



# “Unequal in an Unequal World: Gender Dimensions of Communication Rights”

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## **Introduction**

At the Global Ethics Forum (GEF) Working Session and Public Forum held in Geneva, Switzerland, 27-28 June 2013, a paper on “Media Ethics and Citizen Journalism” reviewed the context of the democratic public sphere in which citizen journalists claim to operate, the changing scene of new information and communication technologies, the shifting ground of professional journalism in the light of perceived challenges from the grassroots, and briefly touched on the concepts of “engaged dialogue” and “deep conversation” as models of communicative action.

The paper articulated understandings of citizen journalism and early attempts to identify the ethical principles on which it might take shape. In conclusion, it pointed to two documents – a policy brief on “The Right to Blog” published by ARTICLE 19 and the “Learning Resource Kit for Gender-Ethical Journalism and Media House Policy” published by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) – as potential sources for a generic set of ethical principles for citizen journalism.

During the meeting, it was decided to follow up this initial survey with a second paper focusing on gender equality as a key issue on the global human rights agenda and to examine how digital platforms and citizen journalism are contributing to greater awareness of women’s rights, gender justice, and to strengthening a contemporary ethics of communication.

## **Background to the Debate**

In 1948 the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and thirty-three years later, in 1981, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) entered into force. Yet it still took until 25 June 1993 for the UN World Conference on Human Rights to rededicate itself to “the global task of

promoting and protecting all human rights and fundamental freedoms” and to affirm that “All human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated” by adopting what became known as the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA).

The VDPA paid particular attention to women’s rights, declaring that:

“The human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. The full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community.”

The same section (I/18) went on to say:

“Gender-based violence and all forms of sexual harassment and exploitation, including those resulting from cultural prejudice and international trafficking, are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person, and must be eliminated. This can be achieved by legal measures and through national action and international cooperation in such fields as economic and social development, education, safe maternity and health care, and social support.”

Two years later, the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing (1995) focused on “Women’s empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power” and produced global commitments to advancing a wide range of women’s rights. The momentum that gathered pace in Beijing led to the inclusion of gender equality and women’s empowerment as one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (2000), addressing what many perceived as promises that had not been kept. The Beijing Conference was also notable for its focus on women and the media. In particular, Section J of the Platform for Action (234) said:

“Women should be empowered by enhancing their skills, knowledge and access to information technology. This will strengthen their ability to combat negative portrayals of women internationally and to challenge instances of abuse of the power of an increasingly important industry. Self-regulatory mechanisms for the media need to be created and strengthened and approaches developed to eliminate gender-biased programming. Most women, especially in developing countries, are not able to access effectively the expanding electronic information highways and therefore cannot establish networks that will provide them with alternative sources of information. Women therefore need to be involved in decision-making regarding the development of the new technologies in order to participate fully in their growth and impact.”

Then came the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005), seen as an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between a widely recognized human rights culture and a rapidly developing information society as well as to tackle what was identified as the “digital divide”. There was a particular concern that the WSIS process needed to pay special attention to how the emerging information and communication society could advance gender equality, protect traditional knowledge and cultures, and improve the situation of vulnerable and marginalized people.

WSIS was invaluable in providing an opportunity for civil society organizations to have a voice where previously they had been silent and to assess deficits and new opportunities. Immediately after WSIS 2005, representatives of civil society organizations issued the

Statement “Much more could have been achieved” (18 December 2005). It argued that the outcomes would have been stronger if they had been founded on an *ethical framework* that was more just, equitable and sustainable:

“In an age of economic globalization and commodification of knowledge, the ethics and values of justice, equity, participation and sustainability are imperative. Beyond Tunis, all stakeholders must be encouraged to weave ethics and values language into the working on semantic web knowledge structures. Communication rights and justice are about making human communities as technology’s home and human relationships as technology’s heart.”

With regard to gender equality, the Statement commented on the need to provide capacity-building aimed at women’s engagement at all levels in the shaping of an Information Society, including policy-making on infrastructure development, financing, and technological choice:

“There is a need for real effort and commitment to transforming the masculinist culture embedded within existing structures and discourses of the Information Society which serves to reinforce gender disparity and inequality. Without full, material and engaged commitment to the principle of gender equality, women’s empowerment and non-discrimination, the vision of a just and equitable Information Society cannot be achieved.”

### **Advances since 2005**

A fundamental principle underlies social change, communication for development and media democracy. It is that *public and private debate, dialogue and conversation are essential if positive, long-term changes on key development issues are to be agreed and implemented*. Such dialogue is most effective when a range of voices are empowered to be heard and acted upon. The same principle applies to the framing of policies and strategies at local, national, and international levels.

Access to information and knowledge is essential to the health of a democratic society for at least two reasons. First, it ensures that citizens make responsible, informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation. Second, information serves a “checks and balances function” by ensuring that elected representatives can be held to account in carrying out the wishes of those who elected them. In many societies, an antagonistic relationship between media and government is a vital element of a fully functioning democracy and the role of the press is critical in disseminating information as a way of mediating between the state and all facets of civil society.

In information and communication societies, despite the proliferation of social media platforms and user-generated content, it is still essential to have a public media sector that supports democracy, is financially viable and editorially independent, and that serves the public interest. The public interest is defined as representing a plurality of voices both through multiple outlets and through a diversity of views and voices reflected within any one outlet.

ARTICLE 19 is an NGO that envisages a world where people are free to speak their opinions, to participate in decision-making and to make informed choices about their lives. In 2009 it published *The Camden Principles on Freedom of Expression and Equality*. Principle 9 covers the media:

9.1. All media should, as a moral and social responsibility, play a role in combating discrimination and in promoting intercultural understanding, including by considering the following:

- i. Taking care to report in context and in a factual and sensitive manner, while ensuring that acts of discrimination are brought to the attention of the public.
- ii. Being alert to the danger of discrimination or negative stereotypes of individuals and groups being furthered by the media.
- iii. Avoiding unnecessary references to race, religion, gender and other group characteristics that may promote intolerance.
- iv. Raising awareness of the harm caused by discrimination and negative stereotyping.
- v. Reporting on different groups or communities and giving their members an opportunity to speak and to be heard in a way that promotes a better understanding of them, while at the same time reflecting the perspectives of those groups or communities.

9.2. Public service broadcasters should be under an obligation to avoid negative stereotypes of individuals and groups, and their mandate should require them to promote intercultural understanding and to foster a better understanding of different communities and the issues they face. This should include the airing of programmes which portray different communities as equal members of society.

9.3. Professional codes of conduct for the media and journalists should reflect equality principles and effective steps should be taken to promulgate and implement such codes.

9.4. Professional development programmes for media professionals should raise awareness about the role the media can play in promoting equality and the need to avoid negative stereotypes.

ARTICLE 19 takes a rights-based position that is non-discriminatory and says that “people everywhere must be able to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and freedom of information. Without these rights, democracy, good governance and development cannot happen.” A recent special report on Brazil looked at “Women on the Internet” (8 March 2013). While information and communication technologies have revolutionized the way women communicate and express their ideas, the report points out that new forms of censorship are threatening the free flow of online information. Also the infrastructure to access the Internet and the skills required to maximize the potential of user-generated content can lead to the exclusion of women:

“For women, the Internet represents new opportunities and also new challenges to claim and fulfil their rights. It is also an important space for women’s empowerment. The Internet grants access to information, enables their mobilisation and visibility, and helps them create new forms of expression and participation in public life.”

This perception is highlighted in a study by the Association for Progressive Communications (ACP) called “Going Visible: Women’s Rights on the Internet” (October 2012). ACP argues that the internet has become an increasingly critical public sphere for the claiming of citizenship rights and civil liberties, including women’s rights. It is a significant space for those who have little access to other kinds of “publics” due to discrimination – based on gender, age, economic status and sexual identity – to negotiate and claim their rights. ACP’s study makes a series of recommendations:

*To governments and international organisations:*

- \* Promote respect for human rights online and offline. Freedom of expression and opinion must be protected online, the same way they are protected offline. There is need to understand the nature of communications in the online and the offline worlds in order to correctly identify where these freedoms are exercised and what threats may be posed to these freedoms.  
Promote ICT use and a strategy of information, education and communication in online spaces to combat violence against women and girls and to enhance women's and girls' rights.
- \* Promote women's and girls' communication rights in ICT use and online spaces, encouraging their participation, content creation and freedom of expression.
- \* Engage in the political discussion about the promotion of internet development and internet governance with a vision of gender inclusion, gender justice and respect for human rights.
- \* Promote and encourage women's participation in decision-making processes in ICT policies to secure that women's and girls' needs are properly considered, included and safeguarded. Protection and promotion of women's human rights cannot be left to private corporations, ISPs or individuals. States and international bodies have a moral and legal responsibility to uphold and safeguard the rights of women, both online and offline.

*To the private sector:*

- \* Internet and telecommunications businesses such as social networking platforms, web hosting companies and mobile phone operators should develop corporate user policies and practices that respect women's rights. This includes the adequate representation of women in policy-making and standards-setting processes, and ensuring that policies and standards consider the safety and security of users.

*To civil society organisations:*

- \* Women's organisations are called on to take action and use ICTs for activism to combat violence against women, promote equality and build solidarity. Women should take actions to control technology and change power relations in the ICT field.
- \* Women's organizations must actively participate in movements for communication rights on the internet and affirm women's achievements and full participation in society, both online and offline.

### **Unequal in an Unequal World**

Throughout history, women have been discriminated against and have generally enjoyed fewer political, legal, social and economic rights and opportunities than men. Yet, women's rights are basic rights and freedoms that all women and girls are entitled to as human beings. Human rights – as the *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action* affirmed – are shared by all women, men, girls and boys, and are enshrined in international agreements and law. The central concept is that every individual is entitled to rights equally, whatever their status in society.

The notion of women's rights within the framework of human rights was advanced because of traditional biases against the exercise of women's and girls' rights in favour of men and boys. In a society where women and men had unequal power, it was seen that women's rights needed to be specifically recognised and fought for. In this context, many women and men advocating for gender equality and women's rights define themselves as feminist. Feminism is, of course, a political movement and is broadly about increasing women's power relative to men's. Feminist advocacy challenges the inequalities between men and women in order to end the unequal distribution of power and resources that excludes women and other marginalized groups.

Today, unfortunately, discrimination against women continues to be widespread and can be found in every country and region of the world. Some of the challenges women face are new and not experienced by previous generations, such as HIV/AIDS, access to information and communication technologies, and new trends in macro-economic policies that worsen women's poverty. But many of them are not, such as violence against women and girls' lack of access to education. Achieving gender justice is a matter of guaranteeing basic rights and also a key means of addressing poverty and bringing about sustainable development. Policies and practices that benefit women will also have other positive outcomes for the economy and society as a whole.

Speaking at the High-level side event on "Sustainable Development in an Unequal World" during the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (20-22 June 2012), Michelle Bachelet, former Executive Director of UN Women and newly re-elected President of Chile said:

"We need to place human rights and dignity and gender equality at the centre of the sustainable development discourse, but more than discourse: actions. We need to advance equality so that women and girls can reach their potential. Women's empowerment and gender equality are fundamental to healthy societies and economies, and sustainable development. Women are on the frontlines, especially in rural areas, and their full participation is absolutely essential to address the key issues of sustainable food, water and energy."

Later, in June 2013 and in the context of the Post-2015 Development Framework and Sustainable Development Goals, UN Women published *A Transformative Stand-alone Goal on Achieving Gender Equality, Women's Rights and Women's Empowerment: Imperatives and Key Components*. It stated:

"A transformative stand-alone gender equality goal must be grounded in an understanding that the structural causes of gender-based inequality lie in systems of discrimination that are often justified in the name of culture, history, or group identity, and policy rationalities which assume that the best way to achieve gender equality is to reduce the role of the state and liberate 'the market'. To address these systems of discrimination, and the institutionalization of women's subordination that they create, the goal must seek to end violence against women and girls and provide services to victims; end histories of underinvestment in expanding women's and girls' capabilities and resources; and reverse the systematic marginalization of women from public and private decision-making."

In order to address the structural causes of gender-based discrimination and to support true transformation in gender relations, UN Women proposed an integrated approach addressing three critical target areas:

- \* Freedom from violence against women and girls – Concrete actions to eliminate the debilitating fear and/or experience of violence must be a centrepiece of any future framework.
- \* Gender equality in the distribution of capabilities – knowledge, good health, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights of women and adolescent girls; and access to resources and opportunities, including land, decent work and equal pay to build women's economic and social security.
- \* Gender equality in decision-making power in public and private institutions, in national parliaments and local councils, the media and civil society, in the management and governance of firms, and in families and communities.

The report argued that:

“Women’s capacity to influence decision-making, whether in public or private institutions, is intimately linked with their capabilities. Having a voice and participating in the processes and decisions that determine their lives is an essential aspect of women’s and girls’ freedoms. Voice and influence in decision-making has both intrinsic value as a sign of an individual’s and groups’ enjoyment of democratic freedoms and rights, and can serve the instrumental function of ensuring that group-specific interests are advanced. In the case of women, this could include influencing public priorities and spending patterns to ensure adequate provision of services as well as economic and social security, and to guarantee their physical integrity and reproductive rights.”

However, the report is oddly silent on one of the key mechanisms for strengthening voice and influence in decision-making at all levels and in all fields: *gender equality in access to information, communication and knowledge and to the technologies that help bring this about*. Digital platforms, user-generated content, and citizen journalism have the potential to meet this need.

The empowering use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is closely connected to socio-economic development, and this potential for social transformation demands that everyone should have equitable access. Prevailing inequalities in access to ICTs throughout the world suggest that many groups are hindered by their social and economic circumstances from making use of ICTs. In relation to women, this inequality is often referred to as “the gender digital divide”, resulting from social processes that marginalize women from technology, change and progress. The potential of ICTs is twofold: they can contribute to sustainable socio-economic development and promote gender equality. However, ICTs are not a panacea but have to be considered extremely useful and effective tools for challenging and changing existing power structures.

The three case studies appended to this short overview reflect the experiences of women’s rights groups in India, South Africa and Turkey, which in their different contexts and according to their different needs are seizing upon digital communication technologies to advance the cause of gender justice and to advocate for greater public awareness of the issues at stake and for better political and social policies.

### **ASMITA – Nepal**

Nepal, which is basically a feudal patriarchal society, has been experiencing a rapidly changing political scenario, economic policies and social awareness in recent decades that has brought about enormous transformations. The existing constitution – the Interim Constitution 2007 – has determined the progressive restructuring of the nation as solutions to problems based on the discrimination of gender, ethnicity, caste and religion. Besides the constitutional and legal commitments of the state, women in Nepal still are facing the challenges created by their stereotyped role as oppressed and subservient to men. Under such conditions, ASMITA has been relentlessly working for gender equality and women’s empowerment for the last two and half decades.

With the phenomenal global advent of the ICT sector, Nepali women also discovered the use of new technologies but with particular constraints. Most of the ICT related facilities are available in the urban areas where only 17.7% of the population of the country lives. Citizen journalism informally came into practice in Nepal through readers’ responses as letters to editors or comments regarding news items or providing community happenings as news to newspapers, FM radios, television channels and online media. With the rapid growth of

social media such as email, blogs, YouTube, face book and twitter, the online media gained mammoth momentum. Ordinary citizens started to share their views and the latest information about whatever they have or they get through ICTs. Poverty, illiteracy, lack of computer literacy, language barriers etc. are some major factors impeding access to ICTs, especially for women.

Urban Nepali women are extensively using mobile phones, email, internet and other social media sites like Facebook (FB) to disseminate and obtain information. Many non-government organizations working for women's empowerment and gender equality use websites to share information about their organizations, campaigns, advocacy documents etc. They also widely use FB and e-mails to disseminate the information and networking.

ASMITA diversified its activities with the newly introduced information and communication technologies, of which production of radio programs, radio jingles, documentaries, cine-clippings for awareness-building and advocacy for women's rights are some examples. ASMITA also contributed to the promotion of gender-sensitive citizen journalism and user-generated contents through its media literacy campaign and news writing trainings for media consumer women. As an advocacy organization, ASMITA uses email for its internal communication and information sharing and timely updates to its website. Women's equal property rights, trafficking in women, violence against women, women's political representation are some significant policy issues raised by ASMITA, as an important stakeholder in the Nepali women's movement, using different media, information and communication technologies.

#### **Association for Progressive Communications – South Africa**

GenderIT.org emerged from the advocacy work of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) Women's Rights Programme in information and communications technologies (ICTs). Both ICT advocates and policy makers expressed the need to have examples of national policy, gender-sensitive language, tools for lobbying, and an understanding of the impact of poor or positive policy. GenderIT.org works to help fill this gap. Launched in 2006, GenderIT.org is a seminal resource site that provides feminist reviews and commentaries on internet policies and communication rights issues. It maps the intersections between women's rights – such as violence against women (VAW) and sexual rights – with internet rights issues.

Take Back the Tech! (TBTT) is a collaborative campaign on ICTs and violence against women run by the APC. Like GenderIT.org, Take Back the Tech! focuses on women's rights, feminism and internet technologies. The campaign calls on all ICT users – especially women and girls – to take control of technology and strategically use any ICT platform at hand (mobile phones, instant messengers, blogs, websites, digital cameras, email, podcasts and more) for activism against gender-based violence. Each year TBTT accompanies the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence (November 25 – December 10) with daily actions that explore different aspects of violence against women and issues related to internet rights and freedoms. It also encourages creativity and exploration of emerging online spaces and platforms to be appropriated for activism.

#### **Flying Broom – Turkey**

Founded in Turkey in 1996, Flying Broom realized that the media are indispensable tools for women's studies and, since the early days of its establishment, it has always actively used and studied the media.

First, the magazine *Flying News* started to be published. It was a bulletin for the women's agenda both in Turkey and all over the world. This magazine is still being published in one Turkish and one English special edition. The magazine not only contributes to coverage of



the women's movement but is also a source of knowledge for academicians, activists and journalists. Embassies, universities, public institutions and non-governmental organizations in Ankara make space for these publications in their libraries. Copies of *Flying News* can also be found in the Library of Congress in the USA.

In 2003, Flying Broom established its "Local Women Reporters Network". This was an effort to develop an alternative to the media from a gender perspective, because the media, which went through significant change in the 1990s, have become a field of sharp rivalries. This period brought new definitions to women-media relations, while the media retained their sexist perspective on the portrayal of women.

In time, the way women were represented in the media made the need for an alternative form of journalism clear. Women no longer want to be in the news only when they are victims of violence. Flying Broom wants its success, solidarity, and efforts to overcome women related problems, its dreams, expectations, needs etc. to be reported and it is using digital platforms to bring this about.

Flying Broom offers alternative media against the sexism in the mainstream media, believing that every woman can write her own news and the only criterion to become a "reporter" is to be a woman. Flying Broom is there so that women can grow stronger, be organized and generate non-sexist news in the "media sector" and "by means of media".

### **Tentative Conclusions**

In *Ethics in the Information Society: The Nine 'P's* (Globethics, 2013) the authors argue that justice and equity, care and compassion, participation, sharing, sustainability, and responsibility are fundamental in information and knowledge societies. With regard to gender, it states:

"Gender equality in access to information, communication, knowledge and decision-making is an important dimension of an inclusive and people-centre society. It includes ensuring parity in women's representation in high levels and decision-making."

As such it calls for "Building empowering capabilities of women and girls to use ICTs for education, formation and citizenship and for older persons in computer and internet literacy."

In its context, ASMITA makes the following recommendations for gender-sensitive citizen journalism: develop infrastructure and programs for the use of new information and communications technologies; organize multi-purpose programs for media owners and decision-makers on the significance of citizen journalism; execute media literacy campaign targeting various strata of the people; report matters like the progress made by women/third gender and their achievements, honour, dignity as well as their success stories; present women/men and third gender with all of their new roles and images; not to use proverbs, languages, pictures, and cartoons which discriminate, humiliate, or degrade women/third gender; always use gender neutral terms/language.

The Association for Progressive Communications (ACP) focuses on ethics as critically important to online environments, especially for small online publications that rely heavily on trust and integrity from their readership for sustainability. For organisations working with a loosely connected group of citizen journalists, who are tied together by a broad set of principles, both earning and maintaining that trust is a complex but vital matter.

Flying Broom sees the need for an alternative form of journalism by women, for women, and about women using digital technologies as a means to raise awareness and voices of concern in order to tackle discrimination and inequality.

All three organizations support Globethics' own expression of "fundamental values for knowledge societies":

- \* Justice/equity is based on the inalienable human dignity of every human being and on their equality. Justice grows when people cultivate a deep respect towards each other. Fair and equal chances of access to information are a precondition for mutual understanding.
- \* Freedom of access to information, of expression, of believe and of decision is core for human dignity and human development. Freedom, equity and responsibility balance each other.
- \* Care and compassion is the ability for empathy, respect and support of the other. It leads to solidarity.
- \* Participation is the right and ability to participate in societal life and in decisions of concern.
- \* Sharing leads to, enables, and sustains relationships between human beings and strengthens communities. The ITCs enable in an extraordinary way the sharing of information and knowledge.
- \* Sustainability as long term perspective for green technologies.
- \* Responsibility is accountability for one's own actions. The level of responsibility has to correspond to the level of power, capacity and capability. Those with more resources bear greater responsibility.

**Source:**

[http://www.globethics.net/documents/4289936/13403256/GE\\_texts\\_4\\_WSIS\\_web\\_final\\_cons.pdf/53fedc19-0475-4f34-bb9f-0d588b09436f](http://www.globethics.net/documents/4289936/13403256/GE_texts_4_WSIS_web_final_cons.pdf/53fedc19-0475-4f34-bb9f-0d588b09436f)

Appendix 1: Nepal

**Nepali women using new information and communication technology, citizen journalism and social media to advocate for policy change**

Appendix 2: South Africa

**GenderIT.org: Gender and ethics in an online environment**

Appendix 3: Turkey

**Flying Broom's "Local Women Reporters' Network" and "Gender-sensitive Reporting and Alternative Media Programme for Women"**

# **Nepali women using new information and communication technology, citizen journalism and social media to advocate for policy change**

*By Manju Thapa, ASMITA, Nepal*

## **1. Socio-cultural Context**

Nepal, a rectangular east-west spread on the Asian map, sandwiched between China to the north and India to the south, is divided into three ecological regions: the northern Himalayan belt, the middle mountains (where most of the people live), and the narrow southern strip of plain, which grows most of the food crops. The country is divided into five development regions and 14 administrative zones, with 75 districts, although recent political changes have popularized the notion of a federalism-based state-nation, and which seems in the offing. Basically a feudal patriarchal society, Nepalese society has been experiencing a rapidly changing political scenario, economic policies and social awareness in recent decades that have brought about enormous transformations, and in which everyday lives are reconceptualised, reconstructed and lived, with new negotiations continually made between the personal and public (*Poudel, Unpublished Paper, 2013*).

Nepal, after a ten-year armed conflict led by the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) against the State and following the spring movement of 2006, has entered into a peace process and is trying to build an inclusive state. The existing constitution (the Interim Constitution 2007) has determined the progressive restructuring of the nation as the solution to the problems based on discrimination of gender, ethnicity, caste and religion to avoid repetition of the conflicts in the past. The Interim Constitution also includes a separate article for women's fundamental rights (Article 20). Yet, the challenge women in Nepal are still facing is their stereotyped role as oppressed and subservient to men. Regardless of all those commitments and policy reforms, no substantial change has come about in the overall situation of women.

Anthropological studies of contemporary South Asian society suggest that the construction of womanhood in Nepalese society is primarily determined by assumptions about woman's perceived sexuality and her socially defined role to preserve the honour of her family and kin. Legal subordination to men and economic interpretation of women's agency are grounded in cultural processes of defining the role women are expected to perform in Nepalese society. Such cultural processes in Nepalese society also relegate women to certain sectors of waged labour. The patriarchal notion of conceptualizing womanhood, defining women's cultural obligations, constructing their economic dependency has actually been about female sexuality, but not about the rights of women as citizens. For Nepalese society, women are daughters, sisters, mothers and wives and are a matter of pride and honour of the family until they are under the control of men. (*Poudel, Unpublished Paper, 2013*).

According to the latest population census of 2010, 51.5% of the Nepali population are women. But they are still mainly considered second class citizens compared to men. Though an ever growing proportion of women is coming out of the home and finding jobs in the governmental and non-governmental sector, they are not considered competent enough to bear the responsibility of decision-making authority. Mostly they are given low level or clerical jobs. The male mentality is still not ready to accept a female boss. So the problem lies there. However, liberalization of divorce and abortion and a growing class of professional single women are some of the social realities that are challenging the traditional Nepali family system and male control over female bodies and sexuality. (*Poudel, Ibid.*)

Though women comprise more than 50% of the total population, gender discrimination still prevails in society. Gender based discriminations have restricted their access to the state's resources and services like productive services, education facilities, health care services. The status of women in various caste, class and ethnic groups differs from one another in Nepal. Women from certain indigenous groups enjoy relatively more freedom within the private sphere and more access to and control over household resources. Comparatively, Hindu women enjoy more participation and position in the public sphere, whereas women in the Far West and Mid-Western Development Regions are facing extreme poverty and worse form of discriminatory cultural practices. Moreover, the situation of violence against women, systematic and prevalent, is alarming. Social attitudes towards women have resulted in many cases of gender based violence (GBV) in the domestic and public spheres. Wife battering, neglecting and abuse of the girl child, female infanticide, early marriage, dowry related violence, polygamy, rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, human trafficking, forced prostitution, accusation of witchcraft, a number of harmful traditional practices and so on are the major inhuman forms of gender-based violence in Nepal.

Such violence exists due to the absence of women's decision-making powers, under-reporting of violence, and the government's low level of commitment to addressing these issues in general. Considering the whole country, rural and sub-urban areas are much more affected than towns and urban areas. In such socio-political and economic circumstances, Asmita Women's Publishing House, Media and Resource Organization (ASMITA), the pioneer feminist organization of Nepal, has been tirelessly working for gender equality and women's empowerment for the last two and half decades.

### **Nepali women using ICT, social media and citizen journalism**

With the phenomenal global advent of the ICT sector, Nepali women also discovered that using this very human development would be quiet fruitful for them. But, the situation was not in their favour, as they first thought. The very first telecommunication service in the capital valley Kathmandu was started in 1913. The establishment of the Telecommunication Department in 1959 tried to institutionalize the telecommunication sector. Telephones went digital in the mid-eighties (*Nepal Foundation, 2004*). Nepal Telecommunication Corporation (NTC) distributes telephone lines at present while private sector operators are setting up their services – especially in mobile telephony. Radio paging had been available for some time from the private sector. NTC has provided access to telephones in all 75 districts of the country, but there are only a limited number of telephones available in the remoter parts of the districts (see Table 1 below). Most of the services are concentrated in few small towns of the districts. Yet, several joint venture companies have already started working in telephony.

Radio Nepal, for the first time in the country, was established on 1 April 1951 to disseminate government information. More than 80 percent of the population listens to Radio Nepal today (*Nepal Foundation*). The airwaves have become much competitive with the establishment of scores of FM radio stations nationwide from the private sector, communities and NGOs. Slowly the FMs are growing as a great challenge to Radio Nepal. Similarly, television came rather late to Nepal. The first TV of the country, Nepal Television (NTV), was started as a project in January 1985 and began broadcasting programs from December the same year (*Nepal Foundation*). After nearly one decade of NTV, more than a dozen private channels some with satellite transmission began their broadcasting services. The computer was first introduced in Nepal in 1971 by the then government for processing data. The private sector began its activities in this area in the early eighties. Mercantile Office System became the first Internet Service Provider (ISP) in mid-July 1994 (*Nepal Foundation*). However, at present, there are more than two dozens ISPs in Nepal, of which one is semi-governmental and the rest are operating privately. The introduction of Information and Communication Technology in Nepal has led to scores of IT institutes, engineering courses in old and new

colleges and numerous internet cafes and cyber points – indicating that the ICT sector is booming with immense employment opportunities. Yet, consumer access to these ICT related facilities is still poor.

Table 1

Household Facilities	Family %		
	Nepal	Urban area	Rural area
Radio	50.82	53.56	50.17
Television	36.45	60.67	30.66
Cable	19.33	53.80	11.10
Computer	7.28	23.66	3.37
Internet	3.33	12.11	1.24
Telephone	7.37	22.66	3.72
Mobile phone	64.63	84.07	59.98

Source: *Rastriya Janaganana 2068, Samchhipta Natija (page 14), Central Bureau of Statistics, Kathmandu, Nepal, B.S. 2069*

The above table shows that most of the ICT related facilities are available in the urban areas of the country whereas the rural residents are mostly deprived of these facilities. Ironically, only 17.07% population of the country lives in urban areas (CBS, 2010).

With the passage of time and the development of the ICT sector, as elsewhere, the use of social media and citizen journalism has also gradually flourished in Nepal, which gained momentum from the capital valley and through those who were studying or residing outside the motherland. A number of people embraced social media for professional as well as personal advancement, and as one of the best ways to reach their audience as well as their relatives and colleagues.

To quote one definition, “If you are doing more than a mere transcription, if you are providing summary, synthesis, analysis or commentary, you are committing a random act of journalism.” (*JD Lasica, Citizen Journalism Defined? New Media Musings, June 20, 2007*). Maybe this led to the notion that “citizen journalism is a phenomenon to be reckoned with.” Actually the term “citizen journalism” has been defined in many ways. The following definition by Bowman & Wills defines citizen journalism as the act of citizens “playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information” (*Women’s Net, Citizen Journalism Training Manual, undated*).

In the context of Nepal, citizen journalism informally came into practice through readers’ responses as letters to the editor or comments regarding any news item/features/programs or providing community happenings as news to newspapers, FM radios, television channels and online media (*Hamal, 2010*). Although some enthusiasts started online media (e-paper, e-magazine etc.) very early, their audience was very low. But with the rapid growth of social media such as email, blogs, YouTube, face book and twitter, the online media gained significant momentum. Ordinary citizens started to share their views and the latest information through ICTs. For this purpose, the use of mobile phones and email looked to be the most common practice.

With the increase in accessibility and availability of the internet, use of social media is on the rise in Nepal. This has enlarged the professional and personal spheres of individuals. However, it has also created a divide where individuals with internet skills and access can utilize web-based devices and services to enhance their presence in the cyberspace and use it to their personal advancement and professional growth. The divide is actually getting

narrower since people are becoming more and more aware of the internet's enormous social, political and economic role in society. It has broadened the reach of the media not only to Nepalese with access to the internet, but also to a global audience including Nepali diasporas which seek news and stories about their society and home.

Though poverty, illiteracy, lack of computer literacy and language barriers are among the factors impeding access to the information and communication technology infrastructure, according to an April 2012 data of Nepal Telecommunications Authority, the internet penetration rate is still 16.67% in Nepal (FNU, 2012). Of course, a lot of problems remain here. The major problem is that the ICTs being comparatively new, most people do not have the digital or technical knowledge to use the ICT revolution to advantage. In the typical Nepali context, mobile phones are the most common form of social media, as they are used for conversation, sending or receiving information, SMS messages, photos and latest news from the web or e-media. Yet, the small internet user base and even smaller number of content producers does not necessarily diminish the reach and importance of the role and use of the internet in Nepal. By its nature, the internet is not limited by geographical boundaries and language barriers. Content generated anywhere in the world is instantly available all over the world, and in Nepal too.

Rapidly evolving online technologies are providing new and user-friendly platforms, tools and service that aid in information dissemination, communication and networking. Along with the prevalence of e-mail, the internet is also becoming the resource and platform for fulfilling the various social roles for individuals such as social and professional networking. While e-mail is used for communicating with individuals or groups based on membership, other social media such as blogs, social networking websites such as Twitter and Facebook, professional networking websites such as LinkedIn, and other websites have a wide following and reach anywhere with internet access. Internet in Nepal is also extensively used for seeking and imparting information.

When one talks about Nepalese women as news makers, media consumers, as experts, as authorities or as people who cannot be ignored, the picture looks extremely bleak. The situation is that women are dramatically under-represented in the news, their points of view are rarely heard, when women do make the news it is primarily as "stars" (celebrities, royalties) or as ordinary people. As newsmakers, women are under-represented in professional categories, and as authorities and expert women barely feature in news stories. Thus, their views are weak in the mainstream media.

Again, there are some serious factors creating obstacles to women using ICTs and social media and being part of citizen journalism. First of all, illiteracy is the main cause. In Nepal, women's literacy rate is only 57.4% whereas the average literacy rate (above 5 years population) is 65.9% and male literacy rate is 75.1% (CBS, B.S. 2069). Additionally, women's economic dependency and low income, limited access to learning new skills including ICTs, and the language barrier are also causing problems for high use of ICTs. Likewise, most of the female population lives in rural areas where ICT facilities are very poor. It would be unreasonable, therefore, to expect large numbers of women to use ICTs and to be part of social media and citizen journalism in Nepal.

Many non-government organizations working for women's empowerment and gender equality in Nepal have their own websites, in which they put information about their organizations, campaigns, advocacy documents etc. e.g. WOREC, Forum for Women and Development, Beyond Beijing Committee, ASMITA, Stri Shakti, Sathi, Sancharika, Working Women Journalists etc. Apart from the website, they widely use FB and e-mails to disseminate the information and for networking. Some women's rights activists widely use

Facebook and run their own personal blogs for this purpose. In recent years, some prominent women's rights issues like violence against women (VAW) are being extensively discussed on Facebook. For instance, Fight Against Violence and Harassment of Women in Nepal and National Alliance of Women Human Rights Defenders are some of the sites that are widely using Facebook for different calls and announcements. It is interesting to note that they are getting a good response to such announcements. However, it is not possible to give an example of a widely used and popular online newspaper, magazine or websites dedicated to women's causes in Nepal.

Recently a remarkable application of social media in relation to women's causes was seen in Kathmandu. This practice was largely used in Kathmandu Valley during the time of a campaign in 2012 which became known as "Occupy Baluwatar", a non-planned and unorganized protest that emerged against the broad daylight incident of the rape and robbing of a female worker inside the National airport lounge. The female victim of such a horrendous act had just returned from foreign employment in a Gulf Nation. At that time, hundreds of participants, activists and journalists and those concerned used mostly Facebook and e-mails for daily programs of protest, and online media for wider coverage and publicity of the event. Women activists were leading the protest rally and sit-in programs just outside the Prime Minister's residence. They used FB and e-mails to share photos, news and information. It all proved to be a very good source of information for many journalists. After 106 days of continued anti-government protest and the sit-in campaign, the government was compelled to back down, the culprits were arrested and suspended from their government jobs, and the victimized woman got compensation. In this way, the significance of social media is recently seen in the movement "Occupy Baluwatar".

Thus, social media usage continues to grow across Nepal, mainly in city and downtown areas, coupled with major shifts in its trends. From merely being used as a tool for social networking and entertainment, social media now infiltrate almost every aspect of the daily lives of thousands of Nepalese, affecting the way they interact socially, do business, or engage in civil society movements.

### **ASMITA's experience on using digital platforms, citizen journalism & user-generated contents**

Though ASMITA started its initial movement with the publication of the monthly magazine "Asmita" advocating for women's rights issues and concerns, it diversified its activities with the newly introduced information and communication technologies, of which production of radio programs, radio jingles, documentaries, cine-clippings for awareness and advocacy for women's rights are some examples. ASMITA also contributed to the promotion of gender-sensitive citizen journalism and user-generated content through its media literacy campaign and news writing training for media consumer women. As an advocacy organization, ASMITA uses email for its internal communication and information sharing and timely updates its website.

ASMITA did manage to go on air by producing two weekly radio magazine – "Shakti" and "Sama Shanti" – that were broadcast on the 10 most listened to FM radios throughout the country. All lasted for a period of more than four and a half years. Both of the radio magazines were produced in such a way that they addressed almost all the issues of gender equality, women's empowerment and awareness about gender-sensitive communication. Some of the remarkable issues discussed in the programs were women's equal property rights, representation in political processes, formulation and implementation of women's legal rights, justice for conflict-affected women, violence against women, trafficking in women, equal citizenship rights, economic rights, gender sensitive media and so on. Through Radio programs, ASMITA provided a platform to express commitments from state representatives

and the views of women's rights activists, ordinary women, experts and survivors. Those radio programs proved very popular and supportive in shaping the demands of the women's rights movement in Nepal.

Similarly, ASMITA also produced a number of radio jingles in and for different ethnic languages on various subjects, i.e. dowry, violence against women (VAW), human trafficking etc. All the jingles were aired and broadcast through various FM radios in the country. ASMITA has also been involved in making documentaries on and about anti-witchcraft, reproductive health of adolescents, situation of the rape victims -both from the State machinery and from the rebels- of the ten year long conflict, documentaries seeking justice for war widows and gender-based violence. All were aired and even telecast not once but time and again from different national television channels. The purpose of making these documentaries was to create awareness among the wider masses and advocate with policy makers as well as with decision-makers.

ASMITA has made use of a digital platform for cinematography too with the production of a cine-clipping entitled "Chetana", based on the huge issue of trafficking of women in Nepal. These cine-clippings were screened nationally in more than 30 movie-theatres for almost six months. This was a great contribution to combat trafficking in women in Nepal.

Likewise, as a part of its gender-friendly media responsibility, ASMITA has been engaged in encouraging local media to be accountable and gender-sensitive. It has carried out a number of awareness programs to promote and increase women journalists from the grassroots level, i.e. from among ordinary media consumer women, who live mainly in the villages or remote rural areas. With the trust and support of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and the Embassy of Finland in Nepal, ASMITA launched a media literacy campaign in 14 districts to make aware and active the media consumer women in order to make media content gender-sensitive. Media monitoring and interactions between the media producers and consumers were the main component of the media literacy campaign. Such programs enhanced the understanding of media producers towards weaknesses and biases in their outputs and their responsibility for addressing the expectations of women. Collaboration between civil society and media made all stakeholders accountable to each other. In our experience, advocacy programs should be targeted not only at reporters/correspondents, but also at media owners, executive board members, editors, news chiefs, station managers and others. After the execution of this campaign, local media started to give space and time to the views and experiences of ordinary women and experts.

The media literacy campaign also made consumer women aware of how the media function and consumers' responsibility to make media accountable and gender-sensitive with their active responses. After the program, most participant women accepted that they could learn skills of analyzing media content and of providing feedback to media. They have started to realize their capacity to change media content which is ultimately a catalyst for social transformation. Local media content was more gender sensitive and balanced due to regular interaction of media producers and media consumer women/ rights activists. After the completion of different phases of that campaign from 2005 to 2010, the participant women media consumers learned and started writing letters to the editor, telephoning correspondents or the responsible person of local newspapers and FM radios, reporting the local news to the local media. Thus, the media literacy campaign proved to be an effective practice of citizen journalism.

ASMITA provides basic-news writing training to ordinary media consumer women for the wider coverage of women's news and integration of gender perspective in all news. This



program was designed with two objectives. First, it could make women capable of writing news about their periphery and surroundings left out by mainstream journalists. Second, trainee women could provide news items to the local media, which has severe human resource constraints for presenting fair and balanced coverage of women-related news. In the five-day long training, issues like definition of communication, mass communication, definition of news, types of news, sources of news, news collection, news reporting, news writing, interview skills, gender perspectives in news gathering, codes of conduct regarding news etc. were minutely discussed. Practical exercise, lectures, interactions, role play, experience sharing, group discussions and presentation, distribution of hand outs etc. were the key methods during the training. The trainers made efforts to make the participants more engaged in their exercise work and give feedback on efforts at writing news.

As a result, participants in the news writing training realized their capacity to write simple news around them related to their organizational theme. They also took the forum as a place to gain an introduction to media owners and editors/radio station managers which might be useful to convey their news through local media. Media consumer women began to send news, poems, opinion articles and letters to media houses (ASMITA, 2011). Generally, financial constraints limit most local FM radios as well as other local media working outside the capital valley; phone calls and news dispatches from the ASMITA-trained media consumer women “reporters” were instrumental in achieving wider coverage and promoting user-generated content. Such contributions are encouraging mass media communication to become more responsible, gender sensitive and democratic. This could be taken as a phenomenal instance of citizen journalism, though not in the exact form of digital ICTs. Yet, our media-consumer women widely used the telephone for their “citizen journalism” as well as e-mail.

In this way, ASMITA applied various information and communication technologies and implemented different types of programs including a form of citizen journalism to advocate for gender equality and empowerment in the country.

### **Policy issues addressed by ASMITA and achievements**

ASMITA – an organization by women, for women and to women – is an integral part of the Nepalese women’s movement. The fundamental issue of the women’s movement, since the restoration of democracy in 1990, was equal property rights for women. This issue remained in focus for almost eight years not only among women’s rights activists, but in a monumental national debate. ASMITA was actively involved in that debate and all the activism around it, purposely publishing special issues of the magazine *ASMITA* strongly pleading why and how women should get their right to property. Alongside interacting with stakeholders, legal experts and grassroots women leaders, ASMITA prepared a booklet which included a number of thought provoking articles, entitled *Equal Rights on Property: One Giant Leap Towards Women’s Emancipation*. It also produced and disseminated many radio programs, posters and other information, education and communication (IEC) materials pleading for women’s equal property rights. And, after lengthy and deliberate delays, at last the Nepal government was compelled to formulate a Civil Act providing for equal property rights for women. It was a phenomenal achievement for Nepalese women and for ASMITA as well.

Other important issues that ASMITA raised and launched advocacy campaigns for included: the right to abortion (woman should have the rights over her own body), against human trafficking, citizenship for the children of single women, advocacy for gender-sensitive media, women’s proper representation in political processes, and against violence against women. ASMITA published a wide range of varied materials regarding the issue of trafficking in women in Nepal, based on a series of investigations in over 28 districts within the country and four major cities of India, i.e. Mumbai, New Delhi, Kolkata and Pune. ASMITA also

published awareness posters, aired radio programs and organized dozens of interaction programs with senior journalists and stakeholders. Consequently, the government introduced a new law to curb human trafficking crimes and to sanction the traffickers.

As a result of huge demand, sloganeering and strong advocacy from ASMITA and other women's organizations, the government, for the first time in the history of Nepal, introduced a law against marital rape. Yet the government has to do a lot regarding the issue of violence against women, many more laws and their strict application are needed. It was ASMITA who for the first time in the country raised the issue of the right to abortion, almost a quarter of a century ago. At that time, there was illegal abortion in the market, but without the proper official services and caring, hundreds of Nepali women had to sacrifice their lives due to unwanted pregnancies or female infanticide. Finally, the 11<sup>th</sup> amendment of the Civil Act provided Nepali women with right to abortion though with some restrictions and conditions.

During that same period, the government introduced the National Women Commission Act (2007). The commission was urgently required to ensure women's rights in different spheres of the state functionaries. Meanwhile, after the restoration of democracy in 1990, a wave of anti-alcohol activism was seen among the women of extremely remote villages. ASMITA strongly supported them and stood by their side. In one article in the magazine *Asmita* at that time, we said, "Feminism evolves everywhere that women are suffering from gender bias, exploitation, repression and violence. Violence against women is a major issue within the feminist movement. Drinking alcohol is directly related with physical violence against women, i.e. battering, rape and molestation or sexual misbehaviour. So, the anti-alcohol activism of the rural women is definitely a part of the feminist movement."

Ensuring places for women in different political posts and in the official bureaucracy was also a big issue for the Nepali women's movement and ASMITA remained at the forefront of that campaign too. And history was made when the newly elected legislative-parliament passed the law guaranteeing that children may gain citizenship either by the name of their father or mother. Similarly, parliament also passed a commitment for voiding all discriminatory legal provisions and creating a new atmosphere for the eradication of all types of violence against women.

These are some of the significant policy issues raised by ASMITA, as an important stakeholder in the Nepali women's movement, using different media, information and communication technologies. Accordingly, its achievements are also noteworthy.

### **Recommendations in relation to gender-sensitive citizen journalism**

At the time ASMITA started publishing its magazine *Asmita* 25 years ago, printing was all about wooden blocks and letter-press. Then the Mac computer arrived in town and desk-top publishing, cutting and pasting and offset printing came into vogue. These were followed by IBM computers and iMacs and others. Everything went computerized which ultimately led to social media networking and citizen journalism. That's why, in an under-developed country like Nepal, where most of the population is deprived of basic life facilities and modern technologies, there are a lot of things to be done in order to promote information and communication technology among common people.

Together we can make a change and develop an environment in which ordinary people, especially women, can use ICTs and become good citizen journalist and they can go for the advocacy to change policies. Here are some recommendations for the promotion of gender-sensitive citizen journalism:

- \* Develop infrastructure and programs that support women's ability to create, access and promote information and networking, in particular through the use of new information and communications technologies.
- \* Organize multi-purpose programs for media owners and decision-makers on the significance of citizen journalism.
- \* Carry out media literacy campaigns targeting various strata of the people.
- \* Citizen journalism should report matters like the progress made by women/third gender and their achievements and dignity as well as their success stories.
- \* Women/third gender should also be presented as creative and advantageous citizens of society, major actors in development processes and a beneficiary group as well.
- \* Citizen journalism should present positive aspects of the role of women, matters which talk about their academic and professional activities, and matters which show equality between women and men.
- \* Women, men and third gender should be presented with all of their new roles and images.
- \* Women/third gender should be presented as sources of information, resource persons and experts in the news, news-based programs and discussion shows.
- \* Women's opinions, feelings and experiences should be inclusively carried in a balanced way in reporting.
- \* The issues of women's and third gender's rights along with all the arguments for and against should be brought forward for serious discussion, and such issues should never be taken lightly.
- \* The presentation of women/third gender and their issues should not be degraded i.e. as sexual objects or as second class citizens.
- \* Materials which promote vulgarity and present women/third gender as objects of entertainment should not be reported.
- \* Proverbs, languages, pictures, and cartoons which discriminate, humiliate, or degrade women/third gender should not be used. Always use gender neutral terms and language.
- \* Women related news should not be manipulated/treated for the interests of political parties.
- \* Prejudice should be avoided. Citizen journalism should not encourage matters/issues which nurture the notion that members of one particular gender are feeble and powerless whereas members of another gender are strong and empowered.
- \* Citizen journalism should strongly discourage issues/matters which emphasize traditionally stereotyped roles and obligations of women, men and third gender.
- \* Violence against women/third gender should be presented as the abuse of fundamental human rights.
- \* Matters such as rape, human trafficking, domestic violence, sex work, sexual abuse and the like should not be sensationalized.
- \* Without the proper consent of victims, her/his identity (either by name, picture, and voice or by any other ways) should not be made public.
- \* If the victim of sexual abuse is a minor, his/her identity should not be made public in any case. The terms of evaluation or comment etc. for such victims should never be used.
- \* Detailed descriptions that sensationalize an incident and make fun of the victims should be prohibited.

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# GenderIT.org: Gender and ethics in an online environment

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The following report examines how two online platforms, GenderIT.org and Take Back the Tech!, engage with the issue of ethics and trust with their networks on issues related to feminism and internet technologies.

## 1.0 About the organisations

### 1.1 GenderIT.org

GenderIT.org emerged from the advocacy work of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) Women's Rights Programme in information and communications technologies (ICTs). Both ICT advocates and policy makers expressed the need to have examples of national policy, gender-sensitive language, tools for lobbying, and an understanding of the impact of poor or positive policy. GenderIT.org works to help fill this gap.

Launched in 2006, GenderIT.org is a seminal resource site that provides feminist reviews and commentaries on internet policies and communication rights issues. It maps the intersections between women's rights – such as violence against women (VAW) and sexual rights – with internet rights issues.

Another objective of GenderIT.org – which is not directly listed but was important from the beginning is where the work is located – really from the perspective of women in the global south, focusing on marginalized voices. It aims to bring this perspective in internet governance and internet rights debates.

GenderIT.org runs around 4-6 editions per year, and they are the result of months of research, classifying, interpreting and monitoring ICT policies which affect women around the world, but especially in three regions: Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America. The site also brings together debate, analyses, topical issues and events, and drives discussion on issues related to gender and ICT.

In this, GenderIT.org works with a network of contributors based primarily in these regions. Most of these contributors are allies and partners of APC's women's rights work with whom the editorial team have developed long-term relationships, based primarily on shared goals. This makes managing these relationships, and any possible conflict, easier, and makes conflict less likely to arise.

The site has three main objectives:

- \* To develop an information resource/knowledge sharing site for gender and ICT advocates, civil society organisations and policy makers that wish to be active in gender and ICT policy.
- \* To raise awareness among civil society organisations, specifically in women's movements, regarding gender and ICT policy issues.
- \* To empower women's organisations and networks in collaboration with other civil society actors to take action on ICT policy issues and to develop ICT policy that meets their needs. To encourage them to lobby for an information society that builds social justice and human rights at the national, regional and global levels.

## 1.2 Take Back the Tech!

Take Back the Tech! (TBTT) is a collaborative campaign on ICTs and violence against women run by the APC. Like GenderIT.org, Take Back the Tech! focuses on women's rights, feminism and internet technologies.

The campaign calls on all ICT users – especially women and girls – to take control of technology and strategically use any ICT platform at hand (mobile phones, instant messengers, blogs, websites, digital cameras, email, podcasts and more) for activism against gender-based violence.

Each year TBTT accompanies the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence (November 25 – December 10) with daily actions that explore different aspects of violence against women and issues related to internet rights and freedoms. It also encourages creativity and exploration of emerging online spaces and platforms to be appropriated for activism.

In 2005, the APC developed research papers that looked at the connection between ICT and VAW, an issue that received little attention or discussion at that time. From sharing the findings with women's rights and communication rights advocates in different spaces, the researchers found it to be a critical issue that compelled further attention and deeper engagement. TBTT was initiated in 2006 as one of the ways of doing this, and it sets out to:

- \* Create safe digital spaces that protect everyone's right to participate freely, without harassment or threat to safety.
- \* Realise women's rights to shape, define, participate, use and share knowledge, information and ICT.
- \* Address the intersection between communication rights and women's human rights, especially VAW.
- \* Recognise women's historical and critical participation and contribution to the development of ICT.

The campaign has global individual partners who contribute content and participate in the daily actions, as well as local partners in different parts of the world who organise more comprehensive campaigns as part of their 16 Days of Activism activities. These range from organising safety workshops to talks to street activism, locating the online violence in material and physical realities. The website is the common platform and space to aggregate and support visibility of activities and campaign materials produced by individual and local campaigners and partners.

## 2.0 Ethics in an online environment

While few large media outlets have formal codes of ethics on their websites, there is usually a section on how users can use their content; the codes of conduct for community discussion, including conditions where comments may be removed; and the relationship between the website and the contributors. It is interesting that *The Huffington Post* basically disclaims responsibility for any contributions that they publish: the first point on their agreement is their right to curtail access!<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, *The Guardian* has "Community standards and participation guidelines"<sup>2</sup>, which are written in easy to understand language, invite feedback and ask users to check back regularly as they are a work in progress. The latter approach is more useful for progressive, small organisations where there is a need to engage the audience in active, participatory

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<sup>1</sup>[www.huffingtonpost.com/terms.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/terms.html)

<sup>2</sup>[www.theguardian.com/community-standards?guni=Article:in%20body%20link](http://www.theguardian.com/community-standards?guni=Article:in%20body%20link)

ways.

The contrast also indicates the different reasons why an organisation might develop a document of this kind. *The Huffington Post* document is primarily about protecting the organisation against legal liability. *The Guardian* document is about maintaining credibility in an online environment. Among the many charges levelled against websites that allow comments and forums is that they practise censorship. *The Guardian* document safeguards against that charge. It provides the criteria and the limits of speech in their forums, namely that the point of the forums is to further debate, but noting that not all comments do this.

Other codes of conduct or ethics may be related to anonymous comments or sources, funding sources, or the principles by which an organisation stands. The document will reflect the needs and aims of the organisation.

In summary, the reasons behind an online code of ethics or similar document can include: a) Legal protection; b) Preventing conflict; c) Adjudicating complaints; d) Positioning the organisation; e) Establishing and/ or maintaining credibility.

Few organisations integrate a gender perspective when drafting these codes. While *The Guardian* code of conduct implicitly recognises the imbalance of power between the large media organisation and individual contributors, it does not specifically talk about the online imbalance between genders and sexualities. Given that *The Guardian's* op-ed writers have repeatedly drawn attention to the systemic and prevalent problem of online misogyny<sup>3</sup>, it seems to be a particularly conspicuous lapse.

## 2.1 Ethical considerations for GenderIT.org and TBTT

While the five reasons given above are important to both GenderIT.org and the TBTT campaign, they come second to the responsibility to those the organisations work with and whose voices are heard through the website. Given that many of partners and contributors

work with communities and individuals who are marginalised and/ or at risk of harassment from the state and from private individuals, the safety of these

### **Accountability to interviewees**

*"If I am recording the interview, I mention this upfront and seek permission from the interviewees to record. I also tell the interviewees the purpose of the interview and assure them that their real names will not be used in any written or digital material that will be developed. In the case with a research I did in rural Zimbabwe in 2011, I also assured respondents that I would not mention the name of their village anywhere. I also told them that the only other person who could listen to the recorded interviews was my supervisor."*

GenderIT.org contributor

groups is a major ethical (and political) concern.

This includes putting emphasis over the potential impact of their work on the personal lives of their partners and contributors. For example, while there is immense value in sharing and re-telling stories of exclusion, harassment and violence, this can at times, result in *triggering responses in some victims and/ or re-traumatising those whose stories are being shared.*

Also, concerns around legal protection extend to partners and collaborators of the organisation. Some jurisdictions where the APC is active in may target, for example, women human rights defenders for criminal or civil prosecution. This means precautions to ensure that communications are secure from the threat of hacking, and that, as far as possible, those that the organisation works with are aware of the vulnerabilities of their communications networks. *The communications network is only as secure as its most vulnerable link*, which could leave some partners or their networks vulnerable.

<sup>3</sup>[www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/apr/06/gender.blogging](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/apr/06/gender.blogging)

Thus, the website’s opinion on issues such as anonymity is informed not just by concerns about the credibility of the websites and campaigns to the public, but also by the understanding that *anonymity is often a prerequisite to a story being told*.

For example, in the mapping of experiences of violence against women by survivors in the TBTT campaign, anonymity is encouraged. This does not mean that authenticity is not a concern. However, both APC and the organisations that make up the network do not always have the resources to investigate cases or the identity of contributors. Further, the website is open to contributors, particularly the Take Back the Tech! which maps incidents of ICT-related violence against women.

Another key area of difference with the ethical considerations above is the concern with issues related to power. Recognising that radical women’s voices, particularly voices from the south and voices from women who face other forms of discrimination, are largely absent from corporate media and their concerns, and *having an explicit agenda of addressing all forms of discrimination affects not only who writes, but also how stories are written*. An example of this relates to the framing of online harassment, which is seen as primarily an issue for privileged, highly visible women, such as journalists and politicians. In contrast, GenderIT.org also looks at how the ubiquity of tools such as mobile phones can lead to harassment and surveillance at all levels of society, and by an array of actors, including family members and private corporations.

Further, GenderIT.org encourages writers to use interview formats, to respect the voices of those that they interview or their informants.

These are concerns that are shared by activist communication groups across the globe. An example is the pioneering feminist media group CIMAC in Mexico. They made a commitment to produce news that found the women in the news stories. An example on their website<sup>4</sup> is when a strike takes place: traditionally the story focuses on the picket line, rather than on the women who are working to keep food on the table, despite no, or reduced, income.

This commitment is also echoed in the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC)’s gender policy. This encourages stations to look both at the number of women on air or in management of community radio stations, but also at factors that might inhibit women from participating in a station, from the manner in which the equipment is set up to issues of safety, sexual harassment and child-care.

**2.2 Ethical considerations online**

This section looks at how the online environment differs from the offline environment.

*“My main concern is that those who have contributed to the article are comfortable with contributing and that we do not reveal anything related to their identity (name, place of work, local geographical location, contact details or any information which could reveal their identity) as this could put them at risk.”*  
GenderIT.org contributor

*Hostility towards women is far more commonplace online*. In an article addressing the harassment faced by women journalists, Margarita Salas notes that online harassment is a silencing strategy<sup>5</sup>. While women journalists are often more exposed to sexualised harassment, because they are exposed to a broad public, other women, particularly those who venture into traditionally “male” territory, such as gaming, have similar experiences. The

<sup>4</sup>[www.cipamericas.org/archives/1923](http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/1923)  
<sup>5</sup>[www.genderit.org/feminist-talk/false-paradox-freedom-expression-and-sexist-hate-speech](http://www.genderit.org/feminist-talk/false-paradox-freedom-expression-and-sexist-hate-speech)



case of Anita Sarkeesian<sup>6</sup>, targeted for successfully raising money to study tropes in video games, illustrates both of these points – that harassment can target any woman with a public profile; and that *the aim of the harassment is silencing women*.

The internet never forgets. Sometimes the repercussions of having a story published are not apparent immediately, so it is the website’s responsibility to try and ensure that all contributors and their sources are aware of possible repercussions of their contributions, and to engage with them on issues of safety and privacy. This is particularly pertinent when working with women human rights defenders (WHRDs). This incorporates the use of images, such as images of training workshops, where participants could be identified and subsequently targeted. Because of these issues, GenderIT.org and TBTT support the use of aliases, as a method to protect vulnerable people.

An example of this in practise is where one contributor, understanding the power of images to relay

*“The concern of the possibility of being hacked is always there particularly when one works online. One way of keeping safe is to keep as much as possible material that is sensitive offline. The other mechanism could be to change passwords as often as possible and also not to give out passwords beyond the trusted group of people.”*

GenderIT.org contributor

information, decided to use “cartoonised” images of survivors/ victims of domestic violence. Alternatives could include using images that just show the backs or hands of participants, making it difficult to identify them.

Beyond the issue of safety and privacy, images that are posted online may be used, altered or re-posted in different contexts in ways that undermine, humiliate or endanger women. Looking at how initiatives such as AdaCamp<sup>7</sup> handle this is instructive.

To some extent, the websites *have to be guided by*

*“Another example is that we suggest having a photography policy that gives people a clear visual signal – such as different colored badge lanyards – for whether they want to be photographed. Photos and videos of women are often taken without consent or commented on negatively; having control over how their images are used makes women more comfortable and confident at conferences. Some women don’t attend conferences at all that don’t have photography policies.”*

Ada Initiative on running a Camp

*contributors on what is safe, acceptable content in the environment in which they live and work.* This is an ongoing process, and involves providing training and expertise on potential risks and strategies for safety and maintaining privacy, including ‘downstream’ risks - risks posed to others as a result of an activist’s increased visibility. In some countries, however, because of the sheer volume of unattributed and often scurrilous material available online, the voices of contributors are only taken seriously if they provide real names and places. Whatever the circumstances, *the safety and privacy of the networks and those they work with are paramount.*

A final concern is the blurring of public and private space for many contributors. While this can be a problem for women journalists, who are attacked in personal spaces (such as Facebook, or Twitter) for public views, this is exacerbated for women who are freelance journalists or contributors. It is thus important that contributors have separate spaces (such as email accounts) for private communications.

<sup>6</sup>From Anita Sarkeesian’s fund-raising page at Kickstarter, [www.kickstarter.com/projects/566429325/tropes-vs-women-in-video-games](http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/566429325/tropes-vs-women-in-video-games), accessed 26 December 2012

<sup>7</sup><http://adainitiative.org/2012/10/freely-available-conference-booklet-template-designed-to-welcome-women/>

### **3.0 Managing ethical dilemmas and conflicts**

#### **3.1 Working at a distance**

Working at a distance from contributors, with even the editors based in different continents, can make it difficult to address ethical dilemmas. First, it means that there may be differing interpretations of the particular, local situation. For example, the editorial team work with a blogger based in Pakistan, who blogs under her real name. Unfortunately, organisations and individuals that APC works with in Pakistan have been the target of threats (including death threats). This has led to serious concerns about safety. Despite these concerns, the blogger is better able to assess the threats that she faces than outsiders are, and the editorial team have to trust her knowledge of the situation.

The organisation takes seriously its responsibility to ensure that international networks are aware of the conditions women human rights defenders face in Pakistan, and ensuring her safety through international scrutiny of the situation. Thus, ultimately, it is her decision to make, but the organisation provides support, training and international solidarity.

There are situations where the editorial team may not defer to the decision made by the local partner – if, for example, other partners in the same country or locality offer conflicting advice. However, it is important to place significant weight on the perspective of the authors themselves.

#### **3.2 Verifying information**

Sometimes this can be problematic. One of the most-discussed ethical dilemmas faced on Take Back the Tech! came when a woman wrote her story, and named the man who had violated her rights. The TBTT team were concerned about the ethical and legal complications that might come from this, whether her story could be verified, and whether it would put her at further risk. Initially, they decided to change salient factors of the story, both to protect the victim and to protect the website. The woman felt that this was a further violation, that not only had the perpetrator violated her, but the “feminist sisterhood” was now silencing her. After much discussion, they decided that they had made a mistake, and published her story in its entirety. Since the role in relation to the victim is (a) making her aware of the implications of the publication of her story and (b) providing support for her voice. There is also the need to verify aspects of the story before being able to publish, and ensure that the space is protected for others.

This has resulted in a ratings system, where each contribution is labelled according to whether or not TBTT has been able to independently verify its contents. They also published a blog post to show why the decision had been made, partly to explain the story, but also so that there was a record of the decision for future reference. This dilemma illustrates first the complexity of the environment – *the need to be supportive of women who have taken the courageous step of sharing their story*. At the same time, ensuring that the space itself is protected.

#### **3.3 Working without physical interaction**

This emphasises another difficulty: there is no face-to-face communication. Face-to-face contact is often an important way of building trust, of working out differences and building understanding, particularly when contributors and editors come from different cultural contexts. Working out the complications that arise from this is an ongoing process, but some methods used include:

- (i) Working through local partners, with whom long-term relationships are built, thus

- establishing and maintaining trust in both directions;
- (ii) If in doubt, discuss, preferably with others in either the same country, or the same region;
  - (iii) Recognise the various ways in which violations can occur - including violation of a victim's right to their own story; and
  - (iv) Admit mistakes, and try to be open about the decision-making processes.

### 3.4 Ethical processes

It is not enough to have ethical outcomes, particularly when working in a human-rights related field. *It is important to ensure that you have "back-end" ethics as well.*

This includes things such as relationships with funders. As the box below shows, this incorporates reporting to the funder, what commitments are made, and what activities are undertaken. It also constrains who GenderIT.org works with, as building a relationship with funders is vital for building trust here.

*"If we receive funding from a donor to carry out training in digital security, particularly from high-risk areas or kinds of work, do we keep a list of participants names and organisations and share with the donor? Do we keep such a list for us as APC? I know that as APC we secure our data as much as possible but even using email to communicate with participants could be risky."*

GenderIT.org contributor

Secondly, the GenderIT.org team incorporates the belief that access to information is a fundamental human right through a commitment to the open source movement and open access to knowledge. *Restricting access to information has a gendered aspect*, tending to make it more difficult for women to have access to information they need on issues from sexual health to counselling or shelter services. Thus, the website is committed to sharing information. This translates into publishing with a Creative Commons license. It also means that the editors are committed to translating articles as far as possible, with both a Spanish and English edition of GenderIT.org, for example. It also has some articles which are translated into Portuguese and French, when funding allows. Likewise, one of the editorial standards is the use of simple language, not just for ease of translation between languages, but also so that people who do not speak English or Spanish as a first language find it easy to access the ideas and material.

Thirdly, the use of open source alternatives where possible. Free and open source alternatives are available at low cost, internationally, with ease of translation and modification for particular countries or needs. Thus, for example, TBTT maps are powered by Ushahidi and GenderIT.org is build on Drupal, a free and open-source content management framework.

### 4.0 Recommendations

First, it is important to recognise that *any ethical procedures or code of ethics are a continuous work in progress*. At GenderIT.org and TBTT, ethics is an ongoing process,

*"An important aspect I want to highlight because improves the ethic work that makes GenderIT.org, is concern for the Spanish and Portuguese translation of articles and reports published in the website.*

*"In my opinion, accessing to information produced by GenderIT.org is a fundamental contribution to women in general and Latin America in particular. For this reason I appreciate the effort that I believe should continue."*

GenderIT.org contributor

recognising that principles and procedures will vary with context. However there are some underlying principles that are important:

1. Transparency of procedures. This is the major principle behind documents such as *The Guardian's* community standards and any similar code of ethics. It allows readers to know why decisions to remove or alter content are made. The only similar document GenderIT.org has is the editorial guidelines. These encapsulate some of the standards (such as on language) mentioned earlier.

The editorial team also try to be transparent in terms of why decisions are made, particularly when there is conflict. This transparency is both with the parties involved and with the audience.

2. Recognising the pervasive nature of power relations. While obviously one of the publication's major concerns is gender relations and the imbalance of power manifest in gender relations, the editors, who are also activists, are also aware that there is often an imbalance of power between editors and contributors, geographic imbalances of power and many others.

3. Putting the safety and privacy of networks and contributors first. This means not just those that are dealt with directly, but also those in their networks, on the principle that everyone's safety is as strong as the safety of the weakest computer or device in the network. It also entails making available information on network and individual safety and privacy.

4. Ethics is not just for the "front-end". Ethics extends to how material is made available, the software choices made and who the organisation works with.

Thus, at both GenderIT.org and TBTT, the ethical choices made reflect both where the websites situate themselves in terms of power relations with their contributors and readers, and how they hope or foresee those relationships shifting.

## FLYING BROOM

# “LOCAL WOMEN REPORTERS NETWORK” & “GENDER-SENSITIVE REPORTING AND ALTERNATIVE MEDIA PROGRAMME FOR WOMEN”

### Writers:

Selen Doğan & Sevna Somuncuoğlu

### Translation:

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[www.ucansupurge.org](http://www.ucansupurge.org)

### Why ‘media’?

In democracies, media are described as the fourth power (after executive, legislative and judicial powers). Media are also the “third sector” (after state and economy). The American sociologist Rivers describes media as “the other government”.

It is expected that the media as a significant power use this power also for equality, justice and peace. Yet, the media have become a tool for struggle in women’s world, just like in other “disregarded”, “weakened” communities. A dangerous tool! Because...

Women constitute half of the population on a global scale. In this respect the media should not exist by addressing and being nourished by only one half of the population. However, today’s media form a structure, in almost every part of the world, in which only men make decisions and media context is male-dominated. The media, with their sexist language and perspective, are far away from representing women.

For this reason, it is a must to develop an alternative to the current media with a gender perspective! For years, Flying Broom has tried to establish this goal with its website, magazine and Local Woman Reporters’ Network (LWRN).

### Why are media important for us women?

Because the media:

- Are a means for women’s struggle to change/transform their lives.
- Enable us to keep informed about each other.
- Are a means to fight, to draw attention, to make a point, to give emphasis, to remind about responsibilities, to talk about what has been and what has not been done, to create public opinion...

But media:

- Legitimize patriarchal/sexist language.
- Violate women's human rights.
- Create a sexist discourse about women's bodies, despise women.
- Indeed "ignore" women; disregard and annihilate in a symbolical way.
- Profit from exposing women's bodies, commercialize women's bodies.
- Oppose gender equality.
- Expose private life.
- Preach morality.
- Present the victim as guilty.
- Tabloidize violence.
- Normalize inequality.
- Turn women's bodies into goods for entertainment where everybody is watching.

However media:

- Can be women-friendly.
- Can be a partner for social transformation by realizing that sexism is men's problem as well.
- Can defend human rights claims and be a partner for equality and justice-based work.
- Can play an active role in promoting gender equality.

### **LOCAL WOMAN REPORTERS NETWORK**

Flying Broom Women's Research and Communication Association intended to open up a field for women to create their own media while developing local reporting, when it first established the Local Woman Reporters Network (LWRN) in 2003. Since then, this network has continued its activities and is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year.

The most important characteristic of this network was that it developed an alternative to the often disturbing media with its language, perspective and the value it gives to the news. Within the process, the network not only achieved this function, but also raised media literate women and made important contributions to the "women media" experience in the world.

#### **What was the Local Woman Reporters Network aim?**

- Its aim was to strengthen women's media, promote the production of news from a gender perspective and make women's agendas visible.
- This alternative news network aimed to announce the demands and priorities of local women to the government, local authorities and mainstream media.
- This way, the "real" agenda of women would be prominent via the news of local woman reporters network.
- This news network also aimed to develop critical media literacy among women of all ages.

### **What do we intend to do with Local Woman Reporters Network?**

- We try to coach news-literate women.
- We want gender sensitive reporting to be widespread.
- We get informed about women's agendas in the provinces.
- We want to make the problems, demands, and successes of women visible.
- We encourage local authorities to develop right and efficient policies for women with our news.
- We expect the local media to give more space to women's news.
- We want local news to be on the agenda of the mainstream media and not just be restricted to the provinces.

### **Who is the target group of Local Woman Reporters Network?**

- Any woman can join this network.
- The only criterion for becoming a Flying Broom reporter is to have a gender perspective.
- Since this network was established to teach women about rights-based journalism, the target group is women of all ages.
- In addition, since the news made by our reporters aims to give a gender perspective to its readers as well, anyone who follows the media is within the target group.

### **REPORTER TRAININGS (GENDER BASED NEWS WORKSHOPS)**

Gradually, we realized that women reporting for a long time gain experience. On top of that, they direct other women to do reports as well. But another need of extending this news network, especially in big cities, and reading the city agenda with a different point of view appeared. For it to happen, more women needed to take part in the production of news and in a way so that this news network could function for many years.

Flying Broom made an announcement to add new women to its reporters and strengthen its network. In a short amount of time, hundreds of applications were submitted. As of October 2013, when this report was prepared, there were 603 women registered in this volunteer news network.

### **An Analysis**

The highest number of local women reporters of Flying Broom (216) is in Ankara. The other cities which have the highest numbers after Ankara are respectively İstanbul (145) and İzmir (55). Alongside these three metropolitan cities, our local reporters in more than 50 cities in Turkey such as Adana, Konya, Mardin, Erzurum, Trabzon, Edirne etc. are watching the local agenda.

We have been receiving applications not only from Turkey but also from other countries. We currently have women reporters from many countries such as the Netherlands, Finland, Malta, Brazil, Poland and Azerbaijan.

One third of the applicants to the local women reporters' network are high school students or university students, one fifth of them are unemployed. There are also academicians, public employees, lawyers, journalists, teachers and psychologists, architects, tourist guides, accountants, bankers and dieticians among our local women reporters. There are even retired women who are not in active working life anymore.

The average age of the reporters that we received application from is 26. The youngest voluntary reporter is 15 years old, as for the oldest, she is 68 years old. Whoever they are whichever occupation they are dealing with and whatever age they are, this shows us that women all need to create their own media.

## **TRAINING**

With the participation of experts we have been organizing trainings since 2003 to meet the expectations of reporter candidates and to increase their alternative media experience.

During these training sessions (between 2003 and 2013) we conducted workshops on:

- \* Mainstream media analysis with a gender equality perspective;
- \* News collection and writing techniques;
- \* Media ethics;
- \* Women's movement and media relations;
- \* Feminist media examples;
- \* Importance of local reporting for women;
- \* The problems of women reporters in areas of conflict;
- \* Empathy;
- \* Reporting issues such as political participation, discrimination, violence, entrepreneurship and etc.
- \* Sexism in advertisement;
- \* Reflection of mental illnesses in the media;

In these trainings for the Flying Broom Local Woman Reporters Network, communicators, academicians and reporters acted as trainers and facilitators and sometimes politicians and writers attended as guest lecturers.

**Examples of how our organization is using digital platforms, citizen journalism and user-generated content to advance the cause of gender equality and gender-sensitive communication.**

## **ONLINE EDUCATION**

It was difficult to organize trainings physically for all the reporters in the Local Woman Reporters Network. But we also had to meet the expectations of the reporters to improve themselves. So we developed a distance education programme.

We developed a website for this education. We announced that we could only train 35 people in our first class and we accepted the first comers. We awarded the reporters attending the 8-week online education a certificate.

### **FLYING BROOM LOCAL WOMEN REPORTERS NETWORK ON LINE TRAINING PROGRAM**

The program is designed for 8 weeks. Every week the participants have to study the text, do the related reading they are given every week and do their homework accordingly. The brief of the weekly work is as follows.

#### **\* First week / Gender Roles and Media**

In the first week, we focused on how media reproduce gender roles and stereotypes. Why do we need gender sensitive media? How can we make alternative news? How can we implement gender perspective in mainstream media? The training text discusses these questions and gives related readings for the week.

**Exercise of the week:** The exercise requires participants to rewrite news that is published in a mainstream newspaper from a gender perspective.

**Homework of the week:** Select an advertisement and analyze. Write a paragraph about how gender roles are reproduced.

#### **\* Second week / Techniques of collecting and writing news**



Participants study texts about how they can get into the news, how they can write it from a gender sensitive perspective, while doing so what should they focus on? Moreover, the work text included knowledge about: what is news, what news value means and who values the news?

**Exercise of the week:** Participants discover other news sources within their local environment.

**Homework of the week:** Women's representation in sports media. Participants select a medium: TV, newspaper, Internet or radio and prepare a report about how women are represented.

\* **Third week / Making news about violence.**

The text of the week is about how women and violence against women find a place in the media. How do the media reproduce violence? Special attention is given to violence against women journalists.

**Exercise of the week:** Participants posted news about violence in the forum of the online education portal and discussed the theme together

**Homework of the week:** Deciphering violence in TV serials. Participants made a report about a TV serial that they watched. They especially tried to find out how women are represented and how violence against women is normalized.

\* **Fourth Week / Children's Rights and Media**

This week's text was about children's rights and how media acts against these rights. As a sample we analyzed news about "child brides".

**Exercise of the week:** Participants prepared questions for an interview with a woman who has been forced to marry when she was a child. **Homework of the week:** They did the interview.

\* **Fifth Week / Interview**

This week's text was about the techniques of preparing the interview questions, communication with the source, taking photos.

**Exercise of the week:** Participant critiqued an interview that was done years ago with a victim of domestic violence and re-wrote the questions asked of the victim.

**Homework of the week:** Five different topics were proposed to the participants, who selected one and did an interview. Mostly they selected violence and discrimination against women.

\* **Sixth Week / Importance of the Local News**

The text was about how local news helps to strengthen democracy and equality. How local news about women news impacts agendas while making city policies.

**Exercise of the week:** Participants discussed how they can make local news and how they can get local news onto the forum page of the digital portal.

**Homework of the week:** Participants prepared a newspaper page with their local agenda and wrote the news.

\* **Seventh Week / Legal Framework of Women and Media Relations**

The text of the week was about how we can act against discrimination of women in the media and which legal tools we can use.

**Homework of the week:** Participants selected news that discriminates against women and used the legal tools to act against it.

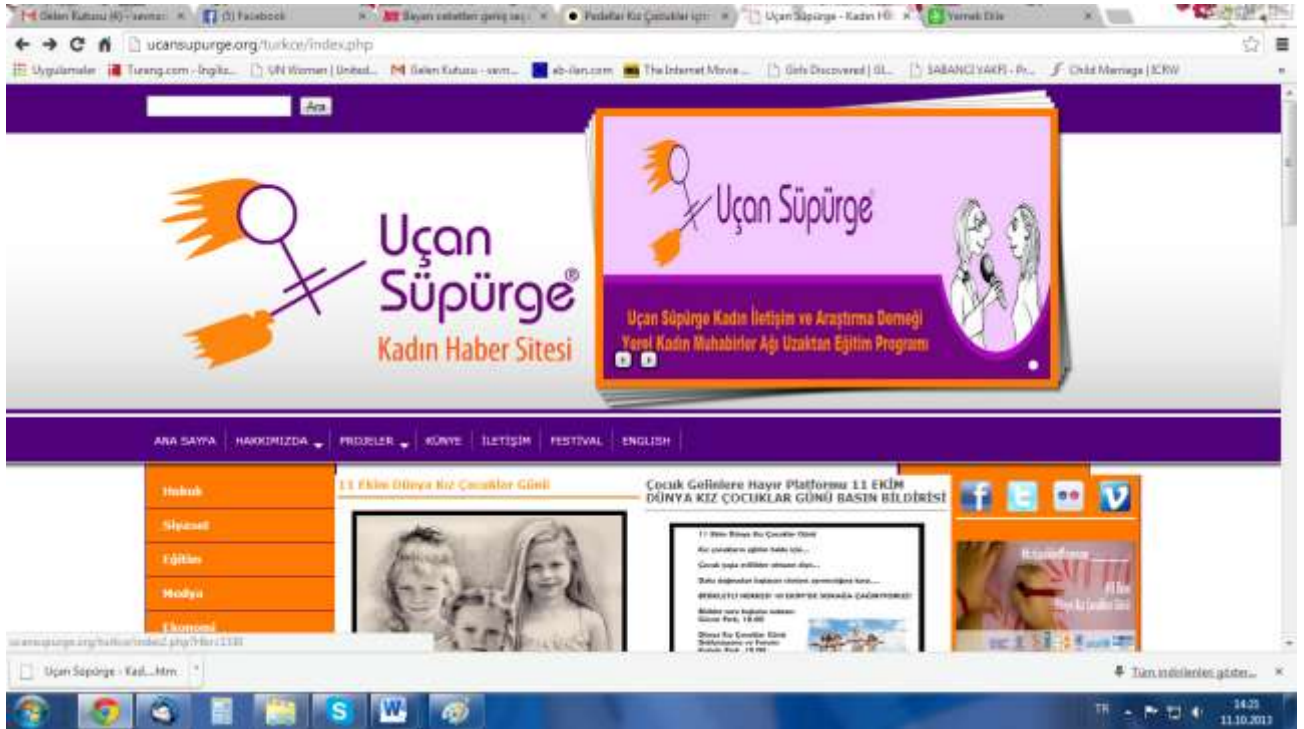
\* **Eighth Week / Evaluation**

In the last week the coordinators of the project, editors and trainers realized and interview with the participants. This interview was about their evaluation of the programme and what they had learnt.

**Homework of the week:** Participants wrote an article how they imagined media could be. They have written about their utopias.

**Here is another example how we use social media for advocacy.**

Flying broom has the first online news portal that has been established and updated every day since 2001



The project called Child Brides is one of our advocacy projects to stop early and forced marriages. Here is the special FaceBook page for the campaign and some examples that we shared on this page.





#cocukevliligiSUctur  
18 yaşın altındaki her evlilik  
"Çocuk Evliliği"dir...  
Suça ortak olmayın!  
[ucansupurge.org](http://ucansupurge.org)  
Çocuk  
Gelinler




#SucaOrtakOlmayin!  
18 yaşın altındaki her evlilik ÇOCUK EVLİLİĞİ'dir  
ve gerekçesi ne olursa olsun her çocuk evliliği,  
SUÇTUR! Bu suça ortak olmayın!  
[ucansupurge.org](http://ucansupurge.org)  
Çocuk  
Gelinler

Medeni Yasa'ya göre;  
Başlık parası, berdel, zorla nişanlandırma ve  
zorla evlendirme yasal değildir. SUÇTUR!  
[ucansupurge.org](http://ucansupurge.org)  
#SucaOrtakOlmayin  
Çocuk  
Gelinler



#SucaOrtakOlmayin!  
"Kimse eğitim ve öğrenim hakkından yoksun bırakılamaz."  
Anayasa 42. Madde  
[ucansupurge.org](http://ucansupurge.org)  
Çocuk  
Gelinler



"MART'TA"  
ÇOCUK GELİNLERE SİZ DE DUR DEYİNİ!"  
[ucansupurge.org](http://ucansupurge.org)  
Çocuk  
Gelinler

Çocuk Gelinler sorunu her yerde!  
Nevşehir'den bir anne:  
-"Dağ olurum taş olurum yine de  
kızımı vermem!"  
Diyarbakır'dan bir kız çocuk:  
-"Tek çarem annem zaten!"  
[ucansupurge.org](http://ucansupurge.org)  
Çocuk  
Gelinler



# #SucaOrtakOlmayin

Çocukların evlendirilmesi evrensel insan haklarına aykırıdır ve erken yaşta evlilikler yasalar izin verse bile suçtur. 18 yaşından küçük bireylerin gelin ya da damat olduğu bir düğünün konuğuyunuz, artık sadece o düğünün değil suçun da bir parçasısınız!

ucansupurge.org

Çocuk  
Gelinler

**"ÇOCUK" KİMDİR?**



Türkiye yasaları 'çocuk'un kim olduğuna dair çelişkili tanımlarla dolu. Uluslararası bağlayıcılığı bulunan Çocuk Haklarına Dair Sözleşme'ye göre 18 yaşın altındaki bireyler çocuk kabul edilir. Bu bireylerin evliliği, ulusal yasalarca kabul edilse bile, "ÇOCUK EVLİLİĞİ" kapsamına girer.

Çocuk  
Gelinler

**#RakamlarlaCocukGelinler**

Çocuk Gelinler'e kulak vermeye ne dersiniz?

**17** Kırıkkale'den Şerife:  
"Üniversite sınavlarına girdim, sınavı kazandığımı evlendiğim gün öğrendim. 17 yaşındaydım."

Çocuk  
Gelinler

Examples of how our organization has addressed policy issues and what it has achieved.

## Advocacy and Lobbying Studies in Local Woman Reporters Network:

- \* Is it possible to do reports without violating women's rights and reproducing the victimhood of women? For us, yes! The Local Woman Reporters Network has been established to strengthen this possibility and make it tangible.
- \* Each report written by our reporters in the network draws readers' attention to women's issues. They focus on violence, discrimination, poverty and under-representation while also including the success of women, and the things they are able to do. And of course, the reports brought their demands/expectations to the agenda. Therefore, the network itself became a tool for advocacy.

- \* In parallel with this work in the network, Flying Broom pointed out consistently and persistently how media violate women's rights. We did that sometimes with press releases and interviews and sometimes with presentations in the national parliament.
- \* Advocacy does not happen only through critical analysis. We also need to show that the wrong context in the media could be easily reshaped and reproduced with a gender perspective. For that reason, Flying Broom's website has been broadcasting continuously since 2002 and includes "non-sexist news". Reports from Local Woman Reporters Network are published on this website as well.

### **As for lobbying...**

- \* In the 2000s, when we felt the need to extend our target group to spread women's media and women's language, we began a creative action regarding the national parliament: we started to send weekly newsletters to women parliamentarians to inform them of women's agendas throughout the country and in the local areas. These newsletters prepared in the Flying Broom News Centre included information for them to use as a background for their legislation activities.
- \* With the editors of our news centre and our Local Woman Reporters we visited national media institutions and local authorities. During these visits, we told them about the importance of strengthening women in media and that our news is an alternative source of information for the mainstream media.
- \* We organized workshops for our reporters in some other cities outside Ankara (like Çanakkale, Mardin). During the organization of these workshops, we held meetings with local women associations in these cities and suggested that alternative women's media should begin there as well. With that, our work on media became more widespread in Turkey.
- \* Since 2010 we have been publishing Child Brides Almanac every December. We collect child marriage news that has appeared in the mainstream media and show the way these reports are structured and inform reporters about women's problems. These almanacs are sent as soft copy to journalists, parliamentarians and non-governmental organizations.
- \* Flying Broom chose to broadcast all the radio and TV programmes we prepare on state channels. We see this as part of lobbying. For example in the radio programmes we prepared for two years for the state channel TRT, we touched on issues that were never spoken of before (such as incest, child marriages and domestic violence) and moulded public opinion. We prepared TV spots for TRT on the topic of ethnic discrimination and women. We produced the very first feminist TV shows on TRT channels and we shot and broadcast alternative media shows for local channels nationwide.
- \* For five years we have been working in coordination with the Local and Regional Televisions Union, which is an umbrella organization for thousands of local radio and TV channels. We ensure that the shows and spots we prepare are broadcast on local channels. Therefore, we contribute to the spread of gender-sensitive broadcasting.
- \* Before the last local elections, we published a magazine in which we included the expectations of women from candidates, women friendly city demands and the

campaigns of women candidates. The aim of this magazine was to show alternative reporting methods about women candidates and the relation of women and media.

### **What do we plan for the future?**

We will create a media monitoring team under the name “Red Pencil Media Monitoring Group”. Media Monitoring is a new, necessary and effective way of combating discrimination, violation and violence stemming from gender inequality in written, visual, online and social media.

The first example of such an effort in Turkey was MEDİZ (Women’s Media Watch Group). This group, formed by women’s associations from various cities, organized conferences, published books and held demonstrations to combat sexism in its first years. However, it could not maintain sustainability and MEDİZ lost its effectiveness. There is now a gap in gender-based critical media monitoring and Flying Broom News Centre with its 600 reporters all over the world has the capacity to monitor.

Red Pencil Women’s Media Monitoring Group will be established under the roof of Flying Broom to denounce sexist, racist, male-dominant language and perspectives, to develop the alternative media approach and to encourage women to produce news accordingly. This group will also aim at reporting, generating data, organizing trainings and activities besides monitoring and denunciation.

The group summarizes its approach as “pointing to alternatives while uncovering sexism in the media and underlining sex-based discrimination, in other words teaching the right way while criticizing”. The group takes its name from the red pencils editors never give up: Critical reading is done by underlining the lines, emphasizing the mistakes, and pointing to the unseen. For that, editors use red pencils. They cross out mistakes with this and write the correct version as well. They note down alternative expressions on the side with red pencils. Red Pencil will monitor the media with a red pencil in hand.

### **Examples of specific guidelines our organisation uses or recommends in relation to gender-sensitive citizen journalism.**

#### **LOCAL WOMEN REPORTERS A GUIDELINE FOR GENDER-SENSITIVE REPORTING**

The most important point of Local Women Reporters (LWR) is that women reporters are making alternative news with a gender perspective for media that are blind to the difficulties created by language, limited perspectives and a male-centric approach to the news.

#### **Media:**

- \* Are tools for transforming/changing women’s life
- \* Keep us informed about each other.

Using media, we recycle our words and draw attention, make a point, underline, remind about responsibilities, tell what has been done and not done, and shape public opinion

#### **The relationship between women and media**

This has increasingly turned out to be a problematic relationship. On the one hand, we all know that media are very important tools for women, but on the other hand we try to understand why they are not women-friendly, why they tend to ensnare women and how to transform them to be the other way around. In this way, we are challenging an enormous system that has a tendency to be on the opposite side. For not leaving media in the hands of a patriarchal system, we women are *here* in spite of the fact that media ignore us!

In LWR, we deal with alternative ways of reporting because news and its images, montage process, and reporting language are all done while ignoring the perspective of women. Neither the people working in the preparation process of news or the person who has editorial decision-making power may consider preparing news from a gender-sensitive perspective. This is the reason visibility of women in the media is a problem. It is us who will notice and transform it.

### **Example 1**

We noticed news saying that the tourism sector is improving. It is expected that the number of tourists will double and this will accelerate economic growth. In this news we can begin to search for the answer to the question where women are via the questions and make alternative news:

- \* What is the situation of those women who are working in the tourism industry on a low salary and without insurance?
- \* Can women take vacation from their work?
- \* Which measures are taken and what is done for women who are tricked into being married or sold and forced to be sex workers?
- \* Does the income gained from tourism contribute to improving the economic situation of women?

### **Example 2**

The construction sector is saying that they are building apartments taking into consideration people's needs. In metropolitan cities, there are numerous blocks constructed and on a daily basis there is a tendency to live in blocks. We read news which says that the constructors are glad about it. Where are women in this news? Nowadays the number of women who prefer to live alone is rising. Does this preference increase the demand for studio flats?

-In blocks of settlements that form an endless series of rooms, the relationship with the outside world is minimal. Yet the only way for women who are not working and cannot find a chance to socialize is to go out into a neighbourhood. Does the settlement approach to living lock women up in some sense? Does it push women into a comfortable but lonely life style?

We have to make it possible to make news from the existing news. Each news' text is like the centre of a circle. From point we can create additional news which can move from the centre to perimeter.

### **We should feed news**

The news that we are going to do may not be sufficient for readers. We intend to explore providing greater background to news which only talks about the situation. Or we need to have more information about persons concerned. This additional information strengthens our news.

### **Example:**

We are going to make news about how Local Women Reporters is blazing a trail and its significant contribution to alternative media. How can we supplement our news?

-We can collect examples from all around the world.

-We can make a list of the reporters and their number and how much news was prepared up to now in total and add this information to the news we have prepared.

-We can do street interviews with women about the importance of having women's own media etc.

### **We should read the news backwards**



This is another way to look for women in the news.

### **Example:**

We read news which says that opening mines is the solution for unemployment in X city. We can take a look into this news and recreate it from our own perspective.

Mines mean wages and food for many families, but on the other hand it means that domestic sex roles will be even harder. The pollution which mines cause threatens everybody's health, particularly children and the elderly. The task of taking care of children and the elderly is given to women. Secondly, pollution is not only in the streets, it is also in the houses that women clean and this doubles domestic labour and the time needed to look after families, etc.

### **Everything is newsworthy!**

We women want to be newsworthy not only when we are murdered in "honour crimes", thrown into the street or when we are defying poverty. We want to be newsworthy for our successes, solidarity, and our efforts to reduce our problems arising from being women, with our dreams, expectations and our needs. There is a common prejudice that news about women is news about "women's problems". We should show that this is not the case in alternative news.

### **Examples of Exclusion:**

If on the one hand there are many internet cafes, astroturfs, and social centres for men, and if on the other there are libraries, sports centres and clean parks where women can spend time safely and without disturbance, this is newsworthy. Because the lack of them causes women not to be able to use the city and to remain locked up in their houses.

If there are three men standing for election in X city and if there is no woman candidate among them, that is newsworthy.

If there are many associations in X city and if there is no women's organization among them, this is newsworthy as well. This absence cannot be explained by a lack of areas in which women would like to work. There might be obstacles to women working, resistance and prejudice against women's rights or women may lack economic power. But there is a story.

### **Examples of Inclusion:**

If there are many women who are graduates of high school and they cannot benefit from employment options and cannot be in production processes, their labour is restricted to domestic work. Is this the result of women's own choices? If the answer is yes, what is the factor that causes this preference; if no, how can government policies be transformed? Such questions can be our first step towards news.

If there are many women who are getting married under 20 in X city, this is newsworthy. Questions about the reasons for these marriages and their impact on women's lives, perhaps from a perspective of gender inequality from, will take us to the news.

If there are many courses for women in X city and if women are only producing handcrafts, are learning nothing about their rights and cannot have a profession and work or earn an income, this is newsworthy.

## Reflection Examples

We read news about women who made street demonstration about taking legal measures against marital rape in X city. Sexual crimes are among the most important problems of women all around the world. We can do street interviews with women in our cities about what women are thinking about it, do they know what to do when they experience such things etc. In this way we can see the global problems' impact on the local agenda.

There is an immense earthquake in X city. Those rendered homeless are fighting for survival in temporary shelters. In such disasters women are challenged by different difficulties than men. We can make news about hygienic problems in the shelters, women not being able to obtain medical supplies and the situation of pregnant women. We can tell of the measure to be taken and the needs of women in our news – because Turkey is an earthquake prone country.

Another example might be an official or an actor or a politician who speaks publicly using sexist language and inveighing against women, magnifying discrimination and sexism. What are the thoughts of women in our city? What do they have to say about it?

## Smiling Examples

- Let's suppose that the students of X university put pressure on the university management to include a gender mainstreaming class in the curriculum. They organized a demonstration, collected signatures and expressed the importance of this class to the local media. We need to get their messages and make this action visible by reporting it as news.
- Let's suppose that women living in a neighbourhood of X city organized themselves to look after each other's babies while they are at work. Some of them had participated in meetings of women's organizations and became conscious of their rights. Then they explained what they had learned to other women in their neighbourhood. They also made an effort to raise the awareness of their husbands and fathers who did not support them. As a result, these women were empowered and contributed to behavioural change in their neighbourhood. If we can find such examples, they can be reported as news.

## Examples depends on the routine developments

- Rate of inflation is declared 3rd of the every months. What does women who are expected to manage the domestic economy think about high cost of living? What are their expectations, what are their plans to deal with this?
- There are days called "public day" when the officers from municipalities or governorship speak with the public to listen their problems and complaints in almost every cities. Do the women can speak about their problems caused by being a woman. Are these problems taken seriously and solved by the authorities?
- The city councils in the cities are meet regularly. Do the women and women organizations participate to these meetings? Do they have a chance to present their opinion? Have they ever participated to these meetings? Are they aware of which issues are on the table in these meetings?

## Examples come from Curiosity

- Why do the names of awards in art or literature or sports generally belong to males? Why do people not realize that there are successful women whose names can be used?

- Why do the names of streets, main roads, and parkways generally belong to males? Why are the women whose names are used for streets generally historical characters? (Like Nene Hatun).
- In the city we live in, the heels of the shoes of women generally break on the cobbles of the streets. Since the pavements are so high, women have difficulty walking with baby carriages. The railings on bridges and the stairs of busses are not suitable for women wearing skirts. Insufficient street lightning causes an increase in crimes against women. Women feel uncomfortable in the subways where there is little security. In general there are no toilets for women in the bazaars or if there are toilets for women, they are poorly maintained. Sometimes the location of the bazaars is far away and women cannot afford to go there even by bus. Why are the municipal authorities not aware of these problems?
- How many women know the addresses of public authorities such as governorship, police station, and the social services centre? How many women are aware of the hotline for suffering women and children?

These are just examples that might inspire alternative journalism for women in local reporting everywhere.

### **How will we reach the news?**

The information or document that we are calling news will not come into our hands in a ready-made format. There are many sources that can be used and keeping in touch with them, collecting information about their activities, consulting them about women issues will make the work easier. You can also benefit from the news and press releases published on their web sites.

- Women's organizations (associations, platforms, initiatives etc.)
- NGOs who have studies on women issues (NGOs working on human rights, sexual orientation, education, health, politics etc.)
- Public institutions (Security Directorate, National Education, Health Centres etc.)
- Women's Branches of Political Parties
- Trade Unions
- City Councils / Women's Assemblies
- Local Governments
- Bars / Women Commissions
- Local Media
- Universities
- Centres for Consulting
- Businesses owned by women
- Women

### **Don't Forget:**

Our news is not confined solely to women. All the vulnerable groups (children, people with disabilities, elderly people, gays, minorities etc.) can be the subject of our news. A gender mainstreaming perspective requires hearing and projecting the voices of groups that are marginalized or ignored.

### **What kind of language should we use in reporting?**

We can produce alternatives for those concepts that represent sexism or that imply male-centric language. For instance:

Policeman is wrong; police officer is right.

Maiden name is wrong; surname before marriage is right.

Gender-sensitive language cannot include masculine/militarist concepts. We should also avoid stereotypes, generalising and prejudices. For instance:

“...Her friends were with her on her happiest day ever...”  
“...Being a bride is the dream of every young woman...”  
“...The treatment for cellulite which is the nightmare of women...”  
“...She has also been subjected to violence like every woman...”  
“... I do not believe in equality; I think women are superior to men...”  
“...There are no women or men: there is only the human...”  
“...Every place that includes women becomes prettier...”  
“...Women are peacemakers...”  
“...Women have the power to deal with everything...”  
“...She is a tomboy, she could defend herself.”

We are making news that takes sides – the side of women and vulnerable groups.

**Don't forget!**

Since our news is published online, we are free to write long stories. However, we should be aware that the easy to read news is the story that is short and to the point. It must be clear, factual, well-presented and – above all – gender-sensitive.