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**The Impact of New Information Communication Technology
on the Media: A Community Media Perspective
from the Pacific Island Region**

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** 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.*

The impact of new information communication technologies (ICTs) on the mass media was most apparent in the Fiji Islands on May 19, 2000, when the illegal overthrow of the People's Coalition Government plunged the country into another political crisis. Just thirteen years earlier, we had learnt of the May 14 (1987) military coup and its ensuing events primarily via radio broadcasts. Certainly this happened again in 2000, but this time as live radio reports were filed faster and more frequently via mobile phone, television and internet coverage also contributed significantly to the mass media coverage of another man-made, national disaster.

As the two radio networks, both based in the capital city Suva, broke their programme format to provide news coverage from their teams of reporters covering and relaying events from the parliamentary complex as well as the central business district, the national television service (our only television station) also broke its programming format to beam into homes across the country the pictures, that truly conveyed the physical and emotional chaos that reigned throughout and beyond the fifty-six day hostage crisis.

The Internet was also a new and crucial source of news and information during the May 2000 Crisis in Fiji. The story of the overthrow was broken on the international scene by a Fiji website, fijilive.com. In fact BBC television led their coverage of the crisis with a picture of the website because they did not have any other information on the event!

Notable Pacific Island journalist, Jale Moala, highlights one of the more serious implications of the live news format as we experienced here in Fiji. Writing in "The Pacific Journalist, A Practical Guide, he notes how a particular radio station allowed supporters of the coup leader to make inflammatory statements live on radio, first to try to legitimize the events that had taken place, and later to call for supporters to move into the parliamentary complex and create a human barricade around the hostages, and the hostage takers. Moala highlights that the mixture of tradition and culture, politics and the media, can certainly result in a highly volatile concoction....

It is in the context of the Fiji Islands current post conflict reconstruction stage that I base my reflections, because for us, as well as countries and territories which continue to suffer from the impacts of internal and external conflicts, the mass media together with the new information communications technology (ICTs), are inextricably linked to peace building and conflict resolution. Coordinating the "Blue Ribbon" Peace Vigil during the 56-Day Hostage Crisis in May 2000 put me in touch with a range of media organizations, both local and international. It did not surprise me that whilst our daily media releases were published regularly by the local dailies, it was the international media that was actually drawn to look behind the scenes of the Peace Vigil which offered them the opportunity to provide to their audiences, the women-in-community perspective on the Crisis. Many of the local media were drawn to the Vigil in order to gain access to the hostages who, as they were released, joined the women of the Vigil in a combined action of solidarity. It became very clear, then, that there was a need to establish our own community-media initiatives in order to have our stories heard. To raise our issues collectively as we addressed the emerging issues, directly related to the crisis. And just as women's peace networks utilize all forms of media to share their messages for peace and perspective on post conflict reconstruction we must remain mindful that terrorists have also learnt to become media savvy, staging media conferences, which are beamed across the globe, thus creating and transmitting their own information. As Moala further highlights: "*There is no*

doubt that the media can be used by friends and foes alike in order to attain political goals.” Therefore, as much as we seek a democratic framework to support the freedom to access information, policy making must be able to secure a workable balance between peace and the new ICTs.

The media coverage of the Fiji crisis, together with recent international conflict events, have highlighted just how much conflict draws a good crowd or audience. Writing in his paper, *The Role of Christian Communicators in Pacific conflicts* (July 2002), Father Larry Hannan, President of Fiji Media Watch cites the secular media industry as a major influence, which shapes the thinking and perceptions of people in regards to conflict situations. The media, he says, can either polarize communities to take sides and heighten tensions or help to educate people on the causes and consequences of conflicts and the need for dialogue. The present trend in Fiji seems to be to facilitate political dialogue, especially between our major political parties. There is an obvious need to promote collaboration between media and media-based non-government organizations (media NGOs) to work together to uphold the values, which promote peace and unity through diversity.

It should be noted, that during the initial negotiations on prioritizing the critical areas of concern, prior to the Beijing Conference, the Pacific Island region did not place Section J in their regional document, the Pacific Platform for Action. It critical that the mass and the new ICTs are **now** acknowledged as a Pacific priority, and that for all the regions of the world where IT development is still lagging behind, a coordinated approach is undertaken to facilitate better networking and partnerships to assist women address ICT and media issues from their perspective

It would be pertinent for us to acknowledge that today’s youth, even in the rural communities in the Fiji Islands, are growing up far more media and more so pop culture savvy than previous generations. As our youth grow up in today’s global environment we must ensure that we instill in them principles and values of equality for all, by putting in place special youth programmes that will also assist young people highlight their viewpoint, by encouraging them to become part of the community media environment. This tangible approach is one way to channel social or capacity building advocacy training for young people and further strengthens the linkages and partnerships between the youth and older members of the community, who can assist in the management of these programmes.

Media is an important tool, which links together a range of viewpoints, including the gender perspective, to assist countries, work towards achieving long term peace. It must be acknowledged that access to information and communications is a human right and must be ensured at all times, particularly in times of crisis. It must be further highlighted that the role of women as peace builders, and the unique contributions that women bring to the peace-table, as enshrined in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 titled Women, Peace and Security must be strengthened through all appropriate forms of media to not only document the experiences of women in armed conflict, but to also support and publicize women’s peace initiatives, which are often sidelined by the mass media.

All forms of media are, inextricably linked in the quest for equality, people centered development and peace. The media is also an important tool to address and combat racism. At the same time, the media, including ICTs, in particular the Internet, also has the potential to produce and disseminate ideas of racial superiority and related intolerances. This is highlighted in the outcome document of the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and related intolerance (Durban 2001). Durban 2001 also reaffirms the importance of community media. This is especially pertinent during the United Nations' designated Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004), especially as it is able to give voice to victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and racial intolerance.

The onus is therefore on all stakeholders, including the mass media, new media and community media organizations and producers to link together all relevant documents, conventions and policies to assist us in achieving the strategic objectives and actions in (Section J) the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA).

Aside from the importance of including a range of women's viewpoints (because we are not a homogenous species) on current and emerging development issues, it is also important to document and share the stories of women's her-stories, especially those of the foundation members of today's global women's movement, simply because the mass media has not documented these stories for us. We must do this ourselves, for our daughters to share. The recommendation of the Know How Conference 2002 (Know How 2002) staged in Kampala, Uganda in July this year, to work towards establishing and maintaining of a women's history website, must be implemented.

For too long, Women and Media issues, have been packaged into a range of international conventions, commitments and policies, with little focus on regional and national implementation, probably because governments and even NGOs, focus on the critical development issues, with the media considered the domain of the private sector, and that the media is to be used to primarily for news coverage. However, presently, especially as a result of the lobby of media NGOs, there seems to be an increased awareness of the opportunities that exist through the media to provide information about a rural council meeting – or adult education programmes on farming or health – or simply to exchange ideas. But in order for this awareness to become an integral part of national development, it must be articulated and documented officially.

In terms of development, there needs to be almost an immediate switch from the top-down approach to one where information from the village level is made available at all levels of policy planning and implementation. Special consideration would also need to be given to needs of the people, and women, of the countries of the south, who continue to be marginalized in the various streams of society, including the media.

Unfortunately the patriarchy of business remains clearly evident and resonates in the current nature of developments of ICTs. This is being experienced by the women's movement globally. Women remain marginalized within the mass media industry today, even when they do hold executive or management decisions. It is imperative, therefore, that we do not suffer from, or exacerbate, the same prejudices that we have been targeted through the current media status

quo. Too often we have had a superficial role in maintaining a gender-balance in media outputs because we are not 'hands on' enough, especially in production and technical development. To achieve this balance, we must work towards ensuring women not only increase their technical capacity to participate in development programmes, whilst at the same time encourage women to become technical professionals.

It would be pertinent at this juncture to also consider that from the mass media industry's perspective, community media could be considered a threat or challenge on their hold of audiences, especially women and children, simply because, it is the nature of community media to engage the 'target audience' in a tangible manner. But this people-centered approach also will be attractive to the primary demographics of a mass media advertising campaign. The mass media, with its powerbrokers of air time, programme schedules and transmission sites, therefore need to be encouraged to support and even collaborate on community media initiatives, such as through the co-sharing of transmission sites, sponsorship of outdoor broadcasts or community events.

As the women's movement develops, women are being empowered to pick up a video camera, produce email news bulletins and negotiate for financial and technical resources, which are part of the much needed resources, including appropriate training for all stakeholders, to develop, manage and sustain community media organizations. Community media, in particular community broadcasting is probably the most ideal point of entry for women's access to the media, as it enables women to gain competence in the technical, content and management aspects of 'our media'. Community media can also be a powerful tool in countries where poverty and illiteracy are still unvanquished enemies. However, we also need to assist communities, in particular women in communities, to overcome the existing barriers, which remain influenced by traditional patriarchal systems. We must take into account that there are situations where the 'village radio' will be controlled by the men so that women are not even hearing programmes made for them let alone have access to television programmes at day-parts that suit their work situation because the advertiser-dollar driven programming does not account for their poverty or rural status.

For rural communities, in particular, some of the current development challenges also include:

- The lack of telecommunication infrastructure, including access to telephones and fax services, let alone access to computers and the internet;
- The need to establish or strengthen existing mechanisms and frameworks, especially to build the capacity of community based women's media networks, through all forms of positive resource, including output-driven training mentorship programmes;
- The need for Communication and Information centered community media development and exchange programmes;
- Provision of information on technology purchase and maintenance especially in harsh weather conditions, such as the humidity of the tropical weather regions;
- The formulation and coordination of regional specific training modules. Appropriate and community-media centered training needs to be target group specific, to encompass the range

of people who will be engaged in such initiatives including management, volunteers, with a special emphasis on youth training;

- Strengthening of current mass media strategies to continue to utilize mass media. Even with community media one cannot afford to ignore the value of using mass media strategies.

fem'LINKpacific was founded in September 2000.

fem'LINKpacific came to be out of a desire to provide not just an alternative viewpoint, but also an additional viewpoint, to the coverage of issues by the mainstream media. It should be added that fem'LINKpacific is concerned not only with news coverage but also with radio and television programme productions and broadcasts, promotional campaigns and advertising/marketing. Since it was established, fem'LINKpacific has documented and produced a range of community-based productions to share its perspective and that of partner non-government organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs).

The idea of a fem'LINKpacific was inspired by the call to action to NGOs of the strategic objectives found in Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action: (1) to increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision making in and through the media and new technologies; and (2) to promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.

It was also inspired by UN Security Council Resolution 1325, where global leaders acknowledged the urgency of bringing women into peace building, and conflict prevention and resolution. The resolution advocates that women be assigned places at the peace-negotiating table and as key negotiators in all levels of conflict resolution. While lobbying the media industry to develop people-centred and gender-mainstream policies for increased accountability to their audience, we at fem'LINKpacific believe we should continue to pursue our own initiatives, which enables us to be engaged with community women's groups, in particular, to 'get their take' on the issues and have their stories heard, rather than relying on mainstream media for the projection of our position on the various issues.

THE MEDIA TODAY: Reflections from Fiji

So how has mass media evolved since the onset of the new digital era in broadcasting and media production?

What policy issues need to be considered to ensure that media, and information and communication technologies are used as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women?

Radio:

For many people of the south, radio remains the most cost effective technology to reach communities. However, the advances in radio technology, has not necessarily meant that radio stations are utilizing the new technology to develop, produce and broadcast more people-centered programming content. Even though the increased commercialization of the mass media has affected the public's access to and community content of a range of media outputs, especially radio, we remain reliant on the mass media and ICT media owners for

our key source of information, news and current affairs, entertainment. Community radio stations must therefore address this gap, and community media initiatives need to be assisted and supported.

In the Pacific Island region, deregulation of the radio industry and public sector reforms of the 1980s, has resulted in a transformation of the radio industry. Reduced government funding has seen computerization and radio automation resulting in the need to reduce staffing rather than to create an efficient production-driven programming environment. Coupled with commercialization trends, the technical advances one could argue, has probably resulted in more benefits for the commercial advertisers than anyone else. In the Fiji Islands, there exists a unique situation. The Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited (formerly the Fiji Broadcasting Commission) is in a contractual arrangement with the Fiji Government to operate 2 Public service broadcast stations. This arrangement is especially critical in news and information provision because the public service format, only in the Fijian and Hindustani languages, enables more information, or at least longer news bulletins in comparison to the commercial radio “sound byte” formats influenced predominantly by commercial forces. Public sector reform has also meant that the national radio station in particular, has lost much of its community centered ethos or values resulting in mostly music based programming and very little information or education based programmes, aside from what is required through the public service broadcast contract. However, this is not to say that some of the models of the commercial broadcast industry should not be considered for adaptation. In fact, the whole concept of social marketing is one way to instill a development approach to the use of the media, both by commercial advertisers and the NGO community as well, especially in relation to addressing youth issues. Despite these shortfalls, whilst the image media and dailies exert the greatest impact, radio still has the highest rate of penetration into all communities, regardless of socio-economic differences.

The opportunities made available because of the availability of the mobile phone and the lap top computer, has given radio more opportunity to access and broadcast from the community, especially as broadcast facilities are now even less cumbersome. Today, radio production requires minimalist efforts compared to the days of spooling and splicing tapes, as multi-skilled producers write, record, mix and distribute radio promos and advertisements through a networked system to radio stations. For newsrooms, radio technology has seen an increase in more portable recording and mixing units for use by field reporters; digital technical advances also enables radio networks to easily receive telephone calls from across the globe. *But what about from across the island?*

There are three different kinds of radio stations:

Public radio This is radio, which is owned and operated by the government. It is normally there to serve the general public in the way, which the government thinks is best.

Private radio This is radio, which is owned and operated by individuals or companies. The main purpose of this sort of station is to make money.

Community radio This is radio, which is owned and operated by a community or members of a community. The main purpose of this sort of station is to develop the community.

Around the world there is one thing that makes community radio different from other forms of radio. It is that the operators of community radio stations are more interested in participatory social development than in making money. Financial resource implications are wider for community broadcasters because it is the difference in profit margins that allow their commercial counterparts to invest in organizations, e.g. in the development of ICTs.

However, practical and sustainable information technology development would be the most practical avenue for community broadcasters to consider. This can be assisted by donor and development partners expanding their own criteria of assistance, especially during the aspects of the early development stages of such initiatives. If development agencies are committed to promoting the principles of democracy, peace and good governance then they must be willing to support the development stages as well as the production aspects of community media, especially as community broadcasting is a way to encourage information sharing and simply providing the community to communicate freely. The community participatory approach of community radio management advocated by AMARC Africa, for example, highlights a positive model and means of putting ICTs into the hands of the community, whether it is for women's development, peace building and reconciliation, promoting rural programmes or adolescent reproductive health. This participatory process must enable output production as well as develop and maintain a media education programme that will educate the community about not only utilizing community media but also assist community members in being educated users of the mass media.

Community radio can therefore be an important asset in developing partnerships across the media and corporate sector. Whilst a number of 'positive models' exist, it is imperative, that these be further encouraged especially in relation to technical resources. The philosophy behind establishing the values and missions of community broadcasters acts can be expanded to act as a basic guide when considering any aspect of ICTs:

- Technology must be used to develop the community
- Equipment must maximize participation, especially as a lot of new technology is meant to be more efficient, so it saves time, but it can also mean fewer people, which may not serve the interest of the community broadcaster
- Equipment must be safe and easy to maintain
- Equipment should also be as practical, use locally available resources, like solar energy, if self reliance is an important value
- Technology, especially transmission technology must also be community centered e.g. transmission sites or the location of an antenna should be for effective broadcast to the community

Television:

Television is a relatively new arrival to the Pacific Island region and still remains a more controversial medium than the less visual radio. This visual nature of the medium often leads to political misunderstandings coupled with overtures of media regulation by politicians who have had their feathers ruffled by a reporter or story. Whilst television provides a mirror on local and national traditional and customary practices, cultural considerations can pose particular challenges for television reporters and camerapersons

and producers, as many people shy away from appearing or being interviewed on camera. Such inherent cultural boundaries can often obstruct a producer/cameraperson from accessing footage, whereas foreign producers are often not so bound by such limitations at local level. It is unfortunate that the television culture has also assisted in portraying a somewhat homogenous version of cultural values and ideals especially in foreign produced programmes.

Television has probably had its biggest impact on the use of radio, as highlighted by Fiji Media Watch, in their overview of the Fiji Islands Media Industry:

“For a small country, with a population of three-quarters of a million people, Fiji has a relatively extensive media infrastructure. There are three major dailies (The Fiji Times, The Daily Post and Sun Fiji), one commercial television station (Fiji One), eight commercial radio stations, three monthly business magazines and a number of other commercial publications. A research media survey carried out in 2000 showed that newspaper readership is generally falling (Pacific Media Watch, April 2000). Yet, although Fiji One TV station claims to access 80% of Fiji’s population, newspapers have still a major role to play in Fiji society as a source of information. (Source: Lynda Duncan, Pacific Journalism Review June 2002, p.10-11). While the image media and dailies exert the greatest impact, radio probably still has the highest rate of penetration of Fiji’s homes and grassroots communities. Unfortunately, due to financial constrictions, radio has lost much of its public service ethos, with mostly music-heavy programmes and little thought provoking reporting. The full impact of the mass media came upon Fiji in the course of a relatively short period of time. Until the eighties, Fiji had escaped the brunt of this worldwide phenomenon, mainly because of geographical isolation. Video came in the eighties and spread fast. The advent of broadcast television in 1991 was a watershed and marked the final phase of Fiji’s initiation into the world of mass media”

According to the key players in the local industry, the biggest constraint to accessing local programmes is because television is an expensive medium, and whatever video camera and editing equipment they have are in high demand just to produce their current quota of local productions. Coupled with the profit driven directive from the boardroom and the stock exchange, we cannot rely on the television stations to produce any more programmes than they are. However, they should be encouraged to provide airtime for local productions by independent or community media producers.

As highlighted by Fiji Media Watch, not only is there a need to conduct comprehensive research to analyze the impact of new media forms, especially television and commercial radio formats, on local cultures, but to also assist local broadcasters, create a broadcast protocol that will enable more local programme content. Otherwise, many of our small island communities will end up knowing more about foreign cultures through imported programmes and devalue the practices of ‘home’.

Since the introduction of television, particularly here in Fiji and in most other Pacific Island countries, self-taught training has been a primary way of learning for most television journalists and producers, who have often had a radio or print background. This also means that local managers of newsrooms and production facilities require new technical and human

resource management skills. Training can assist, and until recently was limited to media organizations initiating and conducting their own in-house training programmes, but this tends to be undertaken in 'closed environment', with participation limited to staff members only, so there was not much of an opportunity for the sharing of information and in viewpoints from the community. Media watch groups and other media based NGOs collectively agree that training for media users, themselves is also long overdue, not only to ensure media consumers become more discerning rather than passive recipients, but to further assist media consumers to overcome the 'culture of silence' syndrome. After all the essence of democracy is that people can speak their minds, but they need to be encouraged, and taught and encouraged to express, convey and even transmit their ideas and viewpoints, in a way most suitable to them in their 'local' setting.

Online Media:

The use of the information super highway in the lead up to and since the staging of the United Nations Fourth World Conference of Women in 1995, helped strengthen and extend information sharing and access to information from the conference, well beyond the boundaries of previous global conferences. These Internet-based strategies signaled the power of the Internet as a tool for use by women for information dissemination and communication. The potential of the Internet to be an open communication system, with democratic access to information, provides valuable opportunity for women's organizations to establish their own spaces and sites, whilst also influencing the character of online culture in favor of gender balance and non-discrimination. Coupled with the technical advances made in the television and radio industry, ICTs have developed a new sphere for development based interaction that, in an ideal environment, can virtually link rural women, village women to share information and advice on a range of projects and programmes which can assist them and improve their families well being.

The developments in ICTs have enabled not only the mass media to expand its functions and outputs, but it has also created new challenges for today's journalists, radio producers, as well as executives and policy makers, especially in regards to access to and use of information derived from the Internet. Today, a journalist does not even have to step outside the newsroom to access research data, audio or video clips for a story or bulletin, whilst at the same time produce to broadcast or publish 'on-line' to a whole new audience, outside of their own country. But this access to a world wide web of information highlights the challenge journalists have, to sift through mounds of information and emails especially to authenticate information and sources. And let us not forget that even a computer is vulnerable and can crash!

The opportunities offered to the mass media have also enabled women's groups and non-government organizations to extend their own outreach, exchange information, and strengthen professional networks that are women 'online'. To ensure true equity in these developments we must ensure that village based communities on the ground have equitable access to and participation in the decision making in relation to the developments of the 'global village in cyber space'.

Writing on "Web Publishing in the Pacific" (Chapter 13, "The Pacific Journalist, A Practical Guide) the former coordinator of the Journalism Studies of the University of the South

Pacific (USP), David Robie highlights that although the phenomenal growth of the internet at first left the Pacific floundering in its wake, the news media in Fiji, Tonga and Papua New Guinea, in particular, have been pioneers in online websites. This process, according to Robie, has opened an instant (positive) window to the world on their social development, culture, socio-political issues in a manner that was previously inconceivable for print editions and surface mail library copies. It has also enabled more local perspectives to be shared, particularly by Pacific Island countries, as many websites on our region, have been, until recently been in the tourism picture postcard database-style, constructed by foreign online producers. The Internet (according to Robie) provides an infrastructure, which enables communications and information services to be used by potentially millions of individual and organizations around the world. This network of computer driven communication, without a central focus of control enables the exchange of ideas and information in a manner not possible via traditional electronic and print media.

In traditional media, as Robie points out, the functions carried out by the content provider, the broadcaster or the publishers and the audience are relatively fixed, domestic based and highly regulated, at least in the case of broadcasting. In contrast the functions carried out by participants in the online environment are more fluid and involve many participants from all over the world.

University online training programmes are now enabling a new crop of 'trainees' to be equipped with the editorial and ethical and technical skills to become news media professionals in and for 'a new age'. New outputs for online publishing and broadcasts are also creating new employment opportunities in the mass media newsrooms. Robie also notes that online publishing is also an outlet for journalists who may not want to conform or remain within the boundaries of mass media organizations and add their authentic voice to cyberspace without the overhead costs associated with print publishing. Advances in desk top publishing has enabled better production of community magazines and publications. In the Pacific Island region, most notably in Fiji and Papua New Guinea, journalism students are given the opportunity to undertake tangible training through output driven productions including the Wansolwara student newspaper at the USP campus in Suva. The USP journalism programme recently launched WanSolVision, a television news service that is designed to provide journalism students a chance to produce regular news bulletins to be broadcast via the university's regional satellite network.

Online writing and editing is not only a specialist branch of journalism, it is also a specialist form of advocacy communication that requires specialist training and capacity building for non government organizations to be able to produce and maintain their publication on the worldwide web, even in the Pacific. According to Robie, the online publishing explosion, which has resulted in the phenomenal growth of the Internet means, that journalists, not just mainstream publishers, have a potential audience of millions. Robie remains hopeful that in spite of the high costs because of the Pacific Islands telecommunications monopolies, this is still a fraction of what it costs to publish conventional newspapers or other publications. But one must be aware of the danger of newsrooms spend more time focusing on producing and disseminating more information and news online and offshore, rather than giving due consideration to local content and issues, especially when in least developing countries. This means rural communities, where many stories are born, can be further marginalized, as journalists look off shore for sources, rather than within their own communities.

What does online publishing mean for the traditional newspaper? Robie cites Mary Lou Fulton, Managing Editor of the Washington Post Online Edition who states that: “*Whilst for the online readers of the north, electronic media offers newspapers potential in terms of virtually limitless space, increased timeliness of stories and the ability to make the paper more interactive on the web.*” This is not an issue for Pacific Island online media publishers, after all only a tiny proportion of the region’s population has access to the Internet. The target markets for existing online sites are actually expatriate Pacific islanders, business people and academics and others with a watching brief or interest in the region’s development and commercial affairs.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s (ABC) resident journalist in Papua New Guinea, Richard Dinnen, highlights from a practical perspective, how useful the Internet has become for media, primarily as another outlet for already established services. Not only do online editions enable people in another geographical regions of the globe access publications, but also email is cheap and effective way for journalists to also make contact across vast distances across the Pacific Island region. He reports that the ABC now routinely uses the web and email to file its stories. Foreign correspondents can load their voice and report for radio into a laptop computer, compress it using new technologies, attach it to an email and send it home for broadcast. The result is crisp, clear studio sound, usually for the costs of a local call. But whilst he highlights the efficiency of using a laptop and digital edit programmes for both video and audio production he also points out the reality of the costs especially from the Pacific Island perspective. As Dillen also points out, in the Pacific, the Internet is not yet quite an effective means of delivering news. Access requires a computer and a phone line, items beyond the means of so many people in the region. The cost of access to an Internet service provider is another barrier as is the quality of telephone lines, which all add up to the growing, digital divide.

Overcoming the Hurdles:

To counteract discrimination and stereotyping, women have increasingly created alternative communication forms outside the mainstream media. Women’s print media, video, film, radio broadcasting and now ICTs are progressively balancing the scales. However, many also women need greater support, especially those in the south, to access and participate in decision making structures, in order to secure the opportunity to defend their rights, and to access either mass or community media:

Women will then be able to strengthen their advocacy campaigns to promote peace and conflict resolution and reconciliation, address economic policies, which further debilitate their poverty stricken lives. But first, all efforts need to be intensified to increase the proportion of content in all media that is devoted to the women’s viewpoint. Certainly there exists a portion of programming that may account for women but it is still too small in fact to make sustainable headway in addressing gender policy issues. Whatever women’s content there maybe, it is often advertiser-driven, so obviously uncomfortable issues of poverty or health problems are not going to fit into the ‘perfect world of advertising.’

Communication strategies are at the heart of the empowerment of people, and women must ensure that the technologies available serve to empower, not overpower us. In fact, our

perspective must be included in all levels of development, not just telecommunications, but water, fuel, health and trade. We are part of development, and so our viewpoint must be acknowledged and taken into account. This can start as simply as the establishment of computer literacy programmes, staged at local telecentres. Political will transformed through enabling policy, the provision of technical and financial resources for infrastructure and telecommunication developments, can assist in mobilizing communities throughout the world, to become equal partners in their social and economic development, thus making them more effective participants in the political arena, with the capacity to negotiate to uphold and maintain their values in a growing commercialized global media environment.

Advances in ICTs represent a dramatic media revolution, but a media revolution that must also take into account the people of the revolution. The digital 'rich' are accountable to the digital 'poor'. There are two ways to consider the access issues in the online context because today, the basic requirements are a computer, a modem and a quality telephone line. In the development context these are still highly priced commodities for rural communities, so while urban-based NGOs/CSOs online publishing and access to the worldwide web has meant that they are able to provide their perspective to interested partners in across the globe, the dilemma of course is whether our local priority should be to establish websites and then take on the responsibility of upgrading etc – but then remaining limited in our community to our local constituents. At the same time, particularly for south-based NGOs, one needs to keep to mind that we do not create our own digital divide between the IT-haves and the IT-have nots.

It is this digital divide which makes one challenge the notion of the 'global village' which from 'our perspective in the south' does not truly reflect the reality that rural communities and even some urban communities remain limited in their access to basic telecommunications services, let alone other primary needs, including access to clean water, transport services and good housing. Yes we can talk about a 'global village' but only when ICTs actively assist in the development and management of agricultural, water, health or income generating projects. That is when we can say ICTs have impacted positively on all women. That is when we can all be part of a 'global village.'

Even though women's groups have advocated for the mass media industry to create more spaces we need to expedite all efforts to learn, understand and participate in the digital debate and developments. Countries need to get serious about investing in the infrastructure to make the new technologies work the way they ought, work for development, enabling all citizens to participate and benefit from the global developments in that sector. This is one way to enable and increase women's access to the media. Despite progress made in accessing and utilizing mass media and ICTs, many women, especially women in the 'south' remain marginalized, and will remain so, unless a more development centered approach is taken to the new technology, and use this to address the critical areas of concern of the BPfA.

But a word of caution, while there is much excitement about the new media, such as web-broadcasting media internationally, it must be understood that the new media support should no way replace women's access to, or addressing 'our long time concerns' with the older media especially radio broadcasting.

Initiatives such as the use of the net-casting ‘moebius’ enables radio stations to share scripts and audio clips with each other and at the same time is also being used by FIRE, the Feminist International Radio Endeavor. The initiatives from the 1995 NGO Forum in Huairou, China, enabled the global women’s movement to transcend the earlier boundaries of access to technology. But what about the women where these advances have barely made it into the mainstream of technology?

In April this year, the National Council of Women Fiji undertook an informal stock-take of our membership to address our organization’s limitations as a coordinating body for a diverse range of women’s groups, clubs and national organizations. It was found that while many of our members initiate, conduct and manage programmes and projects (through donor assistance) most lack the basic tools for efficient project administration, communication and information dissemination i.e. a computer, a phone or fax machine, let alone Internet connection. Even the Ministry of Women’s field officers, who play a critical role as the community based focal points for the government on women’s issues, have very limited technical support. If we are going to address what limits women’s development in the context of new information technology, we must be prepared to also challenge donors and other development agencies who create the policies that usually prevent women’s groups from accessing such equipment. If donors expect NGOs to manage their projects effectively and efficiently, they must be prepared to also provide the appropriate technological tools not only for the period of a project, but also the long term.

As Fiji Media Watch President, Father Larry Hannan, shares, “Technologies are neither good nor bad. They wait to be used, and the people who seize the opportunities to use them will be the ones to influence our future.”

One of the biggest overarching barriers to women accessing not only ICTs but also even the print, radio and television media is our own case of ‘techno phobia’. Community based strategies can assist by sharing training information, technical guidelines and conducting practical skills training:

The National Council of Women Fiji’s Media Mainstreaming Initiative has developed and conducted a series of workshops that brings together women and their mass media partners in a collaborative approach to producing media campaigns. Not only do the workshop programmes assist the media organization understand the women’s groups but the women themselves are put into the media environment during the training period to get ‘tangible’ experience and a basic working knowledge of the specific media.

Just as women are being encouraged to pick up a video camera or audio recording equipment to document and produce her-stories, so women need to be encouraged to acquire the knowledge and skills, especially in relation to accessing and using computers and the Internet, in order to effectively participate in global advocacy, lobbying and communication networks. This is one way to ensure the women’s viewpoint, are shared across and throughout all the regions of the globe.

What do we Use in the Field?

fem'LINKpacific's Community Media Production team does not use the broadcast-format cameras and equipment that most TV professionals or commercial producers use, in fact we have a very 'low budget' approach using a JVC GR-DV2000 video camera, with a light-weight but sturdy "Leader" tripod. Footage is shot on long-play digital tape and a simple hand held mike is used for interviews although the in-built camera mike provides good quality stereo sound.

So whilst existing electronic networks are enabling some women to undertake training through the availability of online training, we must also ensure that policies create a framework, which will enable media output productions. Women need to also master access tools so as to make best use of ICTs, such as to use the Internet publishing tools, to develop their own publishing and media activities, as paradigms of gender-sensitive media products.

Women's limited access or even inability to access media, let alone technology, is actually a reflection of the personal, institutional and systematic barriers, including traditional practices, which are still inherent in many societies today. Other drawbacks include gender barriers such as illiteracy, time, costs, geographical location and social cultural norms means women have to continue to play 'development catch up'. These are important factors for consideration, if we want to ensure the women's perspective at all levels of decision-making and implementation; after all, one of the best ways to mainstream the gender perspective is through the media.

We need to also realize that it is the media professionals who can ensure enabling policy frameworks will become practical action for women working in the industry, to assist them to aim higher 'than the glass ceiling'. Working in collaboration with NGO partners, media organizations can be facilitators of sensitizing sessions and programmes that can assist their producer, technical staff and journalists all work together to bridge the gender divide.

Steps need to be put in place to ensure effective coordination and linkages with and to useful contacts and websites. Existing training initiatives also need to be reviewed and expanded to be more enabling and with a long term approach to capacity building of both media practitioners and women's NGOs. ICT driven programmes can also be used to facilitate networking and to create greater information exchange, especially for media educators.

In order to achieve greater diversity and fairer gender balance in media outputs, education and media institutions such as Commonwealth Broadcasters Association, Asian Broadcast Union, can work together with women's media networks to develop and trial training modules to address women and media concerns in relation to mass media and ICT development, so that as a new breed of on line or mass media producers and journalists are trained, they will be sensitive and aware of gender issues. These modules can then be adapted for regional and sub regional implementation, also in a collaborative approach between media and NGOs.

Serious consideration must also be given to:

- Lack of access by many women to actual equipment, and address the causes of such limitations including the high cost and in some regions women are still waiting to get connected
- The need for women-centered training timetable, to assist women to have the time to learn and practice new technology, especially when globally have so much demand on their time, how much time can they realistically afford to invest in media work? Collective support especially financial support needs to be invested into these women's training and production time; such training opportunities actually offer employment and training opportunities for youth groups
- The provision of appropriate technology training need to be optimized by also providing help with the resources for training, supplies, upkeep, ongoing costs such as telephone time and security
- The need for such training to be adapted into the local language; one should not assume that the lingua franca of all countries is English, especially for the least developed countries; more support and outreach needs to address women specifically using local languages and dialects.

Furthermore, we need to:

- Ensure that ICTs are able to assist in conflict prevention, peace building, etc, especially to promote women's initiatives, as supported and articulated in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325
- Provide a people centered approach to development by linking ICTs into the development mainframe of national development policies, especially to assist national machineries for women to link into their partner agencies and government ministries
- Assist the mass media professionals to undertake capacity building and training to best utilize new ICTs for journalists, programme producers, IT technicians, and give greater consideration to the gender perspective in such initiatives
- Ensure that ICT training programmes take into account specific regional and national needs and capacity
- Collectively address issues of pornography, violence, the safety of child users and the challenges in addressing copyright issues on 'the net' through the strengthening of existing media watch groups to be strengthened to also monitor pornographic and other dangerous websites

We also need to support mechanisms and initiatives which will enable:

- Greater content development, production and dissemination
- Use of local languages and dialects, as a way to also assist in the protection and preservation of indigenous and traditional cultures, especially in the pacific island region
- Community media producers to establish and maintain websites to not only increase awareness of their findings through their community media outputs, but to also create linkages with likeminded organizations

- The staging of regional web-broadcasts especially to promote and enhance women's roles in peace-building and conflict resolution
- NGO youth networks to be supported especially through the establishment of youth computer centers; this will be a more enabling environment to assist young women to articulate their concerns, because they are the 'new media' generation
- ICTs should be used to give greater visibility and support to not only women's groups but also to support other marginalized groups, including sexual minorities

From global to national levels, women remain invisible in the decision-making and developments related to the formulation of telecommunication development policies, including allocation and accessibility to this major resource. Whilst the global communication experience extends each day and regulatory mechanisms and policy makers continue to be addressed only from the perspective of the IT or ICT supplier and not the user. Most countries are in the embryonic stages of drafting legislation and policy in relation to new media. Hand in hand in new policy formulation is the timely review of existing mass media policy issues, especially to strengthen the further advancement of the status of women.

ICT policy makers need to ensure that women are:

- Provided with gender sensitive information on these issues
- Able to articulate their needs during the formulation of any policy documents in relation to IT and ICTs
- Able to effectively participate in decision making on network development and evolve alternative and gender sensitive practices
- Provided with the opportunity to develop and design appropriate uses of new technology; this is especially important to enhance the skills of women already working in the mass and new media
- Provided with the appropriate skills to develop radio and broadcast formats for use for the commercial media
- Assisted to acquire and utilize appropriate technology for the production of community centered radio and television programmes
- Assisted to find the financial resources to establish and maintain their media initiatives, including community radio station, including the legal and management assistance to apply regulatory guidelines to this development

ICT policy makers must also work collectively to discourage the use of new technology for pornography, pedophilia, graphic violence, and work to uphold the principles agreed to in Durban 2001

We will need policy that will:

- Engage women in open dialogue and policy formulation about critical information and ICTs issues and concerns through government, NGO and trade unions

- Enable transparent and accountable affirmative action policies to encourage more young women, with a special focus on young people of the south, to choose career paths in the technological field of the media
- Enable school programmes that will provide both urban and rural schools with technical equipment/resources to document their school events and produce community based school news
- Ensure development and donor agencies and organizations take into account the need to review current donor policies in order to assist in bridging the digital divide, especially to assist rural telecommunication infrastructure development through development driven, e.g. Computer for Food assisting in rural farming projects
- Ensure women have equal access to training programmes that will assist in increasing their capacity to address technical and IT development
- Ensure women will have equal access to computer communications technology and networks
- Gender needs to be fully integrated into ICT policies with special needs of the women of the south
- More research on not only the needs of women at regional and sub regional level but also to answer questions of access, usage, ownership and regulatory policies
- ICTs must be promoted as a development tool especially for women in the south. Policy makers will work towards guaranteeing universal access to all forms of communication because access to information is a human right
- Work towards an ICT-environment which is not used to further divide communities as this can lead to conflict situations between urban and rural communities as well as between various ethnic groups
- Encourage and support community media initiatives, as these are tangible ways of advancing women's empowerment because women will be able to address their own issues and articulate their concerns in the spaces and formats that they choose most appropriate for them
- We must remind ourselves that policies are there to enable action and that we must also collectively act to ensure that we continue to strengthen, support and encourage women media executives and policy planners to be empowered to 'maintain a women's perspective' during their development, and as a means to enhance professional standards in all levels and all aspects of the media

A lot has to be done, a lot needs to be coordinated and in considering an effective process to not only address the gaps, emerging issues and obstacles in achieving the strategic objectives of Section J of the BPfA, some clear direction has been articulated by ISIS Manila in “Changing Lenses: Women’s Perspectives on Media” including:

- The need to establish an effective global women-and-media coordinating mechanism, which will be actively assisted and supported by United Nations bodies including the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as a means to bring together all existing initiatives and achievements of women in the media all over the world, and to act as a coordinating mechanism to ensure the simultaneous pursuit of high quality research, monitoring, training, policy advocacy, production and lobbying for the advancement of women in the media, including community media
- The need for NGOs, governments and other non state actors to work towards ensuring that regulatory mechanisms on the media are established, which not only reflect the values of an

inclusive society, including gender justice, preservation of human rights, diversity of cultural expression, sexualities and lifestyles, and sustainable development.

- A Convention on Women and Media which addresses problems of diversity, human rights and gender issues using existing international conventions and instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as models.
- Government, development partners, mass media and all other stakeholders to support old and new forms of information and communication including community radio, alternative video and access television, community internet and computer networking and alternative print media.

All efforts must be made therefore, to influence policy planners and implementers, especially in the preparation to and during the upcoming World Summit on the Information Society, to realize the vision of community media producers, regardless of geographical location, gender, economic and social status to be able to use the tools now available to traditional and new media, to share their stories with urban and rural communities in their countries, as well as with the rest of the world.

Conclusion

Despite the headway in changing women-and-media relationships many unresolved issues remain on the feminist agenda even as new issues emerge. Whilst we continue to challenge issues relating to the coverage of issues relating to violence and pornography, as well as the representation and portrayal of women, we are now being challenged to address the uses of new information communication technologies, which pose more complex problems for the women-in-media situation. Just as we empower and train women to understand policies and issues for social, political and economic arena we now need to incorporate communication and media as development issues. International mechanisms, including the United Nations and other media institutions, can help facilitate “the ICT agenda” as development issues especially as governments are directly responsible for the related infrastructure and policy formulation aspects.

We need to strengthen all efforts to build on the gains made to ensure equal access to all forms for communication for all women and that will require a thorough review and analysis of the progress made since the commitments made in Beijing 1995. It is time for a global realization and commitment that because women are media owners, producers, activists, consumers, we deserve a United Nations Convention that will thoroughly address our issues in relation to all forms of media, and also enable governments to also realize that the media is a critical component of national development.

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