Preliminary brief on the online discussion

Women and the Media

Conducted by the UN Department of Public Information

1 – 28 February 2010

The discussion on "Women and the Media" was part of a series of United Nations online discussions dedicated to the fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000); and was coordinated by WomenWatch, an inter-agency project of the United Nations Inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and an unique electronic gateway to web-based information on all United Nations entities' work and the outcomes of the United Nations' intergovernmental processes for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. For more information and other "Beijing at 15" online discussions, visit http://www.un.org/womenwatch/beijing15/

Preliminary brief on the online discussion forum on Women and the Media
Conducted by the UN Department of Public Information
from 1 to 28 February 2010
in support of the Beijing+15 review process

Introduction

The online forum was organized and moderated by the Strategic Communications Division of the UN Department of Public Information (DPI). Individual journalists, media organizations and networks, members of academia and representatives of non-governmental organizations were invited to participate. Invitations to participate were sent to the UN press corps, UN Information Centres (who were asked to distribute it in their regions), the DAW contact list of NGOs and those involved in the CSW, as well as to a list of approximately 300 individuals and organizations active on the issue of Women and the Media, found through Internet research. DAW contacted the IANGWE focal points to inform them of the discussion.

The discussion was held for the first time on Facebook, a social media. Over 325 people became "fans" of the page. Twitter was also used to drive traffic to the Facebook page. As of 22 February, 128 participants from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Pacific Islands and the United States shared their experiences regarding women and the media.

DPI solicited inputs on the following themes:
- **Week One – 1 to 7 February:** Achieving gender equality in media organizations through adequate policies;
- **Week Two – 8-14 February:** Addressing the gender gap (Equal Jobs – Equal Pay) – Women working in the media;
- **Week Three – 15-21 February:** Portrayal of women in the media and gender stereotyping;
- **Week Four – 22-28 February:** Violence against women journalists and any other issues; and wrap-up and recommendations.

2. Theme One: "Achieving Gender Equality in Media Organizations through Adequate Policies."

1. The online discussion sought insights into the status of women working in media organizations. It asked participants to indicate if adequate policies were adopted to promote gender equality and if women's participation and access to decision-making and leadership positions in various countries had increased, in order to understand the factors that hinder women's access to leadership positions. It also requested participants to share initiatives taken by organizations at the country level towards achieving gender equality.

2.1 Country experiences

2. In sharing their experiences, participants from developed and developing countries alike indicated slow change in the situation in respect to gender equality in media organizations. They observed that the number of women breaking through the glass ceiling to reach senior leadership positions was rising at a slow pace. The percentage was quite low in comparison with the overall number of women who joined media organizations. They observed that men were still the ones overwhelmingly holding key positions in media organizations and bodies governing media. This was "automatically reflected in the editorial choices a newspaper or other medium makes," as one participant stated. Another participant (Nigeria) noted that she could not "think of any policies meant to promote women's participation in the media" in her country.

3. Some participants (Azerbaijan, Cameroon and USA) felt that change which "might impact on the industry as well as the viewers and listeners" could occur if women were proactive and were to be CEOs and owners of broadcast properties. Building strong networks was another possible way to effect change. In this regard, some participants (Cameroon, Canada, Netherlands, Nigeria) deplored that the few women who did climb to the top were keener on becoming part of the "brotherhood circle" than supporting other women still on their way. "It is 2010. It should no longer be a struggle for women to be in management positions. It should no longer be that a woman cannot change policies and practices of an organization to make it more inclusive of those 'other than the boys club'…," stated a participant from Fiji.

2.2 Representation of women at decision-making levels in media organizations and in boards governing media

4. Several participants from Cameroon, New Zealand, Nigeria, Uganda and United Kingdom shared examples of women holding senior positions in media organizations. Some of these women worked in governmental media structures. It was noted that generally such appointments were considered political. Some participants reported that the situation was quite different within private, independent media organizations, owned by men, where the number of women employed at senior levels was much lower -- almost non-existent. Some examples of contributions include:

- According to Anne Guedheu Youmbi, President of the Association of Professional African Women in Communications (APAC) in Cameroon, in the government structures such as the national TV or Cameroon Tribune, the governmental daily newspaper, journalists were appointed at all levels. For instance, the General Director of SOPECAM, the government structure that owns the Cameroon Tribune, was a female journalist; and there are a few others holding decision-making positions in the national broadcaster.

- Chinyere Fred-Adegbulugbe, Chief Correspondent at The Punch, a national daily newspaper in Nigeria, reported that the Managing Director of the News Agency of Nigeria was a woman, Ms. Remi Oyo.

- Lisa Williams-Lahari, from the Pacific Wave Media network in New Zealand, reported that there were Pacific women in media leadership to be found across all mainstream media: print, radio, TV, online and in particular, alternative community media forms. "Their existence is not tokenistic, as it is purely on the basis of their work, perseverance and effort that they got to where they are. But they remain a minority, and you only have to look at the regional media association for that proof. In the 30 or so years that the Pacific Islands News Association has existed, only one woman has led it as President. The position itself has become so male-owned that potential women encouraged by us to stand for leadership have said no, because they didn't want to deal with the problems and politics involved in merely standing for election, let alone taking on the work of leading media regionalism!"

- Alison Clarke, Founder and co-editor of Women's Views on News, United Kingdom, indicated that "there are very few senior women in the newspaper field in the UK. There are a number of women editors of magazines but very few in more senior areas. This is all completely anecdotal as I'm not sure of the exact numbers but I would say that 95% of newspaper editors are men. As you go up the hierarchy there are fewer and fewer women."

- As regards the situation in the boards governing media, Daisy Anne Namono, Board member of Uganda Broadcasting Corporation, mentioned that her country had a number of statutory bodies governing media and national broadcasting and print media houses. To the best of her knowledge all these were headed by men. "There is a woman at the level of Deputy Managing Director at the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation and a few others at the level of Manager Radio or Editors. . . . The institutional structure does not allow effective participation of the Deputy Managing Director in decision-making." She observed that since boards governing media were statutory, at least one third of the positions on the Board were occupied by women. "The role of these firms is to ensure that the mandate of the institution is exercised. Since gender is not mainstreamed in the media industry, the participation of women is often ignored. On the Board I sit on, we try as much as possible to ensure that women get to occupy decision-making positions in management by ensuring that all women who qualify for the position are given the opportunity to compete for it, but we face the challenge when women fail to excel at interviews. There is always the debate of "not compromising performance of the institution.""

5. All participants acknowledged that a great number of women were mainly working at the low and middle levels.

- Diane Sutter, President/CEO of ShootingStar TV, USA, stated that in the US, they have made great strides towards getting more women into entry-level and middle-management roles in the broadcasting media over the last 25 years, though it has not been easy. "Women have had the most success in the sales ranks, where they have shown great talent and have become the top billers in many radio and television stations. Having said that, the upper level ranks of CEOs and owners have not had the same level of growth."

- Anne Autio, Managing Editor for the European Journalism Centre, The Netherlands, mentioned that "the Nordic countries are often viewed as exemplary, when it comes to equal opportunities for people from all walks of life, and gender issues are often pushed aside as if they were not a problem at all. Unfortunately, this is not the case. In Finnish newspapers, there are precious few

women editors-in-chief. Even on the news manager level, 60 % of managers are males. At the same time, the majority of journalism students in the universities are females and in 2008, more than half (56.4%) of members of the Journalists' Union were women." Currently, a major study is being conducted in Finland, to find out why the careers of women journalists usually stop at the lower management level. The career break to have babies is just too simple an explanation, so a fuller picture is needed."

2.3 Factors that hinder women in reaching senior positions

6. Participants cited the following reasons as factors that prevented women from reaching senior positions in media organizations:

- Lack of gender responsive policies
- Lack of skills and high professional standards
- Lack of effective networking by women
- Cultural factors
- Prejudice: women being kept in certain types of reporting

2.4 **Initiatives/Achievements**

7. Participants from Azerbaijan, Uganda and the USA shared initiatives taken at the state level and by non-governmental organizations to promote women's role in the media.

- Daisy Anne Namono, Board member of Uganda Broadcasting Corporation, reported that the principle of affirmative action that compelled all statutory institutions to have 30% representation of women was enshrined in the constitution of Uganda. She said that so far, women were well represented in the political arena; for instance, the current Minister of Information was a woman. But "the representation of women at professional levels and management levels is still very low."

- Diane Sutter, President/CEO, ShootingStar TV (USA), stated that most of the women she knew at the most senior levels were doing a lot to help mentor other women. She cited as an example the American Women in Radio and Television Organization of which she was a past National President. This organization "is all about helping women grow in the industry and to advocate on behalf of women in the industry as well as to ensure the positive portrayal of women in the media. The organization holds a large, industry awards program called the Gracies, to highlight excellence in programs about, for or by women."

3. Theme Two: Addressing the gender gap (equal jobs-equal pay) for women working in the media

8. All participants agreed that there was still a gender gap for women working in the media. As one of them noted: "gender disparities within the media reflect the reality of our society and the overall status of women." They felt that jobs dominated by women were low-paid for several reasons: partly due to

the "baby break", partly due to vertical segregation (more women at the bottom of the hierarchy and far more men at the top) and partly due to discrimination. They were also of the opinion that women had to do a better job of negotiating for themselves and not just accept what was being offered. "You're worth it if you think you are... stand up for yourself. You might be surprised at what you get," advised a participant.

3.1 Country-specific situations

- Alison Clarke, a UK participant, said, "We have had 40 years of equal pay legislation in the UK and yet there is still a pay gap of about 17% (there are different stats used at different times by different people so this is very much an average) for the average hourly pay rate of full time women workers compared to full time male workers." She further noted that there had been endless government reports on the causes of the pay gap but very little meaningful activity. "At the moment the government is still refusing to introduce compulsory pay audits whereby companies would have to audit the pay of everyone in their organization to ascertain if there is a pay gap, which they would then have to do something about," she remarked.

- Lisa Williams from the Pacific Islands noted that many media employers were in the private sector and did not have an obligation to divulge and were suspicious of any attempts to ask about pay scales. She had undertaken studies on the situation of Pacific women in media and found this was a major stumbling block, especially because the industry had a high turnover and good workers would often switch employers within a very small media base. "We are talking about small island economies of scale which are beyond the comprehension of multi-national conglomerates," she stated, adding: "One thing that seemed to work at least from the little I have seen of New Zealand media and women in them is the need for formalized, embedded remuneration scales which are contestable and performance-driven." This would allow for some transparency and women would have a process to promote themselves. She also observed that the issue of privacy over pay scales resurfaces. Often a woman would not know what men at her level are getting, so she wouldn't know she was being paid less for the same, usually more, effort.

3.2 Main reasons for the gender gap

9. For participants, the following reasons were factors that prevented women from reaching senior positions in media organizations:

- Occupational segregation
- Slower career progression
- Discrimination
- Lack of preparedness
- Lack of negotiating skills
- Lack of support system

4. Theme Three: Portrayal of women in media and gender stereotyping

10. In discussing the proposed theme of the third week of the online forum, "Portrayal of women in media and gender stereotyping," several participants referred to the upcoming findings of the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), which they said would help determine if there had been any progress or positive change in terms of women's representation in the media since the 2005 GMMP. One participant stressed that the results need to receive publicity once released.

Country-specific experiences

11. In the meantime, most participants reported that there had been minimal changes. Women were still being presented in highly stereotypical ways that 'limit' their potential. It was suggested that "ALL staff in the newsroom (and not only women journalists) undertake training on the need to produce quality content that balances the image of men and women."

- For Chinyere Fred-Adegbukugbe of Nigeria, the issue of negative portrayal of women is quite complex because "most of these women, especially those of them who appear on products that sometimes have absolutely nothing to do with women, see these activities as meal tickets. And because men, especially in this part of the world, have refused to see most women other than as men-pleasers, one tends to lose the war at both ends."

- Maureen Isaacson**,** Assistant Editor, Sunday Independent, Johannesburg, South Africa, stated that "repeatedly we are told that sex, or the depiction of women as sex objects, is 'what the readers want'. Stereotypes of the dancing, open-mouthed female are given half a page of broadsheet, at least. We should accept this or suffer the consequences -- which would be a world without news. There is no conclusive evidence that newspapers that do not display such demeaning stereotypes sink, but the status quo takes us back to pre-feminist era and keeps us there." She also added that in South Africa professional women had risen to the top of all fields, yet their faces were seen less than those of their male counterparts, their voices heard less frequently. "This dialogue asks whether it is not time for a major shift in the way women are portrayed in the media, but the male editors of newspapers seem to be taking their sweet time about deciding when to make that shift. Women are readily labeled 'raging feminists' for asking for less of the men who control this kind of imagery," she observed.

12. Anne Autio, Managing Editor for the European Journalism Centre, The Netherlands, was of the opinion, however, that, looking at the media (especially television) in the Netherlands and other EU member states, a twisted sense of "equality" prevailed. "All groups of people - women and men, girls and boys, ethnic and religious minorities, the youth and the elderly, etc - are depicted in stereotypical ways. Especially the exploitation of sexual images of men has rapidly increased in the past few years, and is currently as common as the exploitation of women."

4.2 Initiatives/Responses

Below are initiatives presented by some participants:

- Sikhonzile Ndlovu (South Africa) noted that one positive development had been the signing of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which has set clear targets for achieving gender equality in different areas, including the media. It was hoped that it will address issues around media decision-making structures and representation in content. "It has often been argued that the negative media portrayals are because there are very few women in decision-making positions that can influence content," she stated.

- Ariel Dougherty, co-founder of Women Make Movies, observed that with 16,800 hours a week of TV (via satellite) in the US, not one hour was devoted to feminist news and women's stories and that most women's media organizations and projects fell through the cracks of the vast majority of funding opportunities. She reported on a new initiative – the Media Equity Collaborative – through which they did a survey of women's media organizations and projects in 2009. It came out of the survey that most of these organizations had very slim resources and that there has been a great upsurge of new women's media organizations in the US in the last decade.

- According to Helen Rusetskaya of Georgia, the media in her country lacked good ethics. She reported that she was working on fundraising for the production and publishing of a code of ethics for journalism. It is hoped that this project would help improve the portrayal of women in the Georgian media.

This week (22-28 February), participants will discuss violence against women journalists and wrap up the online forum and discuss recommendations.