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Skills Development Needs Of Women In Broadcasting

By

Eileen Wahab
The Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD) is a broadcasting training institute serving countries of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) region, i.e. stretching from the Cook Islands in the Pacific to Iran.

The success of any development programme is dependent on the communication of it. The AIBD has since its inception in 1972 taken active role in the application of the broadcast media to support development in such areas as health population communication and so on.

Our concern in the use of the broadcast media to support Women's Development is in response to a need to inform and educate women and so help integrate them in development. It derives from a belief that women can benefit from the deliberate educational use of the media and having benefitted contribute that much more to society.

This seminar has quite rightly addressed itself to
a) the access of women to communication education in a formal sense.
b) the status or participation of women in the various media and
c) the portrayal of women in media in examining the of media and women's development. I would like however to add a further dimension to the question of the portrayal of women and that is the portrayal of women's issues in the media.

The AIBD has since 1980 held 12 activities under the theme of women. Such activities have attempted to upgrade the technical skills of women broadcasters and help them deal with issues often overlooked in general programming and in women's programmes either because they are not of interest to women or because women have 'no opinion' or experience in dealing with them. This in itself is a skill particularly in our region - in Asia where programmers have to face the paradox of finding out which direction to take that would be acceptable to a traditional audience whose concern is not so much with equality as with coping with everyday life and everyday decisions.
The first concern of radio & TV programmes must be to strive to reflect the real lives of our women and deal with issues that go beyond traditional concepts of what women are interested in like cooking and domestic issues.

These issues must be dealt with sensitively especially in our societies and with our broadcasting structures which are in the main arms of government. That doesn't mean sidestepping or avoiding issues. It means going out to the women the audience themselves rather than inviting experts or role models to the studio - finding out from them what are issues for them and getting them to talk about them.

Take the issue of migration for which has widespread implications for women all over our region. The migration of men from villages in the Pacific has created great social problems for the women. The migration of women from rural to urban areas to work in factories in Asia has meant a whole new way of life for which many women are unprepared. This is for many broadcasters a very sensitive issue for it conflicts with industrialisation policies. Yet women have a right to know what to expect before they make that decision. We could talk to the experts but we shouldn't. Our audience will learn far more from the story someone he or she can identify with, has to tell.

We have retained in Asia a very powerful tool through which we can do this. The Women's Programme. The women's programme is a goldmine because it has a captive audience. That is not to say that women's issues can only be discussed in the women's programme. Far from it. But if one of our goals is to educated women and integrate them in development then the women's programme is a very good place to start.

In upgrading the technical skills of women, I mean learning how to use the camera, the lights, the studio panel and so on. In our broadcasting organisations these are more often than not separately assigned tasks - more often than not to men-and the producer doesn't get involved. Yet we have found that to give participants on our training courses these skills puts them far more in control of the programmes and its end product.
Apart from training activities for broadcasters, the Institute has more recently embarked on the production of multi media education kit entitled 'Women and Communication in Asia'.

As coordinator of this project I must admit it is ambitions. It is a kit meant to create a critical awareness amongst media management, media trainers, producers and would be producers of predominant images of women conveyed by a range of audio visual media in Asia. It aims to develop analytical skills necessary for critical appraisal and provide examples of innovative formats which could be used in the development of media materials. It focusses on the key issues of violence, health, work and family and will integrate the variables of religion culture and law in these issues. It will draw upon a wide variety of examples of how media material depicts and could depict these issues in this region. A lot of this material is fugitive, hidden away or difficult to access because of a variety of restrictions placed on it. What complicates the task is that material needs to represent the wide variety of situations that exist in this very expensive region we live in.

I could like to point out at this stage that this kit is meant to be used by people like yourselves. But as much as it is for you it is also about you and your womenfolk and the way media reflects women in your countries. On behalf of our New Director Dato Abdullah Mohammed, I would like to thank AMIC for inviting me to this seminar to give me the opportunity to meet all of you and hopefully to discuss with you ways and means to make the Institute's commitment to broadcasting for women's development more meaningful. THANK YOU.

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