UNESCO Foreword

In 1995, during the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, all governments met to discuss gender equality issues. The key potential of media to promote gender equality and diversity in all spheres was highlighted in the Declaration and Platform for Action. All stakeholders are called to join forces to combat "stereotyping of women and inequality in women’s access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in the media". Even long before the Beijing Declaration, gender equality was enshrined in the UN Charter in 1945.

Today, there is consensus among all UN Agencies and other organizations that progress has been slow, fragmented, needs to be intensified, and lacks the strength of a global movement.

UNESCO acts across the world to ensure that women and men benefit equally from freedom of expression as a basic human right. We seek to address obstacles such as: imbalanced access to information and knowledge, media and technology, under-representation of women in the staffing of media at all levels including executives and positions on Boards, insufficient media coverage of gender issues, the prevalence of stereotypical media content and information regarding gender, as well as violence against women journalists and women.

UNESCO’s strategy is pursued through a two-fold approach: (i) gender-specific programmes, and (ii) gender mainstreaming with action in all of UNESCO’s fields of competence: education, the sciences, culture, and communication and information. This includes interventions concerning policy development, awareness raising and advocacy, and research, institutional capacity building, and training.

In December 2013, UNESCO and partners gathered media organizations, media professionals, academics, policy-makers, civil society groups, and development agencies in Bangkok for a Global Forum on Media and Gender. The Forum took the 1995 Beijing Declaration as its reference point and resulted in the setting-up of a pioneering Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMAG). The aim of GAMAG has two main dimensions: Firstly, it will ensure constructive dialogue between media partners and civil society; secondly, it will enable all stakeholders to collectively give momentum to women’s access to expression and decision-making by promoting a gender-inclusive media and communication environment.

The actions and successes of GAMAG should be evidence-based. There is a necessity to show some of the most significant scholarly contributions to knowledge and action towards expanding women’s participation in all communication platforms. In addition, the publication proposes a pragmatic research agenda for the GAMAG, looking back, building on the past and looking to the future.

This volume is divided into four main sections: 1) Gender-based violence, media and information; 2) Women’s access to media; 3) Gender and media policy and strategies; 4) Gender, education, and media information literacy. The authors are all experts on the advancement of gender equality. Moreover, they have been involved in both scholarly and advocacy actions with visible impact at global, regional and national levels.

UNESCO is pleased to cooperate with the International Association of Communication Researchers in the preparation of this publication.

The potential exists for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women. Women should be empowered by enhancing their skills, knowledge and access to media and information technology. All obstacles to women’s equal opportunity to exercise leadership in the media should be unearthed and removed.

UNESCO hopes that this publication will contribute to existing body of knowledge on the topic and will be useful for all stakeholders. The involvement of media and journalism education institutions must interface with that of media organizations, media professionals, policy-makers, and civil society groups for us to achieve gender equality in and through media.

Guy Berger

Director, Division of Freedom of Expression and Media Development

UNESCO

Preface

Janet Wasko

The International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) is pleased to be working with UNESCO and other organisations around the world as part of the Global Forum on Media and Gender.

The IAMCR is the leading worldwide professional organisation in the field of media and communication research. Its members promote global inclusiveness and excellence within the best traditions of critical research in the field. Above all, it represents an international community of scholars who focus on media and communication research.

The IAMCR has addressed issues pertaining to media and gender for many years. Since the early 1980s, the organisation has included an active and productive section that focuses on these issues. The Gender and Communication Section has regularly organised panels at IAMCR conferences, as well as working with the organisation’s other sections and working groups to expand the scope of these concerns. Numerous publications and research projects have emerged from the section members (for instance, Carolyn Byerly’s (2011) study of women in the global news industry, which involved many of the section members). The section also hosts a Facebook page that features announcements and resources relevant to research on gender and communication (https://www.facebook.com/GenderAndCommunicationSectionIamcr).

The current Gender and Communication Section’s mission is:

...to foster and encourage any and all aspects of scholarship relating to the nexus of gender and communication. This Section aims to encourage the conduct and dissemination of research that uses gender as a primary thematic in work around media, culture and communication; to encourage and nurture younger scholars and those from countries interested in areas of gender-media to participate in the academic community via attendance at conferences.

This Section’s members are concerned to transcend the often artificial boundaries that give rise to divisions in the conduct of social science. They are committed to avoiding racial, ethnic, national, gender, ideological or philosophical descriptions. Because this Section is centrally concerned with how gender considerations and identities are reproduced and consumed through media production and consumption, members’ papers yield new insights into the way similarity and difference are experienced in the everyday lives of audiences.

As an indication of the range of topics featured in the Gender and Communication Section’s programme, the following panels were offered at the most recent conference in Dublin, Ireland: ‘Women Journalists and Media Structures in a Time of Crisis’, ‘Gender, Identity, and Culture’, ‘Ethnography, Audiences and Gender’, ‘Gender, Crisis and (Sexual) Violence’, ‘Social Networks/ICT and Gender’, and ‘Audiences the Economy and Media’. The section members are not only interested in theoretical discussions, but are concerned with policy and practical applications, as indicated by panels such as: ‘Improving Women’s Position in Media/Society’ and ‘Speaking Truth to Power about Gender and Communication: International and Regional Policy Developments towards Beijing+20’, a session that was organised with the Working Group on Global Media Policy.

Members of the Gender and Communication section represent some of the most active scholars in the area of women and media and feminist approaches to the study of communications. The section truly represents an international community of feminist scholars. One of the traditions of the section has been to organise a dinner or party at each IAMCR conference – an indication of the ‘community’ that has developed by the group.

Through the Global Alliance for Gender and Media, IAMCR is committed to working with the international community in improving conditions for the advancement of gender equality. We look forward to the Global Forum and hope that this publication will contribute to the goals of the meetings in Bangkok and beyond.

References