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Welcome Address

By

Vijay Menon
On behalf of AMIC, the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre, I am happy to welcome all of you to this Advanced Editorial Workshop for Senior Women Journalists.

The participation and portrayal of women in the media is a subject that has received increasing attention in recent years. It is now recognised that the communication media which have a major role as disseminators of information and moulders of opinion have provided less than adequate job opportunities for women and have been less than fair in their portrayal. This is particularly marked in the developing countries of the world, including most countries of Asia.

The causes of the imbalances are both deep-seated and long-standing and do not permit of a quick or easy solution. There are many agencies currently assisting efforts to right the wrongs. Unesco is one of the institutions that has done much useful work. But the reports and statistics it helped to generate in the early years of this decade only served to highlight the abysmal state of women vis-a-vis the media.

A global review published by Unesco in 1981 concluded that overall, 'media presentation of women can best be described as narrow; at worst, it is unrealistic, demeaning and damaging. No
substantial differences were found between the major media in this respect, and the overall situation was said to be remarkably consistent from one country to another. An update published in 1985 reported that the intervening years were not characterized by any radical change in the portrayal of women in the mass media. To the question whether an increase in the number of women employed in the media leads to a change in media content, the answer appeared to be, 'not necessarily'.

In regard to the employment of women in the media, it was clear that both in terms of overall numbers and of their distribution across and within specific occupations, women's participation is limited. In particular, women are disproportionately excluded from key decision-making posts.

Margaret Gallagher in her book, 'Unequal opportunities: The case of women and the media' writes of three types of segregation: 'occupational segregation' (where women are generally concentrated in the lower levels of particular job categories, or else hived off into areas which are overwhelmingly 'female'; 'vertical segregation' (at managerial levels women hold not more than 10 per cent of jobs); and 'horizontal segregation' (noticeable concentration of women in certain areas - usually the less prestigious, less paid ones, from which promotion or career development is a near impossibility).
She points out that even where equal access to employment is guaranteed by law to women, lack of appropriate education and training may hinder their initial entry or promotion. She stresses that in the developing world, training is crucially important if the younger media systems are to avoid the male-dominated employment profiles of many western organisations.

AMIC has been endeavouring, admittedly in a very modest way, to organise training programmes designed to benefit some of the sectors in need. In the last two years, we have had workshops on Information, Education and Communication on Nutrition for Rural Women, on Reporting, Rural Journalism, and Women and Newspaper Management, to name a few.

Our training activities are made possible by the support we receive from funding agencies. Our programmes for women journalists have evoked encouragement and support in particular from the Communication Assistance Foundation of the Netherlands. Besides two workshops, CAF has agreed to fund a programme of internships for three Asian women journalists in the Netherlands.

As the MacBride Commission has pointed out, the media are not the fundamental cause of the subordinate status of women, nor can it be remedied by media alone. But it is within the power of media to stimulate or retard change to a significant degree. It is our expectation that the women journalists participating in our
activities will be assisted in broadening their knowledge and
sharpening their skills and thereby equipping themselves to
assume higher responsibilities and that they will sally forth
from the workshops determined to stimulate change to a
significant degree.

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