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Welcome Address

By

Vijay Menon
I am happy to welcome all of you, on behalf of AMIC, to this workshop on "Editorial Management for Senior Women Journalists".

The origins of this workshop may be traced to a seminar we organised in Singapore in 1987. The topic was Women and the Media. The participants made several recommendations at the end of the seminar. Three of the more important suggestions were that:

i. that a research project should be undertaken to study the access of women to communication education and employment;

ii. that an exchange scheme should be organised for women media professionals for study tours and internships; and

iii. AMIC should organise a two-week training programme for women in middle management positions;

In the seven years since that seminar, we have implemented all three suggestions.

The research project entitled, "Access of Asian women to Communication Education and Work", was carried out in six countries in 1989. The three Asean countries were Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. The findings showed that the number of female students in communication programmes generally outnumbered the males. The ratio was 6:4 or even 7:3. But this was not reflected in the gender balance in newspapers. And particularly at the senior levels in media organisations, the number of women was comparatively low. The situation is changing -- but slowly.

One possible consequence of this is the stereotyping of women by the media. The media portrayal of women is generally acknowledged to be narrow, even demeaning and damaging. This is not confined to Asia. It is a global problem.
Last year, at a meeting of international communicators in Mexico City, a senior official of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, a Vice-President and female, had this to say:

"The portrayal of women in the media has changed very little during the past two decades, although society has made enormous changes...On TV, with few exceptions, women are still portrayed as bimbos, beauty queens, supplicants and the like...Studies recommending increased media representation of women go back twenty years, but despite more women working at all levels in the media, results of current studies reveal little change in the presentation of women".

Overall, the picture in Asia is promising. As the Asia Magazine pointed out in an article entitled, Feminine Force: "Rising educational levels and new opportunities in the marketplace have spawned a new breed of Asian women...The female voice is louder and clearer today and, in the context of Asia’s burgeoning economy, the climate seems ideal for more "iron butterflies" to take wing".

The media are not the only cause of the subordinate status of women, nor can it be rectified by the media alone. But it is within the power of media to stimulate change. It is our hope that this workshop will help you to broaden your knowledge and sharpen your skills and thereby equip you to assume higher responsibilities and enable you, in time, to contribute to the process of change.

AMIC’s mission, in the 23 years of its existence, has been to assist efforts to improve the quality, spread and accessibility of mass communication in the region, to foster an exchange of ideas, information and experience and to aid in the development of skills, so that the potential of mass communication for development is more fully realized. We have been assisted in our efforts by the steadfast support of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Government of Singapore, and by agencies such as the Communication Assistance Foundation of the Netherlands. The CAF is supporting this series of four workshops. It also provided support for an internship programme in the Netherlands for Asian women journalists, besides assisting small and rural newspapers. But equally important to us is the positive response of individuals and organisations who participate in our programmes. So to you and your papers, we say "Thank you".

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