GENDER AND MEDIA POLICY: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Lisa McLaughlin, Ph.D.
Miami University-Ohio, USA
The New Techno-Industrial Complex

- Dominated by “informational capitalism” and the notion of a knowledge and/or information economy which often is treated as synonymous with an “information society” (marked by technocratic, meritocratic, and technophilic approaches)

- Technological systems are defined in terms of the flow of knowledge and (technological, economic) competences
The New Techno-Industrial Complex, cont’d

- Dominated by complex technologies and expert decision-making, with little opportunity for citizens to be integrated into technology policy decision-making and thus discourages them from voicing opinions on issues that directly affect their lives.

- Blocks of technological knowledge are structured by a set of corporate/industrial sectors operating within a neoliberal political-economic environment.
Governance encompasses regulation and policy, but it is a broader notion than “government” because it refers not only to formal institutions but also to the interactions among these form institutions and the institutions of civil society and the private/corporate sector.

Global media governance has become a primary concern for governments, intergovernmental organizations, transnational/multinational corporations, and global civil society.
The “New Global Governance” (NGG) as Defined by the World Summit on the Information Society

A Counter-balance to the New Techno-Industrial Complex’s Undemocratic Tendencies?
The New Global Governance

- NGG: ostensibly a “multi-stakeholder mode of governance” in which civil society and the private sector participate on an “equal footing” as partners with governments (or member-states of the United Nations).

- NGG: presumably differs from the top-down tendencies of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) debates; includes “multi-cultural” and “grassroots” groups.
The New Multi-stakeholder Approach to Governance

1. The “new multi-stakeholderism” is a set of economic imperatives.
2. The private sector rises to the head of the body politic; UN member-states and many NGOs have become instrumentalized by neoliberal economic imperatives.
3. Corporations increasingly have more power to frame and set the development agenda (constructing a dominant vision for future-oriented social change).
Multi-stakeholderism, cont’d

- Multi-stakeholder processes tend to exclude or tokenize groups which threaten economic imperatives.
- As development agencies and governments become unable or unwilling to pursue or provide funding for development, the private sector offers financing for development as a form of “corporate social responsibility,” often in the form of market-based public-private partnerships.
Gender Governance Orders

- Global governance reinforces gender governance orders and become institutionalized as a result of systems of capital accumulation and state power, cultural definitions of gender, and the production and re-production of gender relations as a form of social ordering.

- Gender orders are stabilized through various micro- and macro-practices that ensure the reproduction of macro-political orders. They become institutionalized as a result of specific historical regimes of capital accumulation.

(Brijitte Young, Gender, Globalization and Democratization 2001).
Public-Private Partnerships and ICTD

Public-Private Partnerships: governments, intergovernmental organizations, the business sector, and civil society organizations develop partnership agreements that are thought to allow government enablement of both markets and communities.

- PPPs are now the norm in development.
- Business and government sectors tend to benefit more than do community members, enjoying a financial largesse that the women who have become attractive targets for PPP-led development will never experience.
- Technology, computer, and electronic companies are prominent in PPPs, mostly supporting technical skills training, creating Internet kiosks, with corporations such as Cisco Systems, Hewlett-Packard, and Sun Micro-Systems pursuing gender and “less developed countries” partnership initiatives.
Gender Mainstreaming Through Public-Private Partnerships

- Although issues of consumer “protection,” “needs,” and “access” to ICTs feature prominently in the discourses of global communication governance, the role of women as information workers is a more pronounced, though largely overlooked, preoccupation.

- The example of the WSIS and the public-private partnerships forged throughout the process illustrate that approaches to gender and development have become integrated into the corporatization of development.
Gender Mainstreaming as a Gender Governance Order

- Emerged alongside the corporatization of development
- Definition: “a strategy for making women's and men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.”

- ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions (E/1997/100)
The Commercialization of Development

According to Wilkins and Mody (2001), the commercialization of development leads to:

1. focusing on short-term goals at the expense of long-term interests.
2. valuing individuals in terms of their ability to consume rather than their human rights.
3. positing social change at the individual level, neglecting social and cultural constraints.
4. privileging of economic interests over social and political interests by national policy-makers.
5. commercializing public domains and promoting a materialist climate, including in the area of policy-making.
Women Become Efficient Economic Actors to be Inserted into Market-driven Initiatives

Mainstream gender and ICT for development policies and practices focus on “unleashing” individual women’s entrepreneurial energies and mainstreaming women into corporate-led public-private partnership initiatives instead of confronting structural inequalities which establish most women as the preferred laborers in the lowest ranks of occupations associated with new technologies.
Women entrepreneurship development training focuses on teaching the skills necessary for women to identify and select business opportunities, build their business skills and knowledge, and develop entrepreneurial competencies to start and run small- and medium-size enterprises (SMEs).

Women worker associations are abundant in India, particularly in the informal sector. ICT companies flock to India to target women in collectives for partnerships who are positioned discursively as self-reliant, enterprising women who will become empowered individuals despite the unlikelihood that their the basic ICT skills will will open the door to higher pay and links to the national and global economy.

The notion of an “entrepreneur” refers less to an innovator or founder than it is a metaphor that offers a model for how subjects should conduct themselves and contribute to social welfare and economic growth.
Enterprising Women

- Enterprising women are imagined to be enterprising partners of entrepreneurial political institutions that have outsourced the imperative of economic growth and social and employment security to individual subjects entrusted to possess entrepreneurial qualities.

- Enterprising citizens are supposed to be productive, efficient, self-motivate, and active in the maintenance of their own social security and life progress.
Does Entrepreneurship Development Training, in its Neoliberal Manifestation, Erode Affinities that Exist Within Women’s Collectives and Lead to Atomistic Individualism?

- Criticism of neoliberal rhetoric about workforce readiness, the middle class values of individualism and self-reliance, entrepreneurship, employment in the professions, and the need for self-reinvention to succeed in the new capitalist order

- Not if we understand neoliberal policies and practices to be extraordinarily flexible and adaptive, thereby necessitating that individualism and collectivism co-exist and are co-implicated from the inception of a PPP
Why the Collective Remains Critical to Multi-stakeholder Partnerships

- The collective acts as a sort of repository for attracting additional women to ICT competencies in entrepreneurship development training.
- The collective retains a collective responsibility for teaching and advising individual members of worker and SHG associations in how they should conduct themselves in the skills of self-management while making a contribution to the entrepreneurial state.
- The collective often acts as a monitor so that non-neoliberal, oppositional, and resistant ideas are suppressed.
- The women members remain attached to the associational atmosphere of the group.
What Should Feminist Approaches to Governance and Policy Seek to Accomplish?

- the gaining and maintaining of women’s voice and visibility
- empowering women to inhabit the agency, authority, credibility, and space from which to speak and be heard
- being vigilant so as not to be co-opted by neoliberalism, which is increasingly difficult to distinguish from its “others”