Gender Policy

for

Community

Radio

March 8 2008

Preamble

Women's equality and the important role of women in every field of human endeavour have been acknowledged by international instruments, national constitutions and societies across the globe.

The rights of all people, regardless of gender, sexuality, race, religion, have been acknowledged under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Further, governments have acknowledged the rights of women under the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Under this Convention, governments are obliged to implement concrete programs to put into practice three main principles: the principle of equality, the principle of nondiscrimination and the principle of State obligation.

The role of the media in promoting the women's equality is vital. It is recognised in Section J of the Beijing Platform for Women, adopted by consensus in 1995. This section draws attention to the active involvement of women in the media, but their general absence from decision-making positions in all forms of media. It also points to the urgent need for reform and puts on obligation on States to undertake steps such as training, research and promotion of women into positions of decisionmaking power. It also points an obligation onto media practitioners to help achieve the two outlined strategic objectives to increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new informatiion communication technologies (ICTs); and to promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.

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Community radio should be at the forefront of achieving these objectives.

The advent of the internet and online communications provides opportunities for women to network and communicate on an equitable footing. The majority of women, however, live in developing nations, where their access to all forms of technology is severely limited. The needs of women in developing countries, and those limited in their access to technology in developed countries, need to be taken into account not only by community radio practitioners, but also by policy-makers at every level of society, from local governments to international governing bodies. Unfortunately, policy-making has largely ignored women's needs online, leading to an environment that has been largely designed by and for men, and which worsens both the information gap between men and women as well as the negative portrayals, overt commercialisation and sexualisation of the female body. Community radio can play a role in helping to bring these specific concerns to the policy table, and promoting the role of women both in the use of ICTs, and redressing this political imbalance.

Internationally, the role of women in preventing and resolving conflict and in peace-building has been recognised through United Nations Security Council resolution 1325. Community radio has the responsibility to help ensure women's visibility and participation in these situations, providing spaces for women's voices to be heard in the peace-building process and addressing women's and girls' specific needs in conflict situations.

Community radio has an obligation to redress the imbalance; facilitate women's involvement at all levels of decision-making and programming; ensure that women's voices and concerns are part of the daily news agenda; ensure that women are portrayed positively as active members of society; and support women acquire the technical skills and confidence to control their communications. Community radio is part of a progressive social movement, and as such stations should initiate and strengthen ties with progressive women's movements. Stations also have an obligation to implement and enforce an ethical policy that includes respect for women and equalityas one of its cornerstones. This Gender Policy for Community Radio will serve as a tool to implement gender equality in stations. It should be part of station by-laws and ethical policies.

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Section I
Women's access to the airwaves

Women need to have access to the airwaves, in terms of the ability to make their own programmes about political and social issues and entertainment, and also to have programmes that deal with women's issues.

This requires a positive attitude towards training for women, allowing women space to produce programmes; and ensuring a supportive, secure environment in and around the station. This includes the development of anti-sexual harassment policy and a complaints mechanism to provide protection for women from any form of sexual harassment and molestation. Women also have the right to work without fear, so appropriate training in security and self-defence, zero tolerance for violations of women's dignity and helping women deal with threats coming from both inside and outside the station form a key part in allowing women access to the airwaves.

Culturally, it is sometimes difficult for women to access the airwaves, due to their inability to travel alone or late at night. Efforts should be made to ensure that women are able to overcome these barriers, for example, through mobile radio stations, sharing of transport or the provision of escorts. Special technical training for women or women-only days at the station are ways of overcoming problems of confidence. Until women achieve parity, stations should commit to establishing a women's desk within the radio station to support women's participation and to safeguard them against all forms of discrimination within the station and on air; and to help in creating an affirmative environment for women's equal participation.

Section II
Women's representation on air

Encourage the representation of women in their diversity, instead of emphasising stereotyped roles, such as within the family, for women.

Ensure that all people, regardless of gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, etc are treated with respect and dignity in all aspects of the content broadcast on the station, whether as editorial content or advertisements. This includes ensuring that neither men nor women are objectified, physically or otherwise.

Women's perspectives should be represented in all programming. However, special programme must be alloted for women. At the same time women broadcasters should not be confined to these specific women's programs. Women are often neglected by the media as sources of expertise and expert opinion. Diverse sources, representative of all sectors of society, should be used for news and analysis programmes. To facilitate this, it may be useful to make a directory of women experts in various fields that can be used as a reference point.

Section III
The special needs of minority women

The diversity of women's experiences needs to be recognised, and space should be created for women who have faced further forms discrimination, oppression or neglect by commercial and state media. This includes special provisions for including differently abled women, women from minority ethnic, caste or indigenous backgrounds and women from sexual minorities, such as lesbians and transgenders.

Ensure that women and people have access to the airwaves in their full diversity. In particular, give women from minorities priority airtime to discuss their issues in an empowering, safe and nondiscriminatory environment.
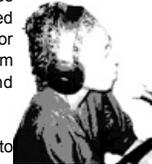
The training and capacity building of women from these backgrounds and orientations may be unique, and funding should be included to ensure that these needs are met.

Section IV
Women's representation at all levels of station management

Community radio has better women's representation than either commercial or government-owned / public media. However, women are still largely underrepresented, particularly in areas of decision-making and technical skills and there are too many stations where there is no effective representation of women. In order for women to be meaningfully represented at all levels of the community radio station, quotas for participation need to be set for ownership, management and production, including women's participation in technical management. The ultimate goal is to reach equality between men and women, but quotas of at least 30% women's representation should be set in the interim. To achieve these quotas, it is important to invest in women's skills, to institute leadership and management training aimed at supporting women and achieve gender parity within the station.

Women's participation cannot be measured by the number of women involved in the station. Women must be represented in the production, ownership and decision-making bodies of the station to ensure that women are able to engage meaningfully with policy processes, which could include culturally sensitive supportive environment.

There are multiple factors that can facilitate women's participation. This includes ensuring child-care, flexible working hours and broadcast schedules that fit women's other responsibilities, adequate lighting and security at the station during meeting and broadcast times, or secure transport for women who have to travel to and from the station, particularly at night or on public holidays. At least half of all training places should be reserved for women.

Section V
The use of appropriate technology

While some women are proficient in the use of ICTs, there remains a gendered digital divide and the majority are not. Women are often excluded from the use of technology, including the use of traditional technology, such as operating a radio studio. It is important to acknowledge this gendered digital divide and overcome it, through both dedicated technical training by and for women and investment in appropriate technologies. Appropriate technologies includes a commitment to free and open source software. This includes a studio set up that is easy to operate for women, bearing in mind physical differences, accounting for example that women are usually shorter than men – to ensure that the studio can be used by all, including differently abled people. It also includes ensuring that training materials are accessible, translated into the local languages and adapted for non-literates, so that anyone can understand them. There is also an urgent need to encourage research and support initiatives that help the poor and non-literate meet their communication needs, both through the development of technology that can be used by those who are non-literate; and through making cheaper technology available.

Section VI
Funding and capacity-building for women's radio

Capacity-building is a key component for achieving gender parity. This does not only apply to capacity-building for women involved in the station, but for both men and women so that they can work together to build a safe, nurturing and supportive environment where all feel able to contribute their best to all aspects of the station's success.

At the same time, gender sensitivity training should be conducted for all participants at the radio station to enable men and women to recognise patriarchal behaviour and discriminatory portrayals; and eventually develop egalitarian gender relations, and non-discriminatory and gender fair reporting.

While many stations have good intentions to achieve gender parity, rarely is funding or capacity-building dedicated to this goal. Specific funds and money should be set aside to achieve gender parity. These funds should be used to train women with technical, programming and management skills; invest in achieving conditions in the station that enable women to feel secure (such as lighting, security equipment or separate toilet facilities); and provide networking opportunities for women involved in the station.

From a structural point of view, it may be vital to have a women's officer among the staff, advisory board or management committee who can assess the needs of the station and implement programmes to help achieve gender parity, such as through a women's desk.

This Gender Policy has been translated into 17 other languages see:

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL NETWORK
RÉSEAU INTERNATIONAL DE FEMMES
RED INTERNACIONAL DE MUJERES
AMARC WIN

AMARC-WIN International, 705 Rue Bourget #100, Montreal, Quebec CANADA, H4C 2M6, Tel: +1-514-982-0351, Fax: +1-514-849-7129
secretariat@si.amarc.org, http://win.amarc.org/

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The inputs to this gender policy come from the members of AMARC-WIN Asia Pacific and it was appoved by AMARC-WIN International.

Drafing Commettee: Geeta Malhotra, READ (India); Nimmi Chauhan, DRISHTI Media Collective (India); Sonia Randhawa, AMARC Asia Pacific Board (Australia); Tamara Aqrabawe, INTERNEWS (Afghanistan); and Bianca Miglioretto, ISIS INTERNATIONAL (Philippines)

Cooordination: Isis International, www.isiswomen.org