues are getting attention, such as international trafficking in women. News organizations are on the lookout for more concrete information on this sorry business. There is room for much more news on the increasing vulnerability of women to HIV-AIDS.

An Afterthought: The Women's Page

In the passionate feminism of the 1960s, there was often contempt for the media ghetto known as the "women's pages," with their cosy household hints, recipes, fashions, social announcements and bland consumer information. Many young female journalists new to the profession fought to stay out of those departments or feared being relegated to them after failing to gain a foothold in the hard news sections of newspapers and broadcasting. In many influential newspapers, those pages were phased out over the years, or were transformed into hipper departments devoted to what became known as "lifestyle" reporting of interest to both men and women. Male and female journalists shared editing roles. Content ranged over old subjects like food and fashion, done in novel ways, as well as newer coverage of domestic architecture and design, and a fascination for luxury goods.

In theory at least, articles for and about women went into general news – or were relegated to women's magazines, which were becoming bolder and more explicit in their frankness about once-taboo subjects like sexual behaviour. These changes would have been welcomed by women had not two disturbing trends not emerged. Women's magazines fell prey to the celebrity cult sweeping the media generally, and there was often little space left for articles about women who had made important but less than glamorous achievements. In newspaper and broadcasting newsrooms, meanwhile, men were holding on to power over the gathering and selection of news despite the purported mainstreaming of women's news and the presence of more women, as surveys described earlier in this paper demonstrate.

Some good newspapers did expand behavioural and medical coverage, which allowed some issues of particular interest to women to be reported in greater depth. But those newspapers are few in number – as are similar radio and television programs. In developing nations, the situation may be worse when the media have no tradition of reporting topics such as human sexuality, health and human rights. The absence of reporting on gay lifestyles, ignored in many publications in the global South, has hindered frank discussion of AIDS, for example. Equally, avoiding articles on heterosexual behaviour also does not help women who have little knowledge of their vulnerability to AIDS or other diseases because of the scarcity of information available to them.

Should the women's page come back? Probably not in its old form. But close reading of the weekly list of articles from the Women's Feature Service in New Delhi or the daily output of the Women's Enews network in New York gives clear evidence of how much news about women is being missed elsewhere in the media There are women out there who can fill the gap.

In 2000, the United Nations published its third edition of *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics*. Among the most astonishing findings was this one from UNESCO: Around the world – in 53 of 83 countries surveyed – women accounted for at least half of all graduates of professional journalism and communications training. The numbers went as high as 79 percent in Algeria, 80 percent in Panama, 90 percent in Bulgaria and 100 percent in Mongolia. Where are these women when their training and talents are needed? Statistics like these point to the urgency of finding more support for women in journalism in all its forms and, in the absence of commercial money, raising more money from non-commercial sources for publications, broadcasting or Web services that could give women more outlets for their work. Women are notoriously underrepresented in opinion-page articles, for example, as well as in critical writing in the arts and literature. If mainstream doors are closed, they need to start somewhere to learn the tricks of the trade and become competitive.

And, though little girls are adept as boys in playing electronic games, women are still missing from the "new media" – computer-based, high technology news and communications organizations. In part, experts consulted for the UN report say, this is because girls have less access than boys to computers at home and school in many countries (where there is access at all) and later study computer science and mathematics-based technologies in smaller numbers than their male peers. In every country, the United Nations report said, "men outnumbered women by about three to one among those planning a career in computer or information sciences." Translated into future terms, that can only mean that at least for one more generation women will have even less impact in new media than they have in the more traditional forms. And the women waiting outside the gate for their stories to be told will have to wait even longer.

Barbara Crossette, a former New York Times correspondent in Asia and chief of the paper's United Nations bureau, has also been deputy foreign editor and senior news editor at the Times.
