‘Mission Possible’: A Gender and Media Advocacy Toolkit

Module 3: Who are the Target Audiences for Gender and Media Advocacy?

Successful advocacy depends on taking time to think through how you will work with and influence each target audience. This module identifies key audiences that are significant to bringing about change in the media and highlights some strategies used by gender and media activists throughout the world to promote gender equality in the media.
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Successful advocacy depends on knowing the various audiences that are strategic for bringing about change. Some of these audiences will be able to affect change in a direct manner, while others may be those who can have a positive influence, or who can put pressure on those in positions to make change happen.

**Key audiences** are those who have the power to effect change (also called change agents), but who may need to be persuaded to act. These include media owners, managers, senior editors, advertisers, media governance structures (such as Boards of Directors), and legislators.

**Primary audiences** (also called beneficiaries) are those who will benefit from the changes being made. In gender and media advocacy these include women and at times men, both within and outside the media.

**Secondary audiences** (also called partners) are those whose support you can rally. These include media professional bodies such as editors' forums and journalists unions, media advocacy groups; legislators and independent regulators who are instrumental in developing guidelines for the media; the general public.

**Significant others** include target audiences within the media industry who might oppose the proposed changes. These include the journalists and other media professionals who will have to change their newsgathering and editorial practices to be more conscious of the gender biases and prejudices that influence how they do their work.

Good advocacy depends on taking the time to think through how you will work with and influence each of the audiences.

1. **Who is Who in the Media?**

As an industry, the media employs people in various capacities. Some of these people are as follows: (This is not a detailed breakdown, but a general overview of some of the key positions within the media so that gender and media activists can ensure that they work with the right group on each issue).

**Journalists/Reporters** – These are the women and men who often are the first target of gender and media advocacy, because journalists are viewed as those who have the power to decide which stories to cover, how to cover, who to interview as sources, and to decide on what will or will not be news. Journalists are key to bringing about a change in the media because they are the gatherers of news and often do have leeway to choose the type of stories they will report on, especially as they become more senior reporters.
Editors – Editor is a broad term which covers a broad spectrum of people ranging from editors-in-chiefs, news editors, business editors to features and sports editors. These are often referred to as the ‘gatekeepers’, because they are among the decision-makers and policymakers within the media. Editors assign news and issue-based stories to journalists and reporters; they can decide what will be the top stories of the day to appear in the newspaper or in the broadcast line-up; they guide reporters towards various sources; help to shape the angle (focus) a story will take; and are also instrumental in the development of editorial guidelines, codes and policies.

Sub-editors – These are the people who are responsible for editing news and other media stories to ensure that facts, spelling and grammar are correct, and that the story is written in accordance with the media institution’s style guidelines. Sub-editors write headlines, captions for pictures and graphics (and they often decide what illustrations will go with what stories) and are responsible for ensuring that stories fit within the space (newspapers and magazines) or time-slot (broadcast) available. This gives them the power to decide what stays and what will be omitted.

Media managers – Many people fall within this group. They include decision-makers within the media who are responsible for policy development, management issues; and, have the power to effect change through the development and implementation of policy. They give guidance and direction that can make a difference in how a media operates and how those involved in editorial operations do their work. General managers or chief executive officers, editors-in-chiefs, controllers of news, directors of human resources, advertising/marketing, finances, technical operations, all fall within this category.

Directorate/governance structures – These are the members of the Board of Directors or members of the highest governing structure of a media institution. These structures are not involved in the day-to-day work on the media, but do have a vested interest in seeing media survive, becoming more relevant to their audiences, and in ensuring that the bottom line is in order. These are often influential people within a community or country and may not be from the media sector. Media owners, those who invest funds into the running of a media operation or who start the medium from their own resources, are often part of the governance structure.

Other Audiences Who Can Make a Difference

External policy makers – legislators, regulators, state and private sector administrators within the media and communications sector.

The general public – building media literacy among media audiences is pivotal to successful and sustained engagement with the media on gender equality issues both within the media and in the media’s editorial agenda. Media literacy is the ability to understand the way the media works, to spot bias in the news and to recognize accurate and impartial news coverage.

The following chart illustrates how gender and media activists can begin to identify the various audiences for gender and media advocacy issues.
Chart 1: MAPPING AUDIENCES FOR GENDER AND MEDIA ADVOCACY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Key audience</th>
<th>Secondary audience</th>
<th>Primary audience</th>
<th>Significant others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development of gender editorial policy and guidelines by media institutions</td>
<td>Media managers Directorate/governance structure Editors</td>
<td>Editors forums Women’s groups Media associations</td>
<td>Women within the media General female populace</td>
<td>Editors Journalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing the number of women who speak in the media as sources</td>
<td>Editors Journalists/reporters</td>
<td>Women journalists Women’s groups</td>
<td>Journalists editors</td>
<td>Journalists Editors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve coverage of gender violence in the media</td>
<td>Journalists Editors</td>
<td>Legislators Women’s groups Media councils</td>
<td>General populace Women survivors of gender violence</td>
<td>Journalists Editors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chart illustrates how an issue for gender and media advocacy can be thought through in terms of audiences. Activists can use this as a model to begin to think of the various audiences and how they fit into gender and media advocacy.

**Approaches to Gender and Media Advocacy**

Various strategies are in use throughout the world to promote gender equality in the media. No one approach will suffice given the complexity of the media and the national media landscapes with their own specificities.

To be at their most effective, gender and media activists should not be antagonistic towards the media and those working within. Taking time to learn how the media works, how and why journalists choose the sources they do, how sub-editors do their jobs, and who are the key players in media decision-making, can provide activists with much needed insight into where opportunities for intervention and lobbying lie within the media.

Gender and media activists often use a combination of strategies. These include the following:

- The creation of gender and media networks and associations which push for change through dialogues, discussions, research and media monitoring.
Examples include the Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network (http://www.gemsa.org.za), Sur Profesionales in Latin America (http://www.sitiosur.cl/organizacion.asp) and the Asian Network of Women in Communication, among others.

- Women have created alternative media in the form of newsletters, journals, radio, video productions, and now on-line publications. One of the most important contributions of women’s alternative media is to provide a space for serious reflection about the nature of women’s exclusion from the mainstream. Examples include the Women's Feature Service (WFS) based in New Delhi, India (http://wfsnews.org/), FIRE radio in Latin America (http://www.fire.or.cr/), the Africa Women and Child Feature Service, based in Nairobi, Kenya (http://www.awcfs.org/), among others.

- Gender activists have developed tools to monitor the media on its coverage of violence against women, women in politics, women as sources, the portrayal of women, among other areas of concern. These exercises provide specific data and analysis that could be presented to the media which highlighted professional gaps in news and other forms of reporting, as well as examples of how the media violates its own principles of accuracy, fairness and balance.

### Box Six: Gender and Media Activism

Based on a study on feminist media activism worldwide, feminist communications and media scholars Carolyn Byerly and Karen Ross pose a Model of ‘Women’s Media Action’. Based on interviews with some 90 women worldwide, the scholars identify four paths that characterize women’s activism and engagement with the media:

**Politics to Media** – Feminists decide to begin to use media as part of their feminist political work. These women move from being ‘feminist activists’ to producing media products of some kind.

**Media Profession to Politics** – Women employed in media industries decide to use their vantage point as insiders to expand women-related content or to reform the industry’s policies to improve women’s professional status. Some also seek to make company policies more egalitarian.

**Advocate Change Agent** – Women who pressure media to improve treatment of women in one or more ways. The outside advocate’s path often entails research and analysis about women and media, including publication of reports or articles, or they may mobilize a constituency to write letters or take some action.

**Women-owned Media** – This path allows women the maximum control over message production and distribution. Examples of this include book and magazine publishing, syndicated radio programming, women's news agencies and independent film and video companies.
Box Seven: Case study

Industry Ears goes for top guns

Industry Ears, a Washington D.C.-based media watch group, was started by women professionals within the music industry to lobby radio stations not to air hip-hop and rap music that contains misogynist lyrics.

The media watch group says its firing aim is at the media policy makers and not the artists who create the lyrics. “People go after the artists, but rarely do we hold to the fire the feet of executives who control when and how often we hear these songs,” says Lisa Fager, co-founder of the group.

Last spring, Fager and other group members hit the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters annual gala, handing out fliers with the lyrics from the song they found offensive. Their strategy: to confront those at the top of the radio food chain. “We told them we expected more from them,” Fager says.

Besides getting executives to face the music, Industry Ears also is empowering communities to take on the media. They recently worked to end an insidious practice at WMIB The Beat in Miami, Florida, and WQHT Hot 97 in New York: smack fests, where mostly young women of color pummel each other until someone gets injured or gives up.

After Industry Ears learned that in New York the contest violated state laws barring unlawful fighting competitions, the organization armed local activists with the information. That led officials to order the station to stop the contest and the state attorney general to launch a probe into it. Florida lawmakers are next on their list.

Source: Davey D, Going Straight to the Source, Essence, July 2005

Activity – Discussions Points!

1. What is the gender and media issue for Industry Ears?
2. Who is the key audience and why?
3. What other audience does Industry Ears target? Why?
4. What are Industry Ears strategies?
5. Is there a similar gender and media issue of concern in your country? If your answer is yes, what strategies have been used to bring this to the attention of the radio station(s)?
6. What new gender and media advocacy tips have you learnt from the Industry Ears story?