Executive Summary

This reference manual provides guidelines for mainstreaming gender into the functions of Ministries of Information and Communication. Its main objective is to assist governments in advancing gender equality in their countries, especially through the establishment and operation of a Gender Management System as a means of mainstreaming gender across all government policies, plans, programmes and projects. It presents an extensive list of recommendations for action, grouped under a series of strategic objectives. It includes a questionnaire for conducting a gender impact analysis as well as various tools designed to assist ministry personnel in putting gender on the agenda of their activities: conducting gender impact analysis, collecting data on problems faced by women and men in the sector, using gender-sensitive language, and creating linkages with women's media networks at regional and global levels.

While this manual is aimed primarily at governments, it may also be of use to private-sector and civil society organisations that wish to advance gender equality and equity in the sector. It is designed to present a menu of options and action points that users may adapt to specific national contexts.

A Gender Framework for the Information Sector

Gender is a concept that refers to a system of roles and relationships between women and men that are determined by the political, economic, social and cultural context rather than by biology. One's biological sex is a natural given; gender, on the other hand, is socially constructed. We are taught 'appropriate' behaviour and attitudes, roles and activities, expectations and desires. It is this learned behaviour that makes up women's and men's gender identity and determines their gender roles.

In some regions of the Commonwealth, recent gender analysis reveals the emergence of male disadvantage in certain areas, especially young men (for example in educational attainment and access to health care). Where this occurs, a gendered approach can ensure that interventions address these inequalities appropriately. In most parts of the world, however, it is women who are disadvantaged. Therefore, since this manual is intended to advance gender equality and equity, much of its analysis focuses specifically on ways to improve women's standing in the information sector.

How are gender roles manifested in the social construct and what are the implications for women and men? Four areas are addressed: work, global resources and benefits, human rights and religion. In all these areas, women are disadvantaged in various ways in many countries of the world.

Objectivity is often held up as the main principle of journalism. But how does the assumption of objectivity find expression by individual communicators socialised into accepting unequal relationships between men and women as the norm? Once this reality is clear, the importance of raising gender awareness among writers, reporters, editors and all those involved in the creative process, becomes self-evident. The critical areas to target are: language, stereotyping and story selection.

Communicating gender equality requires journalists and other media practitioners to observe the ways that people may be marginalised because of their gender as well as race/ethnicity, class/caste, age and other such factors. Who gets coverage? From what

perspective? Through which lens? Reflecting which stereotypes about people from different gender, race/ethnic, class and other groups? Are stories helping to advance gender equality and equity in society or are they angled in a way that upholds traditional attitudes and values?

Gender on the Global Agenda

Women and the media is a critical area of concern in the Platform for Action, signed by governments at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The current development discourse on gender and media began in the 1970s within the framework of three international events and processes: the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985), the New International Information and Communication Order (NIICO) spearheaded by UNESCO, and the networking activities of women's movements worldwide.

The 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development includes 15 action points that are recommended for governments to take in order to advance gender equality and equity. These action points include: undertaking an advocacy role in partnership with the media, and using gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive language:

A consultative approach is required in mapping out actions to be taken by all the stakeholders. Such an approach, particularly with respect to the sensitive area of media content, fosters the development of democratic practices and offers broader possibilities for freedom of expression in civil society.

Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming means integrating a gender equality perspective into all the mainstream activities of government, at the policy, programme and project levels. It involves:
+ forging and strengthening the political will to achieve gender equality and equity, at the local, national, regional and global levels;
+ incorporating a gender perspective into planning processes;
+ integrating a gender perspective into sectoral planning cycles;
+ using sex-disaggregated data in statistical analysis;
+ increasing the numbers of women in decision-making positions;
+ providing tools and training in gender analysis and gender planning to key personnel; and
+ forging linkages between governments, the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders to ensure a co-ordination of efforts and resources.

The strategy of mainstreaming has evolved out of efforts by the international women's movement to change the attitudes, assumptions, working practices and activities of public institutions which reproduce and contribute to gender inequalities.

Three possible approaches to policy are identified: gender-neutral policies are seen as having no significant gender dimension; gender-specific policies take into account gender differentials, and target women or men specifically, but leave the current distribution of resources and responsibilities intact; and gender-aware/redistributive/transformative policies seek to transform existing gender relations by changing the distribution of resources and responsibilities to make it more equitable.

The basic choice presented is whether media policy reflects, perpetuates, or challenges gender hierarchies. The latter approach involves the implementation of gender-aware/transformative policies and implies a proactive effort to: avoid stereotyping; ensure the equal participation of women and men in decision-making, agenda-setting and content-determining activities; and advance gender equality on all fronts.

The government ministry responsible for the information and (tele)communications sector is assumed to have the following functions in relation to the media: policy analysis and development; policy-making at the political/ministerial level; administration and implementation of policy (policy deployment); regulation; and government information and media services.

The depth of gender stereotyping among all those involved in the information and communications process needs to be both openly acknowledged and acted upon – training, guidelines and processes need to be established to counteract and break down established attitudes. The task requires political will and the allocation of additional human and financial resources. Benchmarks should be established and concrete work plans drawn up in respect to actions, mechanisms and processes throughout the system. A credible monitoring mechanism should be in place, as should standards of accountability. An understanding of the concept of gender should not be assumed. Steps should be taken to raise awareness among all levels of staff including the introduction of non-sexist language guidelines and gender-aware editorial practices.

The Gender Management System

The GMS is an approach to gender mainstreaming developed by the Commonwealth. The Gender Management System (GMS) is an integrated network of structures, mechanisms and processes designed to make governments more gender-aware; increase the numbers of women in decision-making positions within and outside government; facilitate the formulation of gender-sensitive policies, plans and programmes; and promote the advancement of gender equality and equity in society.

Gender and the Media

Today's media can deliver messages and symbols – imported or domestic – directly into almost every home. Unfortunately, however, they continue to perpetuate and reinforce negative, stereotypical images of both women and men, according to which the resort to violence on the part of some males is presented as a 'natural' and acceptable way of resolving conflicts, and which do not provide an accurate or realistic picture of women's multiple roles and contributions to an ever-changing world.

The mass media are major socialising agents in modern society. Where media systems are highly developed, people spend at least four hours a day watching television, listening to radio, and reading magazines and newspapers. Although in domestic viewing and listening situations, the decisions of the adult male in the household tend to prevail (Mytton, 1993; Lull, 1988), women are enthusiastic media users. The pattern of preferences is similar worldwide: men prefer sports, action-oriented programmes and information (especially news); women prefer popular drama, music, dance and other entertainment programmes (Sepstrup and Goonasekara, 1994; Bonder and Zurutuza, 1994). This is not to suggest that all men or women prefer these catagories of programmes, simply that this is the dominant trend observed by the researchers.

Gender differences are linked to power and influence in the mainstream media. Over 400 women communicators from 80 countries called the media "a male-dominated tool used by those in power," (Bangkok Declaration, 1994). According to the 1995 Global Media Monitoring Project, "it is evident that gender differences are linked to power and influence," and "news gathering and news reporting are rooted in a value system which accords higher status to men and 'the masculine'." The way the world is portrayed on television "serves to maintain entrenched power imbalances," and "this fits into a long history of the use of public displays of violence to maintain rankings of domination ..." (Eisler, 1996). News, for example, is more often being presented *by* women but it is still very rarely *about* women. According to the 1995 Global Media Monitoring Project, women comprised 43 per cent of journalists but only 17 per cent of those interviewed as experts or opinion makers.

Studies suggest that the presence of more women journalists and female experts voicing opinions in the media would create "significant role models for other women, stimulate female interest in public issues, and – perhaps – sometimes speak in the interests of and for women" (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1994). Another solution is for the media to shift attention away from the traditional 'power' perspectives with respect to the top echelons of politics, government and business, and focus more on aspects that are more inclusive of women. This is not to suggest an abandonment of power and influence, but rather that the media broaden their horizons and seek greater inclusiveness and diversity in their reporting.

Most regions have seen a steady growth in the numbers, range and scope of women working in mainstream media, but women are much more likely to be concentrated in administrative than in the other occupational categories (i.e., production/editorial, design, and technical). Of all the women working in media, some 50 per cent are located in administration in contrast to five per cent on average in the technical field (Gallagher and von Euler, 1995). Women still lack the power to develop media policy, or to determine the nature and shape of media content. This is so even in North America, where a dramatic increase has been noted in women-owned media and in women's organisations working on media representation issues. Women's average share of posts at the top three levels of management is below 20 per cent in all media and all regions except for broadcasting in Latin America. Women are also a minority in the committees and boards that define and shape policy, holding just 12 per cent of these positions in broadcasting, and 9 per cent in the press.

Despite the general upward trend in their numbers and visibility women also drop out at a greater rate than men. The most commonly reported obstacle to career development reported by women is that of male attitudes. Women are constantly judged by male standards and performance criteria of what constitutes news and who constitutes a newsmaker, a gender bias which leads to discrimination in the awarding of assignments: many women journalists report being denied approval to cover beats such as science and technology, politics and economics. Women are also confronted by social disapproval since the critical, independent, assertive and self-assured approach required of journalists often runs counter to cultural norms for women.

It is widely accepted that greater involvement by women in both the technical and decision-making areas of communication and media would improve both the content of media coverage and the context in which women journalists work.

Gender-based stereotyping can be found in public and private, local, national and international media organisations – electronic, print, visual and audio. The media is often criticised for perpetuating images that reduce women to sex objects, and for promoting violence against women as 'entertainment'. Degrading images negatively affect women and distort men's attitudes towards women and children by fixing them

to their physical attributes and making no recognition of the complex realities of their lives. Advertising, in particular, often offers lurid sexual innuendoes aimed at men and which demean women as appendages or reinforce the notion of women as mere objects.

In many developing countries, television fare is restricted by budget constraints. Imported programming, often old series in which the way women are portrayed may be outdated even in the country of origin, may dominate peak viewing times. While local programming is often expensive to produce and may lack sophistication, joint productions with local private companies, sensitive pre-screening of programmes from the developed countries and exchanges with other developing countries are some ways to improve this situation. National broadcasting entities can also foster partnerships with community groups using video for community development.

Gender stereotyping by the media leads women, men and children to develop false and stultifying views and expectations of themselves and others, and masks reality. When women and men fail to match up to the fantasy ideal created by the media, serious problems may arise. Both women and men may develop low self-esteem. Women are more likely to become depressed and accepting of abuse, while men are more likely to become frustrated and angry, leading to violent and abusive behaviour.

The high incidence of media violence worldwide – whether verbal, physical, psychological and/or sexual – is of great concern and has generated debate and research into just how media violence affects viewers, in particular children. Media violence is insidious since the viewer may perceive no visible long-term effects. It is appealing since it is so often linked with power, and it is shown as a quick way of resolving conflicts.

A 1995 study of US television programming concluded that "violence remains a pervasive, major feature of contemporary television programming, and it is coming from more sources and in greater volume than ever before." The study cited 1,846 individual acts of violence – ranging from violence that resulted in one or more fatalities, to threatening behaviour with a weapon. Media watchdog groups in all continents have proved most effective in raising public awareness of these issues.

The creation of alternative presses has opened new publishing opportunities for women. Worldwide networks of independent video makers and filmmakers are developing a variety of visual alternatives and narratives (Riano, 1994). Women are now able to move information around the globe even faster than some governments through watchdog networks that combine fax-trees, e-mail, postal services and word of mouth. The Beijing Platform for Action, in recognition of the important role of women's alternative media networks, calls for governments "to support the development of and finance, as appropriate, alternative media and the use of all means of communication to disseminate information to and about women and their concerns" (Paragraph 245e).

Ministries of Information and Communication can link up, support, and benefit from women's alternative media organisations in respect of their outreach, innovative uses of local culture, and their perspectives. A first step is to recognise their work, contribution and expertise by including their representatives in policy-making – on advisory boards, and editorial groups – and as experts in programming. Ministries may also seek to partner with women's alternative media networks for education purposes: in awareness-building workshops for ministry and public service broadcasting personnel, for public sensitisation campaigns, and for media awareness training in schools.

Women are making great strides in adopting electronic communications, and have benefited from the support and facilitation provided by proactive initiatives. Increased communication and sharing of knowledge among women, particularly in the South but also in Eastern Europe and remote communities in the North, has broadened the scope of on-line participation creating a more equitable global women's forum on-line. For many more women, using e-mail has become a routine part of their day-to-day lives.

The challenges and pitfalls of electronic communications include limited accessibility, information overload, language constraints, skill deficiencies, and lack of gender-sensitive training. Women in the developing South face particular challenges: limitations of e-mail only accounts (not having access to remote databases or Internet tools); limited infrastructure (difficulty in getting a phone line); and the high costs of data transmission (networks in the South often charge their users for all messages, both sent and received).

Existing literature on women's portrayal by, access to, and employment in the media is still heavily dominated by research from North America and Western Europe. Studies from other parts of the world, where they do exist, are often limited in their scope. Apart from the need to develop and strengthen databases about women and media, research should be used as the basis for action that productively enhances women's relationship to the media. The research should also be used to develop appropriate support materials.

In all regions the number of women in higher education journalism courses has been increasing. At the same time, few courses are tailored specifically for gender concerns even where courses in development communications exist. Women-specific training that is free is recommended particularly in the area of electronic communications. Studies have recorded different tendencies between women and men in their ease and use of electronic communications; for example, men start with hands-on exploration, while women first want to know how it all works. Women have less access to electronic communications and less ownership of equipment. They are therefore not so proactive in learning the new technologies and need more initial encouragement and training.

Strategies and Recommendations for Action

Governments may wish to adapt these recommendations to suit their particular national circumstances and priorities. In addition, some specific tools are provided in this manual for use in carrying out the recommended actions. Since in most countries the media are overwhelmingly male-controlled and portray women largely in terms of limited stereotypes, the strategies recommended here focus mainly on closing the gender gap for women. In countries where male marginalisation is an emerging problem, attention should be paid to the role of the media in reversing this trend. There is also a need to focus on the role of the media in re-socialising both women and men, and changing traditional attitudes, behaviours and roles that perpetuate gender stereotypes and inequalities.

The policy environment

- Review existing policies with a view to integrating a gender perspective aimed at enhancing women's skills, knowledge, access, and participation in all types of media.
- Encourage the creation and/or strengthening of guidelines, codes of conduct or other self regulatory mechanisms for the media to eliminate gender-biased programming.

◆ Ensure gender balance in all government, parliamentary, state or public entities that consider media, advertising and telecommunications policy.
◆ Enact appropriate legislation against pornography and the projection of violence against women and children in the media.
◆ Abolish laws which effectively curb freedom of expression and/or freedom of association, and that result in discrimination against women.

Image and portrayal of women and men

◆ Promote balanced and diverse media portrayals of women as persons who bring to their positions many different life experiences to provide role models for young women.
◆ Provide positive role-models for young males and avoid reinforcing stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity that perpetuate gender inequalities.
◆ Promote the use of non-sexist, gender-sensitive language.
◆ Exclude stereotyped images, and violent and/or pornographic materials that discriminate against or that violate women's and children's rights.
◆ Increase the number of programmes for, by and about women.
◆ Increase women's participation, particularly in the portrayal of traditionally male-dominated areas of society linked to power and influence.
◆ Broaden sources – women, youth, indigenous people can speak on any issue and on all aspects of life.
◆ Create and strengthen media monitoring entities and encourage adequate consideration of consumer complaints against media content that portray women or men in a discriminatory way.

Employment

◆ Ensure equal employment opportunities for women at all levels of the media industry.
◆ Adopt positive action programmes so that women can reach their full potential as media professionals.
◆ Create opportunities to increase women's ownership of media houses and directorship of media organisations.
◆ Attract and retain women in the profession by devising facilities aimed at easing the conflict women journalists face between working conditions and family responsibilities.

Production and programming

◆ Apply gender analysis to programming and develop editorial policies that are gender sensitive and reflect gender equity, so that women's perspectives are equally included.
◆ Provide incentives for creative, gender-sensitive programming in the national media.
◆ Disseminate information on development and social issues in local languages, using traditional, indigenous and other forms of media.
◆ Devise media campaigns that promote gender equality, and provide information aimed at eliminating all forms of violence against women and children.
◆ Target gender-awareness programmes at both women and men.
◆ Sensitise media managers and professionals to increase coverage of women's points of view, especially in political, economic, business and scientific news.
◆ Recognise women as authoritative information sources, experts, and opinion makers – and therefore news sources on any issue.
◆ Introduce, support and extend community radio stations as a way of increasing women's participation and contribution to the media and local economic development.

Outreach and democratisation

◆ Develop and support monitoring bodies and media watch groups that survey media and advertising content concerning gender portrayal.

◆ Include media women in media self-regulatory and other executive committees that draft programme guidelines, budgets, contracts and personnel documents.

◆ Support local, regional, national and international networks for women media professionals and promote co-operation between journalists' organisations, women's professional media associations, women's legal groups and women's political associations.

◆ Develop and/or increase linkages with women's media networks, and assist the financing of these networks.

◆ Advise smaller media, especially those reaching women in rural and marginalised urban areas, on questions such as available technology optimal for their needs.

◆ Interlink grassroots workers and volunteers, media researchers, NGOs, advocacy groups, alternative media networks and policy-makers concerning women and the media.

◆ Create networks of NGOs, women's organisations and professional media organisations with a view to increasing women's participation in media.

◆ Promote public media literacy programmes in order to develop the critical faculties needed for analysing messages disseminated by the media.

◆ Encourage dialogue between the media sector and the field of education in general to raise public awareness of the portrayal of women in the media.

◆ Partner public and private educational institutions to disseminate information about, and increase awareness of women's human rights.

◆ Work in co-operation with journalists' organisations to develop guidelines against gender-biased treatment of information.

◆ Promote dialogue between organisations of journalists and media employers to discuss a joint approach to the ethics of gender portrayal.

Training

◆ Assign programme budgets to allow for women's equal access to all forms of professional training.

◆ Include training modules in gender-awareness, local history and cultural diversity at all media training institutions.

◆ Train women media students and professionals in management and related subjects, such as interpersonal communication and decision-making skills, with a view to promoting women's media enterprises.

◆ Develop train-the-trainer programmes geared specifically for women in computing and all new communications technologies.

◆ Develop educational and training methodologies that enable women's organisations and community groups to effectively communicate their own messages and concerns.

◆ Encourage gender-sensitive training for media professionals to encourage the creation and use of non-stereotyped, balanced and diverse images of women and men in the media.

◆ Sponsor short-term or longer term professional internships or exchanges to expand the professional skills of women media professionals.

Research

◆ Increase research into all aspects of women and media to define areas needing attention and action.

◆ Undertake national studies on media audiences and the impact on viewers of the content of media products. Include the development of follow-up and evaluation systems.

◆ Ensure all national statistics are disaggregated by sex, to facilitate national analysis and planning in the gender mainstreaming process. Aim to repackage research for wide dissemination.

Gender-sensitive action tools

◆ Build and make widely available a database on women working in the media in all fields.

◆ Publish pertinent studies that can assist in building the base for evaluation and planning.

◆ Collect and distribute annual bibliographies on major research activities and findings concerning women in communication and development.

◆ Create a data base of resource materials produced by national women's machineries and women's alternative media networks at local, national, regional and international levels.

◆ Repackage legislation and international conventions on women in simplified forms and in local languages for wide dissemination.

◆ Facilitate the compilation of a Directory of Women Media Experts.

◆ Develop, and maintain with regular updates, a Media Directory of women spokespersons for use by journalists and media practitioners.

◆ Set up an international on-line network for exchange of information on portrayal of women in the media and information on women's media enterprises.

◆ Disseminate non-sexist language guidelines.

◆ Establish, in co-operation with broadcasters, an international video library on women for use in programming and in seminars and workshops aimed at raising gender awareness.

◆ Circulate information sheets on funders interested in the development of communication projects relating to women, alternative media networks, independent women media professionals and NGOs working in popular media forms.

◆ Facilitate the distribution and marketing efforts of women's independent presses and newsletters focusing on women, gender relations and development.