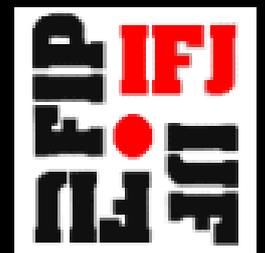




THE STORIES WOMEN JOURNALISTS TELL

Women in Media in South Asia

A report from the South Asia Media Freedom and Solidarity Project (SAMSN)



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF JOURNALISTS

Contents

FOREWORD	3
METHODOLOGY: THE ROUNDTABLES	4
COUNTRY REPORTS	
AFGHANISTAN	6
BANGLADESH	9
BHUTAN	11
INDIA	11
NEPAL	13
PAKISTAN	15
SRI LANKA	17
THE SAMSUN GENDER NETWORKING CONFERENCE	20
GENDER CHARTER 2013	21
CONCLUSION	24

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A report from the South Asia Media Freedom and Solidarity Project (SAMSUN)

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- Dhaka Reporters' Unity
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- Free Media Movement
- Indian Journalists' Union
- Journalists Association of Bhutan
- Media Watch
- National Union of Journalists India
- National Union of Journalists Nepal
- Nepal Press Union
- Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists
- Pakistan Press Foundation
- Sri Lanka Working Journalists' Association

SAMSUN is an alliance of journalists' trade unions, press freedom organisations and journalists in South Asia committed to working together to promote freedom of expression, freedom of association and journalists' rights in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, coordinated by IFJ Asia-Pacific.

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) is the world's largest organisation of journalists. The IFJ Asia Pacific represents journalists in 27 countries.



FOREWORD

Despite the media explosion in the countries of South Asia, the status of journalism today is precarious. The safety and security of journalists across the board has seen a downward slide. Impunity rules and murders and attacks go unpunished. Across the sub-region, press freedom continues to be severely compromised in several countries and Pakistan is now widely described as one of the most unsafe places in the world for journalists.

So too, in a rapidly changing media environment, journalists in South Asia can no longer be confident of security of service in their jobs. Scores of media workers are either in contractual employment for very poor wages or work as freelancers, contributing reports at a piecemeal rate. Meanwhile, journalists' organisations are under great pressure to remain strong and effective in preserving an independent role for press freedom.

Given this situation, the status of women journalists is all the more vulnerable and the struggle to make a mark in this profession begins from the very stage of recruitment.

The good news in South Asia is that women are joining journalism's ranks in large numbers. Yet with that, they are also still bearing the brunt of inequality in many newsrooms.

While improvements have been achieved by and for women in journalism, many problems still remain, notwithstanding the disproportionate number of men in decision-making roles within the unions and media organisations.

The IFJ and SAMSN believe the priorities of women journalists must be recognised and addressed.

But in order for journalists' organisations to improve the conditions for women journalists, they may also have to reform their own structures – to ensure that women are properly represented in the union's governing bodies.

In 2013, this is what the SAMSN gender work sought to focus on.

Between February and July 2013, South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSN), organized a series of roundtables, "The stories women journalists tell", on gender equity, media rights and safety in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The roundtables culminated in the first-ever SAMSN gender networking conference in Kathmandu, Nepal, on July 21, 2013 and the adoption of a statement on gender equity: 'Building Resistance, Organising for Change' at the 11th annual meeting of SAMSN held in Kathmandu, Nepal on July 21-22, 2013.

Conducted as part of the SAMSN-IFJ project on gender equity, safety and media rights, the roundtables have helped to articulate the pressing issues women



journalists face and the dire need to develop a strong network whereby women journalists in South Asia can work together and organize around common causes and concerns.

Apart from the issues specific to each country, some issues were universal and came up repeatedly at these gender roundtables. The women we spoke to shared their thoughts, ideas and experiences. Their primary concerns centered on recruitment, work assignments and promotions; the impact of the contract system and growing job insecurity; the need for greater gender sensitivity in the workplace; sexual harassment and safety.

The "Stories Women Journalists Tell" was the first stage of this important campaign and sets the agenda for women journalists across South Asia.

Jacqueline Park
 Director, IFJ Asia-Pacific

METHODOLOGY: THE ROUNDTABLES

“Family, society and workplace - women journalists have to deal with all three – the family allows them to work as pilots or doctors, but not as journalists”

- participant at roundtable in Dhaka, Bangladesh

The SAMSN gender roundtables were devised to elicit the greatest amount of participation from all women on subjects as varied as workplace concerns: safety and security of women journalists; representation of women in the media; covering conflict; the role of women journalists in gender-sensitive reportage and safety and sexual harassment, both in the workplace and while on assignment and the measures to deal with those issues.

Within a union context, the roundtables were aimed at working with unions to organize women journalists, to hear the experience of women journalists in unions and the problems they faced, and look at strategies to increase organisational involvement.

While all the roundtables followed a common agenda, special sessions were designed to discuss country-specific issues. The participants were also a mix of young entrants to journalism and mid-level and senior journalists, adding to the synergy in the discussions.

The agenda for all the roundtables broadly focused on:

- Defining the problem I : Recruitment, work assignments, working conditions
- Defining the problem II : Media representation of women
- Evaluating strategies on conflict reporting
- Sexual Harassment in the workplace
- Positive stories about the impact of women journalists
- Networking strategies and strengthening organisational structures

Country reports were prepared by individuals and organisations, which facilitated the roundtables in each country. This writer takes responsibility for any variation in emphasis, errors or omissions between the general report and the individual country reports.

In India, a two-day roundtable was held in Guwahati, Assam on June 7-8, 2013, with 23 participants drawn

largely from North-East India. Unlike the other country roundtables, the India discussion focused on women’s experience from this region in particular, to draw attention to the special issues faced by women journalists: the neglect and lack of recognition of their problems and their struggles to bring focus on the region – either with articles in news services or online magazines.

There are several examples and it would be unfair to leave out any. But some instances are Ratna Talukdar’s writings in Women’s Feature Service, online magazine The Thumbprint started by Teresa Rehman and the work of Chitra Ahenthem, editor of Imphal Free Press.

In Sri Lanka, a two-day roundtable was held in Colombo on June 22-23, 2013, with 15 participants, including a Tamil journalist from Jaffna. Senior journalists from the government media also participated in the roundtable and shared their experiences.

In Afghanistan, a roundtable was held in Kabul on July 2, 2013 for 20 women journalists drawn from different media outlets in Kabul and a few provinces, including Parwan, Nengarhar, Mazar-e-Sharif and Kapisa.

In Bangladesh, a two-day roundtable was held in Dhaka with 30 women journalists from Dhaka on July 17-18, 2013. There were two special sessions, one on the principles of media monitoring and the other on the issues faced by bloggers.

In Nepal, a roundtable was held in Kathmandu on July 19, 2013, with 12 participants, nine from Kathmandu and one each from the Terai, Janakpur and Pokhara regions of Nepal.

Together their stories formed the basis of the SAMSN gender discussion going forward.

WOMEN IN THE MEDIA IN SOUTH ASIA: AN OVERVIEW

“We must overcome these unseen barriers and glass ceilings. Sexual harassment is a serious issue; we need a code - against sexually abusive remarks.”

– participant from Sri Lanka

Discrimination in the types of work assigned to women journalists, promotional opportunities, sexual harassment, lack of maternity benefits and poor support conditions for working mothers are all part of the familiar stories told by women journalists across the countries of South Asia.

At another level, the representation of women in the media in all the countries of South Asia is skewed towards celebrity-driven, sex and scandal-prone coverage. As traditional forces clash with the ‘modern’, the struggle to provide non-sexist and non-discriminatory coverage of women and women’s issues is paramount and becomes acute in situations of conflict and violence.



Aheli Moitra and Parul Sharma at the Guwahati gender roundtable

Yet, there are a number of women journalists who still strive to get the story and strive for fair and gender-sensitive reportage. They put their lives at risk and try to uncover different and more human dimensions of the conflict they cover, seeking to speak to women survivors to find another story. They learn to survive with courage amidst great odds.

While the roundtables recorded the stories women journalists shared of the issues and problems they encounter at work, they also recorded, in equal measure, the stories women journalists wrote about and the issues they covered.

Thanks to Laxmi Murthy for notes taken during the gender networking conference.

- Geeta Seshu

“The condition of all journalists in Nepal is very bad and everyone is very frustrated. And there is this mindset that women don’t need a job, or don’t need a salary”

- a Kathmandu-based woman journalist

AFGHANISTAN

“There is no safety or guarantee for their lives, especially if women cover and publicize critical issues like corruption or sexual violence against women.

No one cares about her life or her safety”

- participants at a roundtable in Kabul, Afghanistan

Afghanistan presents a chilling reminder of the truly precarious status of women journalists in South Asia. Afghanistan’s media opened up after 2006 and the country now has around 100 radio stations, at least 75 television stations and scores of news publications. According to information from the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture, women comprise around 1500 of the country’s 10,000 journalists.

However, for women who aspire to journalism, the first obstacle to recruitment is often their own family, social restrictions and the terror of warlords. Cultural taboos are strong.

For other women journalists, the prospect of moving out on assignment is considered dangerous and often discouraged. Women journalists have to fight hard to get assignments and the demand for sexual favours in return is ever present. So too, access to information from government officials is difficult and permissions for travel are next to impossible.

There have been two recent cases of women journalists being killed or disappearing from their homes and the target of suspicion is their own families, who are against their decision to become journalists in the first place!

Investigations into the death or disappearance of the women journalists have been slow and inconclusive. A journalist activist did take up the case of 20-year-old Duniya Samani from Parwan Province, who was killed by her family, only to receive threats of murder and acid attacks on her and her daughter.

Sexual Harrassment

While there are no cases of female journalists who successfully took up and fought their cases, a participant from Nangarhar province shared an account of a woman journalist who approached an attorney for a personal problem and the latter, instead of taking up her case and assisting her, told her he would help her and defend her case if she married him! The woman recorded his voice and filed a complaint but no action has been taken by the government or department of security.

All the participants in the Afghanistan roundtable expressed concerns that, if women journalists are silent about wrong and unethical behavior, men will only become stronger and more oppressive.

For women who do protest or confront sexual harassers, the fallout is worse, as they are blamed or stigmatized.

The perpetrators of such harassment rarely secure any punishment. Others felt that, if their families were told of these instances of violence and sexual harassment, their families would not allow them to pursue their passion and their profession!

The daily deterioration of the condition of women journalists, in terms of social pressures, security and organisational problems, was forcing several women journalists to leave their jobs and join other professions.

Without the presence of women in the media, there will be no coverage of women’s issues, no advocacy and campaigns for women! As some of the participants said: Women must raise a voice against bad behavior, misuse of authority and harassment in the office or in the field.

Killing of women journalists

Apart from social conditions and the discrimination at the work-place, the lack of security for women journalists has become a major reason for a large number of women leaving the profession. Many women journalists in the roundtable criticized the security and government for not following up on investigations in the killings of female journalists and delivering justice to their killers.

In June 2007, Zakia Zaki, a well-known woman journalist in radio and television in Parwan province, was shot dead while she slept in her home. She had been receiving threats for her reportage for several weeks.

Barely five days earlier, Sanga Amach, a young news presenter in a private television channel, was murdered in her home in Kabul. Police said it appeared to be a case of ‘honour’ killing, much like another killing a few years ago, where relatives were said to have killed a woman journalist.

To date, nobody has publicised the murder issue of journalists, especially female journalists and no government agency discloses information on their status of their investigations.

Since 2003, Afghanistan has lost at least five women journalists but there are no files on their cases, nor any investigation or follow-up by police or even the judiciary.

Journalists’ unions and associations have taken up the case it’s still not enough. Much more is needed to be done in terms of unity and protection.

The creation of the Afghan Journalist Federation, which nine unions and associations had joined together for,



Zakia Zaki, shot dead in her home.

has been a significant achievement as has the setting up of a protection center for journalists. However, for it to become a support for women journalists, it must be more alert to their issues and obtain information from governmental sources. Women journalists must also take on managerial responsibilities and gain self-confidence.

Participants

The Afghanistan roundtable held in Kabul on July 2, 2013, comprised senior female journalists - two from Parwan, two from Nengarhar, one from Mazare- Sharif and one from Kapisa provinces. The others were from different media organisations such as BBC, Killid Group, Salam Watandar, VOA, Radio Bayan, Bakhter News agency, Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan Women Journalist Association and two from civil society and women activists from AWN. The meeting also included contributions from Sharmini Boyle, senior television journalist.

Recommendations from the roundtable:

- *Capacity building programs to equip and prepare women journalists them for the challenges which threaten their progress as women and journalists*
- *Guidelines aimed at increasing the recruitment of women*
- *Opportunity to allow women to occupy senior leadership positions*
- *Improved working conditions to ensure that contracts prohibit the removal of women from the workplace without due reason*
- *Specific safety training for female journalists, including the provision of safety jackets for women journalists covering conflict*
- *Insurance for journalists injured on assignment*

- *Transparency in investigations on cases of violence against women journalists*
- *The creation of new networks for sharing challenges and seeking solutions*
- *Increased support for gender budgeting for women in the media*
- *Campaigns against bad behavior and harassment of women, supported by journalists unions and the Afghan Journalist Federation*
- *Programs to build self-confidence and encourage women in the media*
- *Work toward improving the solidarity of women in the media*
- *Fellowships and scholarships to help women study further and develop their skills*

Afghanistan Roundtable

By Farida Nekzad

Afghanistan has a significant number of women journalists today, due in large part to the funding for media by the international community. With the overall improvements in the media landscape by 2006-07, women have felt more free and able to work alongside other journalists.

The government, headed by President Hamid Karzai, attributes press freedom and freedom of expression as the key success story of the democratic government but as yet there is no concrete evidence of improvement in the safety and security of journalists. Many journalists have received life threats, been kidnapped, or face physical and verbal assault. Others have been jailed, abducted and murdered, including some women journalists.

Today, woman journalists are still under pressure from several fronts in a country which is still recovering from three decades of war and where there is a strong Islamic conservatism.

Afghan women face domestic violence, imprisonment and abuse, more so outside Kabul and particularly in rural parts of the country. And despite the large number of media actively working in the country, the voice of women in Afghanistan is still not heard, nor have there been any significant social changes in their living conditions.

After ten years of international intervention, the levels of violence against women are still reportedly very high, according to reports from the Afghan independent human rights commission media watch reports. Evidence shows women constantly face hostility from sources, including warlords, conservatives and hard-liners.

Many believe that women are unable to deal with existing challenges due to the excessive influence of men over women, the power balance in families and community structures, and the numerous other restrictions placed on women.

Women in Afghanistan have many untold stories, which need to be brought into the headlines. This means the presence of female journalists is very important. Without them, it is impossible to highlight the issues of Afghan women.

Since 2007, recruitment has become a major problem for women

journalists. A major reason for this is the male-dominated ownership of media in Afghanistan and the biases and prejudices of male owners. Women journalists say that often media owners make personal demands on women recruits and the latter have only two options: to protest and confront the person who made the demands or to keep quiet and acquiesce for economic considerations.

The other problem journalists shared was that owners or editors regularly gave better assignments to male journalists. Those women who do display courage and take up assignments are rewarded by insults and derogatory remarks they are not capable of the work.

In the absence of encouragement, in fact in an environment of discouragement, their self-esteem is too often affected. Any sick leave taken becomes a good excuse for news editors to fire them.

Wages and bonuses are generally unequal between male and female journalists. Men are also more likely to get bonuses, as well as higher salaries.

When a woman journalist does marry, it is often expected by both society and her family that she stop working to take care of the home and family. Those who do continue working after child-bearing are also given a very hard time. Pregnant journalists can't expect any concessions and if they do not take up field assignments, they face punishments and even job loss. In some media organisations, they get between 20 days to one month's maternity leave. In most media organisations, crèche facilities are non-existent.

Many media organisations don't provide transport facilities for women, which becomes a big deterrent for their employment as their families are reluctant to send them due to the lack of safety and security.



Farida Nekzad, interviewed on security of journalists

BANGLADESH

“My reports get published everywhere but I never get credit. When I protested, they said – don’t speak so loudly!’ If a woman gets an award for her work, people say she curried favour with the editors; The easiest targets are women bloggers.”

- participant at roundtable in Dhaka, Bangladesh

Women journalists have held a prominent place in Bangladesh media but there is little recognition of their issues and their struggles.

The Bangladesh Nari Sangbadhak Kendra (BNSK) is the oldest women journalists’ organisation in Bangladesh and was established in 2001. However, it is still kept out of decision-making by the government and media houses on media-related issues and there is regrettably, little gender specific work done by media unions.

According to BNSK, the number of women journalists is increasing in Bangladesh, but their numbers are still woefully low. BNSK estimates around 6000 male journalists and only around 300 female journalists in Bangladesh. Sadly, there are fewer women at the policy-making level.

In newsrooms, female journalists often face disparities in work assignments. Though there are women reporters in all types of news beats like energy, economic, political, parliament, crime, sports and election commission, their numbers are negligible. Also, in the absence of support systems, women find it difficult to balance out familial or parental responsibilities with that of the work-place.

With poor facilities and a discouraging environment, upward mobility is a struggle. Women suffer discrimination in training, recruitment and promotion and are denied decision-making positions. A rare occasion when trade unions came together was in the campaign to book the culprits in the killings of the journalist couple, Sagar Sarowar and Mehrun Runi last year. Unfortunately the campaign was unable to make substantive gains.

Apart from the killing of bloggers and numerous attacks on journalists, women journalists have also been specially targeted in the violence against the media by fundamentalist forces like the Hefajat e Islam. Women have been attacked and ridiculed while covering public meetings and stopped from reporting in the field.

Journalist Nadia Sharmeen was on assignment to cover a Hefajat meeting, when she was brutally attacked and subsequently hospitalized. Her employer, Ekushey TV, supported her initially, including paying hospital bills, but support petered out after a while.

The Bangladesh High Court later directed the government to provide her with medical treatment free of cost.

Bangladesh Roundtable

In Bangladesh there is a need to improve the environment to empower women in journalism.

Improving working conditions, fair wages and job security are the rights of every woman but too often they are deprived of it. In the terms of policy-making, women are largely ignored. Ironically, women journalists win awards, but in their own workplaces they are disregarded and often referred to in the most disparaging manner!

The roundtable heard that the pressures on women journalists come from both inside and outside. Many newspapers are reluctant to appoint women journalists and if they seek maternity leave, they are often terminated. Within the workplace, female journalists are discriminated against in both assignments and promotions.

But over the past decade the landscape in Bangladesh has changed dramatically. There are now scores of women journalists working all over Bangladesh in print and electronic media. They are very eager to work in all the sector of journalists because they are brave, courageous and adventurous.

“Men love to say that women are capable of only for the soft issue like fashion and style, entertainment and naripata etc but that is not correct. Women have proved that they are worthy of any valiant assignment,” said the president of BNSK, Nasimun Ara Minu.

The Bangladesh roundtable participants shared their own journeys and stories of survival. Together they faced problems like professional jealousy, sexual harassment, humiliation and demoralisation.

Several participants spoke out at the roundtable, some of them for the first time, about the problems they faced. They stressed the importance of sharing of experiences (with monthly meetings, for a start) and building up networks, learning from one another’s struggles and training for new



Nadia Sharmeen was attacked and hospitalised

“Women may take maternity leave once or twice in their entire career, but such a big thing is made of it. They are sacked though the termination letter will not give this as a reason.” - Bangladesh participant

skills. Besides, gender sensitization programs for men as well as follow up programs in smaller cities and districts were also recommended.

Some said while male colleagues did often create problems, they also said others were also supportive. All of them expressed determination to overcome family barriers and social obstacles and forge a new path for the coming generation. Having more women in top editorial or ownership positions would also help to improve opportunities for women.

For some sections of Bangladesh’s media, the picture for women is more progressive with women being actively encouraged to take up assignments and taking on senior reporting roles. Women bloggers are also making an impact in taking women’s voices in journalism further.

Sexual harassment in the media was discussed and participants shared their experience on condition of confidentiality. Sadly, instances of sexual harassment in the workplace are increasing. This is largely hidden and undocumented and women journalists who raise sexual harassment charges against colleagues or seniors are often at risk of losing their jobs and their charges are either not taken up seriously or dismissed as false.

One participant said: “Women may take maternity leave once or twice in their entire career, but such a big thing is made of it. They are sacked though the termination letter will not give this as a reason.”

Some said the form of harassment was also changing – women get lucrative offers and, if they do take these up, they can advance very quickly. However, there are conditions and catches and women are not aware of these! Some participants experienced verbal abuse and pointed out the irony of journalists who write stories about the pathetic condition of women, yet there is no one to hear their voice.

There is a need to break the silence and raise the voice of women. Sexual harassment is not a shame for the women who experienced it; it is the shame of the harasser.

By K Kamal with contributions from Shamima Chowdhury, Parveen Sultana Jhuma, Nasimun Ara Minu, Akhter Jahan Malik, Shelina Sheuli, Sebika Debnath, Shanta Maria, Masreka Jahan Mona, Saju Rahman and Nazneen Nahar.

BHUTAN

The media of Bhutan is very much in its infancy – the average age of a Bhutanese reporter is just 25.

Until 2008, there were very few newspapers, now there are 12. With the growth in media outlets, so too the number of women journalists has increased, with women covering all beats from sports to politics and even ‘crime’ as they are considered good at “extracting” stories because police officers are men!

The general working conditions of both male and female journalists are at par. Women are paid equal or even better wages than their male counterparts. Bhutan, being a predominantly matriarchal society, women in traditional communities inherits property and sons leave the house. Bhutan is a mix of traditional and liberal society.

But journalists in Bhutan lack training because of the status of journalism as a young profession. Since the country is still developing on so many fronts, coverage is all about roads and schools and development. There is a need to discuss what kind of stories to tell and how to tell those stories.

Note: There was no roundtable in Bhutan but the sole woman representative from the newly formed Journalists Association of Bhutan, Sonam Pelden, attended the gender networking conference. These points emerged from her presentation.

INDIA

“I hate the term woman journalist. Why don’t we talk of ‘man’ journalists too? Yes, it might be a problem being a woman – you travel alone, get nothing from managements. Yet, we are in journalism because we have some social anger in ourselves”

In India, women journalists are far more visible, especially in broadcast media, but they are yet to break the glass ceiling across the board.

Despite the media explosion, the recruitment of women in smaller cities or in areas like to North-East is still very low, partly because of poor pay and working conditions. Increasing criminalization and militarization also affects women and limits their opportunities. Safety and security becomes a major issue and specialized training is needed to help women cope with safety issues.

There have been several high-profile instances of sexual harassment in the workplace but institutional mechanisms and adherence to court orders on dealing with these cases are sadly absent. There is also a crying need

to sensitize male journalists, to involve them in gender programs and solicit the active involvement of male journalists who are supportive.

In India, women journalists continue to battle sexist representation and the challenge is to ensure the media adopts the use of non-sexist language. However, before this, a thorough survey of the insensitive language used around gender must be undertaken along with attempts to suggest alternative, gender sensitive language.

There is also a dire need to build up stronger networks and reach out, build up support groups and a potential network of friends to work together on issues.

Participants

Thanks to Parul Sharma for her paper ‘Why I am a journalist’ on the opposition she faced from her family and the experiences she had in the newsroom. Thanks also to Chitra Roy her paper on sexual harassment in the media.

The India roundtable comprised 27 participants, including 21 from the North-East. All were either working in local newspapers, ran their own websites or blogs or were independent journalists. With thanks to contributions from Anjulika Samom, Geetartha Pathak Ratna Chotrani, Jayashree Bhattacharjee, Parul Sharma, Chitra Ahanthem, Susmita Goswami, Ratna Talukdar, Teresa Rehman, Linda C, Uddipana Goswami, Chitra Roy, Tamanna Tamang, Ratna Talukdar, Parul Sharma and Rajashri Dasgupta.

Recommendations from the roundtable:

- A survey on sexual harassment issues
- A letter campaign to management of the media houses to determine if sexual harassment committees have established
- A handbook on North Eastern media
- ID cards for journalists especially in dangerous situations



Sexual harassment at the workplace must be addressed says Sabita Lakhar.

India Roundtable

By Geeta Seshu

*“How do we make our languages more gender sensitive?”
– participant from India roundtable*

The North East region of India comprises seven states, known as the Seven Sisters: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. Each with their own languages and cultures and inhabited by several tribes, parts of the North East are gripped by insurgency and the media is constantly under attack, with the recent death of a news-cameraperson in Manipur and last July, the heinous attack on Arunachal Times Associate Editor Tongnam Rina.

This region is hardly ever given any attention by mainstream media and its issues are often neglected. In this context, a focus on journalism here and on the conditions of women journalists was sorely felt.

Women journalists of the North East have courageously reported on the insurgency, they have braved bullets and threats and continue to write on a range of issues – politics, militarization, health, education, development etc. However, they don’t enjoy security of service, have no transport facilities on night shifts or protection for assignments, no statutory wages or no structural mechanisms like committees to deal with sexual harassment in the workplace. While some networking and organizing exists at local level in some states, regional and national interaction is missing and acutely felt.

For many in the roundtable, the ever-present threat of job loss made journalism a risky profession. The region had just recently witnessed the closure of a newspaper like the Seven Sisters Post due to the bankruptcy of the Sharada group. Scores of journalists lost their jobs almost overnight. In other media houses, there was no payment of wages as per the Wage Board recommendations. Instead, private contracts are the norm. Journalists are still paid by column centimeter, while payments for freelancers is poor and rarely on time. For women there is very low recruitment throughout the region and when they are employed, they are often assigned ‘soft’ news.

Participants in the roundtable shared experiences on stories they did and the reports that affected them and their work. Young journalists like Aheli Moitra and Tamanna Tamang, mid-level and seniors like Mubina Akhtar, Linda C, Chitra Roy, Teresa Rehman and Sabita Lakhar, spoke of a range of issues, from battling censorship, trying to write stories on ‘serious’ issues instead of catering to demands of lifestyle journalism

or trivia, moving away from the media’s constant projections of the North East as a place for ‘exotica, not about guns, guitars and girls’, confronting sexual harassment at work etc.

One participant said: “We need to speak out and reach out – let’s face it, it’s a male bastion and we have to confront it.”

Women shared two instances of sexual harassment and how they were tackled. Both cases are still going on. Generally there is a woeful lack of any institutional framework or mechanism to deal with sexual harassment and it is felt there is an urgent need to sensitise male journalists too by involving them in gender programs and have a more broad discussion on the use of non-sexist language.

The marginalisation of the North East by ‘mainstream- national Indian news media was a concern for many, that media indulged in stereotypical depiction of violence and little else. There was a woeful lack of information and education on the North East and most journalists or news-anchors from the metropolitan television studios had little or no understanding of the number of tribes, the languages and even the general topography of the region! Meanwhile, local journalists are only valued as ‘fixers’ or as a provider of information. They rarely get any credit or acknowledgement. Often, the journalist from big periodicals or television channels parrots the analysis provided by the local journalist, without attributing any credit.

Women journalists are in the frontlines of conflict coverage, whether of the Bodo agitation or the insurgency movement in several parts of the region. They risk their lives to bring the story out. For many in the region, conflict reportage also means confronting militarization. The population lives under the shadow of militarization and journalists needed to learn the perils of writing or reporting on the Army. Women spoke on conflict reportage in the shadow of the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and the need to have a support system in place for journalists who do report on conflict and the need for more security.

Aside from militarization, criminalisation in the North East is on the rise and, as a result, journalists often had to deal with stories of ‘militants’ indulging in extortion. The latter put their own pressures on silencing journalists and did not approve of such stories.

NEPAL

“If there is a glass ceiling in India and the US, the world’s largest democracy and the other, a super power, what can we say of Nepal? Here, women have to battle a biased social structure”

- participant at roundtable in Kathmandu

In Nepal, women journalists are a little more visible now, especially in the state capital Kathmandu but they are still struggling with recruitment, challenging assignments and safety.

For women from hill districts or from the Terai (the plains) of Nepal, the situation is much more precarious. Here, social attitudes, coupled with the complete lack of recognition, much less support, from media houses, makes recruitment and work assignments a daily challenge. The impunity that still clouds the investigation into the death of Uma Singh in 2009 in Janakpur has had a chilling effect on women journalists in smaller cities and towns.

Sexual harassment is also widely prevalent, though few women speak openly of it. A campaign to raise awareness on sexual harassment and encourage women to lodge complaints in confidence is vitally important. So too, gender sensitization programs would benefit both male and female journalists.

Few journalists in Nepal – both male and female - have access to identity cards, press passes or even the TOR (terms of reference) that governs service conditions. While male journalists take on other jobs to supplement their meagre and uncertain incomes, women have no such avenues. This makes journalism even more of a struggle along with the challenge to get things like basic reporting equipment.

Yet, women journalists break these barriers to tell the stories of development, health issues, violence or even politics. For them, support systems from fellow women journalists, access to information in local languages or even training in enhancing skills as journalists – using computers, social media or mobile media to tell the story, becomes paramount.

“I have done 58 ‘basic’ journalism training courses – why is it that I am never asked to train anyone?”

- a young women journalist who works in a district in Nepal

Nepal Roundtable

By Geeta Seshu and Laxmi Murthy

Women journalists in Nepal have been a more visible force in the last decade, several of them playing a major role in the movement for democracy. But there is a danger of the gains of this movement receding as other pressures rise. As a woman journalist put it, the situation is so bad for the media even male colleagues are frustrated and want to quit! Most online news sites don’t even want full-time reporters, while many young entrants opt for the more glamorous FM radio stations, despite poor pay.

This roundtable examined three main issues – recruitment and work-place conditions; sexual harassment; and the need to strengthen networking amongst women journalists. There were 12 participants, nine from Kathmandu and three from regions – the Terai, Janakpur and Pokhara.

One of the strongest points that emerged was the need to change mindsets. Society was still so male-dominated and women journalists couldn’t work very freely. For instance, men would find it difficult to work under a woman station manager in a radio station, thus in a station would find women end up working at lower levels and can’t aspire to higher levels of work.

Sexual harassment is an issue even at higher levels and women journalists are belittled for their work, instead of getting due credit. Also, women journalists who are young and inexperienced need special training to recognize sexual harassment and learn to report it and fight it.

Another point that came up was exploring of non-legal routes to deal with sexual harassment, since women fear lodging complaints as they may lose their jobs or are considered ‘unemployable’ elsewhere. Women remain silent because of this.

Journalists, who work in areas outside of the capital – Kathmandu and in smaller towns and cities, face other issues. In the Terai for instances, women journalists get threats from political leaders and

some are forced to quit, despite being well-qualified and experienced. As a woman journalist put it, “We do everything from recording, mixing, vox pop – we are technicians, journalists and reporters. And we are active in (FNJ) the union!”

Women are not assigned to the night shift and they have no facilities like transport, bearing risks in their work. If they lose their equipment or are attacked, they have to bear the costs themselves, without any help from their organisations. Worse, they are not even believed when they report abuse or attacks!

Referring to the dastardly attack on journalist Uma Singh in Janakpur in 2009, a participant asked, “We get no respect, no recognition. Are we going to get honoured only after we are killed?” Another said the social structure was such that violence was condoned, so it was much worse for women journalists.

The disregard for the work of women journalists is so deep-seated that they are often denied fair wages, on the pretext that they are single and don’t need to support a family! Barely ten percent of the journalists get ‘TOR’ or terms of reference, so the remaining are vulnerable and don’t get official representation. Barely five or six media organisations pay staff a monthly salary, and in this process, women journalists suffer the most as they have no alternate means of income.

There are few women in the premier journalist organisation – the FNJ (Federation of Nepali Journalists).

The senior-most woman in the organisation was Vice-President, Yashoda Timsina. However, there are now more representatives in the executive committee but a lot more needs to be done to reach out and recruit women who are working journalists and active in the media as members.



Uma Singh (pic courtesy Bikash Dware)

“I had to go with a male colleague on his motorbike to some village, he kept braking and making me fall against him. So when I complained, he stopped in the middle of a deserted road and made me alight. Then and there, I decided to learn to ride a bike. I even broke my hand in the process but now, they find it a threat!”

Recommendations from the roundtable:

- A complaints mechanism for sexual harassment
- Orientation programs with young women journalists to understand and recognize sexual harassment and training on combating it
- English training programs for women
- Orientation and training on ethical and professional journalism as well as practical training in writing and reporting and using equipment
- A legal desk set up in FNJ for sexual harassment, where complaints can be made in confidence.
- A three level sexual harassment campaign targeting women, men and media management
- Confidence building programs to get women journalists to travel and participate in exchange programs with other women journalists
- Greater coordination between all the organisations working for journalists and women in the media on campaigns for gender equity in the workplace (ie child care support at work) and to adopt the SAMSN-IFJ gender charter in letter and spirit

“There is a severe lack of professionalism in the hill regions and no professional security; In the Terai, it is very difficult for women journalists to join the profession. The underground armed groups constantly threaten and intimidate all journalists”

- participant at roundtable in Kathmandu

PAKISTAN

“Earlier, under the martial law regime of Zia-ul-Haq, the participation of women was curtailed in all professions, including journalism. When it ended in 1988, educated women jumped into the media. But they don’t have time for union activities.”

– participant from Pakistan

In Pakistan, women journalists are at risk of losing jobs because of poor security and low recruitment. In areas like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtoonkwa, there are very few women represented in the media.

Women are still traditionally given stereotyped beats though a few have ventured into covering sports or politics. But for many, it is still a struggle and they are regularly subject to comments or barbs that they should be devoting their time to their families, not their careers!

Religious extremism is another major problem that all journalists struggle against in Pakistan.

The premier journalists’ organisation, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, is committed to gender equality and in 2012 – local unions were encouraged to increase women’s participation by having women’s cells at the local units. Now PFUJ is in the process of setting up a national women’s wing.

But the current reality is that few women join unions or are active in their unions. To improve this, there needs to be a greater emphasis placed on the importance of having women in the unions, along with dialogue with media employers on the need to allow leave for union activities. The PFUJ also needs to have a mechanism through which sexual harassment complaints can be addressed.

“If a woman gets a promotion, it is assumed she did something fishy.”
– participant from Pakistan

Pakistan Roundtable

By Minari Fernando

There are very few women in journalists unions in Pakistan, with 200 of the 14,000 members of the PFUJ are women. They are rarely voted in to positions of authority despite being well represented in media houses and press clubs. In their rounds, they tend to be confined to cover softer issues.

In this environment, women journalists rarely volunteer to cover controversial stories nor are they sent to cover the various conflicts because of safety concerns or they are dissuaded by their families and employers.

The roundtable heard that sexual harassment is rampant. While media houses are expected to display publicly a code on sexual harassment, few actually do. Grievance committees in media houses can investigate complaints of sexual harassment, but many women simply don’t complain because they fear reprisals or loss of jobs. With harassment the norm, complaining is too often seen as making a big deal out of nothing. Women are expected to be silent on these issues.

In one high profile case of sexual harassment, a woman had to leave the country because of the backlash against her. Sexual harassment may be prohibited by law but it is poorly implemented and many women don’t know the procedure to make complaints in a way that will ensure success.

Women discussed being groped, pinched and pushed around when they go to cover stories and facing harassment from journalists as well as the general public. This acted as a barrier for women who want to cover issues other than “women’s issues”

Within unions, women spoke of a lack of gender sensitivity among union leaders who did not

facilitate women’s involvement into union work while press clubs also made it culturally difficult for women to attend gatherings – all things that could be addressed with small changes.

On TV, women are too often treated as sex objects and expected to act and dress in that manner. They are rarely seen as serious journalists. More generally, women are expected to go the extra mile to prove themselves and there is a lack of trust in their abilities by employers who will choose a man to cover an important issue.

Across the Pakistan media it seems there is no real support system for women to grow in the profession and no affirmative action. In the larger media houses this is not a problem but in others only men receive a fuel allowance, women don’t and are expected to take public transport which leads them to leave the profession or only cover issues that don’t require much travel.

In job interviews, they are quizzed on their marital status or plans to have children and many women felt discriminated against on this basis. In smaller places women lose their jobs when they go on maternity leave.

Recommendations from the roundtable:

- A comprehensive study to ascertain the situation for women journalists in Pakistan
- A mapping survey of employers that display the sexual harassment code and have measures in place to prevent and address it
- Training for employers and union leaders on gender equity and sensitivity so women are able to claim their rights more effectively
- Establishment of a formal association for women journalists
- Capacity building for women journalists, including technical training
- Training on gender sensitive reporting
- Gender equity training in newsrooms
- Union quotas or increased representation in higher union positions
- Safety training
- Working conditions that help women remain in the field after marriage/motherhood, such as workplace childcare



Pakistani journalists join a PFUJ protest against impunity

SRI LANKA

“The problems of women journalists are the same – whether for Tamil, Sinhala or English media: decision-makers are men, opportunities are not equally distributed and sexual harassment is a major issue. The question is: how do we mainstream gender? How do we include more men into the conversation?”

- participants at roundtable in Colombo, Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, the number of women journalists has increased and some of them are indeed holding senior editorial positions in news media. However, as an exercise in media monitoring at the roundtable showed, there is an ongoing struggle to ensure better coverage for women, to create an environment conducive to women professionals and the encouragement for women to take assignments that put them into situations that compromise their security and safety.

As a country that has been through a war and in a conflict for 30 years, there was little or no safety training for women journalists, who often relied on sheer common sense to survive. Now the threats are silent but as lethal as the bombs that came earlier.

In just a few months, two women journalists – senior editors of leading Sri Lankan publications – were forced to leave the country after receiving threats and attacks. While they were not targeted as women, but as journalists who wrote on various issues that proved problematic to the powers-that-be, the threats and attacks underscore the general precarious state of media freedom in the country.

For other women journalists, sexual harassment is a silent chilling factor in the workplace. There are no forums to address the issue and, with few women in senior positions, it becomes more difficult to deal with sexual harassment. Younger journalists need mentoring and help in identifying and confronting sexual harassment.

For women journalists in Tamil media, the struggle is manifold, as they have little or no support systems. Attrition rates are high and women often leave seemingly without any reason. This has given rise to suspicion that sexual harassment could be a cause and the stories they could tell only fall silent.

Sri Lanka’s unions were the first to adopt a Gender Charter in 2006 but it has yet to be implemented. A good start to work on the updated and revised Gender Charter would be to put together a database of women journalists and strengthen networking amongst them.

“Sure, some things have changed. You do see women covering parliamentary proceedings but ‘commentary’ is still done by men, not women.”

Thanks to Gagani Weerakoon for presentation on status of women in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka Roundtable

By Dilrukshi Handunnetti

Seetha Ranjane of the Free Media Movement (FMM) began this discussion by asking: “In a country where five women were reportedly being raped every day, is the work done by women journalists sufficient in highlighting such gross violations?” It can only be expected that sexual violence and aggression will also get reflected in the media houses and leave a shadow at the work places.

At the Sri Lanka roundtable, women discussed the safety of women journalists when carrying out official duties and whether anything tangible had been done to bring an end to stereotypical portrayals and the typical problems faced by women in Sri Lanka, including continued discrimination at work places.

President of the South Asian Women in Media – Sri Lanka Chapter and County Representative Asia Media Forum (AMF), Dilrukshi Handunnetti stressed on the need for collective action to handle collective problems faced by women in media and called for collaborative work at local, provincial, national, regional and international levels, to deal with issues of commonality.

Women spoke on how discrimination did or did not affect their work. They spoke about assignments that were considered male preserves and their experiences in dealing with such stereotypical approaches. They also spoke about how women journalists do not get well-deserved exposure to ‘real journalism,’ largely due to their gender.

As one said: “Most of our political coverage is done by women, but in most cases, even the managements believe that women don’t understand politics and it is better left to men!”

Whether there was an actual reduction in the level of discrimination at work places, especially when allocating assignments, was an issue of conjecture – all agreed it required more discussion and actual analysis.



What is clear is that training courses for electronic media are limited and the few available were largely designed to cater to men, creating a bottleneck for women at the entry point itself. So too, despite a film industry and renewed interest in documentary-making, Sri Lanka has failed to produce a single woman videographer, though there were a few women photojournalists, again, less than ten.

The need for a better wage structure, merit-based promotions and assignment culture were tabled for discussion.

In a discussion of sexual harassment issues at work, women told how male-dominated managements proved insensitive to issues women journalists were confronted with, including sexual harassment, especially in vernacular language media.

The group highlighted as a key concern, the absence of opportunity for upward mobility for women journalists working in Sinhala and Tamil media. Not a single women journalist had so far been appointed to a decision-making level position indicating that managements are male preserves, it was observed. So too, many were also subjected to sexual harassment by their managements and immediate bosses.

One woman said: “We must overcome these unseen barriers and glass ceilings. Sexual harassment is a serious issue, we need a code - against sexually abusive remarks.”

Unlike Sinhala and English media journalists, the cultural background of the Tamil women journalists prevented them from taking up issues such as sexual harassment at the work place with the authorities. Some of the best young talent had left the industry as a result, and it was listed as a possible key reason for Tamil women to leave mainstream journalism.

In order to deal with sexual harassment, house codes and a national policy to deal with sexual harassment at work place should be lobbied for.

The group delved into how women journalists viewed the changing face of the media industry and its representation of women, the manner in which women and women’s issues were covered by the media, room for intervention and how best to address anomalies. It was pointed out that stereotypical content such as recipes, gardening, sewing etc; took considerable space whereas it was unclear whether the current women audiences were interested in the same old topics to the same extent, as before. The question of audience research was again highlighted to understand whether content was actually in agreement with the current audiences.

The roundtable agreed the negative portrayal of women in newspapers continued with the incessant use of the image of women as sex symbols. Other common representations were of women as victims, widows, beneficiaries and bearers of crosses, whereas the success stories went missing in the media.

“During the war, hardly any women journalists were embedded. But we must seize every opportunity. Wives resisted sending husbands to cover the war but I was young and unmarried, so I told my Chairman that I was willing to go. He was surprised that I was not afraid,” said one participant in the Sri Lanka roundtable.

How conflict is covered by the media, specifically by women; the absence of perspectives and reliable data; the portrayal of women in conflict coverage; and managing difficult assignments without compromising professionalism gave another insight on women’s experience in the media.

The absence of safety training for journalists working in the Northern Province was highlighted as a key concern for the industry. Safety issues of independent journalists, it was emphasized, were often overlooked by the managements, placing them in a precarious situation.

Dress code during assignments was also discussed and many claimed, they preferred to wear comfortable clothes with running shoes that do not hamper their mobility, while participants from the North said, they are required to wear a saree or shalwar kameez because a conservative dress code was a prime requirement in the North, whether working within office premises or on the field.

Although women represent 52% of the total population of Sri Lanka, women’s voices went missing in the media, one presenter said, showing evidence of how the conflict was covered with a strong absence of women’s perspectives, at all levels. While gendered reporting was absent, the space allocated for wom-

en's issues too was shrinking rapidly, an unwritten rule applied to the coverage of conflict as well.

Denial of free access to former war zone, intimidation, harassment and close surveillance impeded the work of women journalists more than their male colleagues, particularly when undertaking assignments in the former war zones. It had only been a handful of women journalists who have embarked on these assignments considered dangerous and unsuitable for women, to report the war and its aftermath, with a different perspective.

Many women journalists have embraced new media (social media) as a tool that offered unrestricted space and utilized the same as an opportunity to overcome some constraints posed by the mainstream media.

Still, not too many Sri Lankan women journalists remain active online.

State oppression has been applied not just to individual journalists but also to media associations, hampering their independent functions, while man media activists have had to flee the countries, fearing for their lives.

As a result, there has been a certain level of credibility loss among certain media organisations, insensitivity to issues concerning women journalists and general

safety concerns, all of which contributed to a reduced level of interest and engagement by women journalists.

"Women are marginalized and never given credit for their work. Women learn to ignore so many remarks," said one participant.

Others raised more practical issues connected to being organized, and a shared concern was that male-dominated media organisations showed a tendency to conduct meetings late in the evenings (after 6 pm) and venues for meetings were selected without paying much attention to the safety and dignity issues of female colleagues, contributing again, to the lack of active participation by women.

Recommendations from the roundtable

- *Data be collected via questionnaire and a credible database be created on women journalists in Sri Lanka*
- *A campaign against sexual harassment to increase awareness on sexual harassment, including the possibility of a zero-tolerance day*
- *Updating of the Sri Lankan draft Gender Charter, including its potential introduction within a legal framework*



Young student journalists protest against impunity in Sri Lanka, November 2013

The SAMSN Gender Networking Conference

“When we hear the problems of women journalists in other countries, it makes one feel less isolated. We realize that we are not alone”

- a participant from Afghanistan

The first ever gender-networking conference of SAMSN-IFJ was held on July 20, 2013, with women journalists representing each of the countries of South Asia and women representatives of union affiliates of the IFJ.

During this meeting, the gender charter first adopted in Sri Lanka in 2009, was developed and updated for adoption at the 11th SAMSN annual meeting in Kathmandu, Nepal, on July 21-22, 2013.

The issues that emerged in all the gender networking conference included workplace discrimination, the need for men to share familial responsibilities and balance domestic life with the pursuit of a professional career and the need for professional training for women journalists.

Other common issues were: measures to confront and tackle sexual harassment at the workplace and the dire need for training of women journalists on safety and security.

Recommendations:

Work-place issues

- Enable more recruitment of women at the workplace and to ensure non-discrimination in work assignments.
- Campaign to end work-place discrimination
- Enabling legislation to provide maternity benefits for women
- Industry to invest in training and re-training of mid-career professionals who may take a break and seek re-entry into the workplace
- A fund for women to buy equipment like a camera, laptop or cell phone and perhaps an instalment plan for payback
- Special attention to issues of freelancers

Safety and Security

- The setting up of a specific Women’s Safety Fund
- Safety training designed to address specific problems women journalists faced, conducted preferably by female trainers

Sexual Harassment

- Multi-pronged approach to tackle sexual harassment at the workplace
- A survey to map: (i) incidence/prevalence of sexual harassment at the workplace (ii) implementation of law (iii) existence of mechanisms for redress
- Demand law in countries that don’t have a specific

law (for e.g., Afghanistan, Sri Lanka) on Sexual Harassment and to demand implementation of the law in the countries that do (for eg: India, Bangladesh, Pakistan). Do a comparative analysis of the legal position in all countries

- Campaign on sexual harassment to include:
- The observance of a ‘Zero Tolerance to Sexual Harassment Day’, after a build up over several months
- Campaigns to break the silence on sexual harassment. Three levels of campaign:
 - (i) women journalists (ii) Male colleagues at the workplace and at the union (iii) management
- Use of multimedia and social networking media to raise awareness – posters, pamphlets and documentary films
- Investigation of existing complaints cells in media houses - how many are in place, how independent are they and how effective in tackling complaints?
- Networking and organizing
- Initiating a campaign among women journalists about the importance of unions and of organizing and networking
- Initiating discussions with unions to make unions relevant to journalists today, especially women journalists.
- Special attention to the issues of freelancers and contract journalists in print and electronic media who are currently excluded from many unions

“We need to speak out and reach out; let’s face it, it’s a male bastion and we have to confront it”

– participant from India roundtable

Gender Charter 2013

“The situation of women should be part of political discourse. We must look at universal issues, women, education, nationalism, citizenship. The discourse should not be about exotica, not about guns, guitars and girls...”
– participant from India

The Charter on Gender Equality for Media and Journalism in South Asia was adopted at 11th SAMSAN meeting, Kathmandu, Nepal, on July 25, 2013.

CHARTER ON GENDER EQUALITY FOR MEDIA AND JOURNALISM IN SOUTH ASIA

We, the partner organisations in the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSAN), are committed to the promotion of democracy and equality, human rights and press freedom, peace and social justice in our countries. SAMSAN is a coalition of unions affiliated to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and other press freedom advocacy bodies. It currently has partners in all eight countries of South Asia.

We are deeply disturbed by the growing attacks by fundamentalist forces on women journalists in South Asia. We also note with dismay the backlash by conservative forces against the growing presence of women in public and professional life, particularly in the media. We are also concerned at the growing corporatisation, commercialisation and politicisation of media ownership in South Asia which puts in jeopardy the labour rights and media freedom that we strive for.

In this context we commit ourselves to the following fundamental principles outlined in this Charter.

The charter sets out the minimum standards, principles and actions needed to underpin gender equity in media in South Asia and outlines a practical program of action to support the achievement of equality in media workplaces, journalists organisations and the media itself

The partner organisations of SAMSAN declare their endorsement of this charter for gender equity and urge all journalists, media institutes, organisations and media unions to adopt and support the following actions.

1. *Fundamental Principles*

To create equality throughout society it is essential that the media promote and protect gender equality, both within the working environment and in their representation of women. It is the responsibility of media to open debate and discussion of these issues, to better inform society and to break down the limitations of gender stereotypes.

Gender equity in the media workplace is central to any discussion about gender equality in society.

All journalists and media staff, regardless of gender, caste, religion, ethnicity or minority status have the right to expect equal access and no discrimination in:

- *appointment and recruitment of people to journalism:*
- *payment of salaries; or*
- *opportunities for promotion and advancement in journalism.*

Media can either perpetuate the subordination of women or play a central role in promoting women's rights. It is vital that journalists recognise their responsibility to represent men and women in an equitable way so that media images do not reflect or reinforce stereotypes about men and women and the relations between them that replicate inequalities traditionally unfavourable to women and other marginalised sections of society.

2. Equality of opportunity

All media, whether public or private, must uphold the principles of gender equity in the media workplace by committing to:

- The use of transparent selection and promotion procedures based on merit i.e. qualifications and experience, not gender or favouritism;
- Need for training in new technologies so that women are on par with male colleagues;
- Support and encourage women journalists to avail of existing subsidies to access equipment like a camera, laptop and cell phone;
- The removal of job segregations, allowing equal access to all assignments and resisting traditional gender allocations;
- Equal pay for work of equal work;
- The introduction of policies to deal with sexual harassment at the workplace; setting up of Complaints Cells and demanding implementation of existing laws prohibiting sexual harassment;
- Provide safe working environment and adequate transport facilities for women journalists particularly at night;
- Insurance for women journalists;
- The introduction and promotion of clear anti-discrimination policies that encourage selection of women for important roles;
- Special policies to regulate insecure employment practices including freelance, casual, relief, piece rate and contract work;
- Formation of a Media Commission to hear complaints relating to job insecurity.

3. Equal Rights for journalists as parents

Journalists who are also parents have special needs and responsibilities. Since the bulk of the childcare often falls to the woman, creating pressure and conflicting demands with work, special provisions need to be made to both parents to allow their full participation at work.

All media houses and journalists organisations must address the under-representation of women both in journalism generally and in senior decision-making roles within media institutes and organisations particularly by promoting:

- Flexible working hours that accommodate family commitments;
- Fair payment of maternity and paternity leave;
- The availability of child-care services to employees.

4. Portrayal of women

Everybody involved in the media has a responsibility to strive for fair and inclusive representation of men and women.

Journalism must give voice to everyone and should avoid reinforcing traditionally unfavourable images of women, but rather promote a balanced portrayal of women and girls and their multiple roles.

Journalists and media should make special effort to ensure a diverse range of female perspectives are included in all stories including in reports on politics, crime, economics, national security and war.

Responsibility for ethical conduct in journalism rests with media professionals, including the drafting of guidelines to promote gender sensitive reporting and credible and accountable systems of self-regulation.

5. Gender equity and participation in unions and associations

Journalists' organisations recognise they have a responsibility themselves to adopt a policy of gender equality and to take up the concerns of women and principles of gender equity and incorporate them into their policy and action frameworks, including through:

- *Demanding equal opportunity in appointment, recruitment, promotion and advancement in journalism and in payment of salaries; or*
- *Best-practice surveys that encourage workplace policies that promote gender equality; and work practices that ease the burden on working parents and promote more compatible work and family responsibilities;*
- *Increasing representation of women in journalist's organisations, and in their decision-making structures will contribute to a mainstreaming of gender equity issues. Journalists organisations see this as a goal and commit themselves to working with women journalists on practical programs to encourage better representation of women.*
- *To hold union meetings at a time and place convenient to women members.*
- *Journalists' organisations encourage and support the development of a national network for women journalists to share their experiences and support one another while also advocating for gender equity in media.*
- *Explore the possibility of hosting awards to create incentives for men and women to report on issues that are important to women as well as recognising special contribution of women in media.*
- *To open discussions with media houses to develop policies and proposals to ensure that internal regulations to promote gender equality are put in place in all media throughout the country.*
- *To actively campaign against social and religious barriers to the entry of women into journalism*
- *To encourage family support for the entry of women in journalism*
- *The journalists organisations understand the importance of adopting internal policies that reflect gender equality by adopting the following actions:*
- *The development of a gender committee that specifically focuses upon producing campaigns related to gender issues, particularly sexual harassment at the workplace;*
- *The introduction of a minimum quota of female representatives, particularly on the executive board;*
- *The encouragement of family-friendly meetings.*

Adopted this twenty-second day of July 2013 at the Eleventh Meeting of the South Asia Media Solidarity Network in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Conclusion

“Why am I working in this field despite all this? Because journalism is like an addiction, more powerful than drug addiction” - participant from Nepal

The promotion of gender equality among journalists is a key objective of the SAMSN gender project going forward in 2014.

The roundtables and the gender networking conference discussed strategies and campaigns that could address the issues faced by women in South Asia.

The conference also put forward a common Gender Charter, from a charter adopted in Sri Lanka in 2006 that can clearly set out minimum standards, principles and actions needed to underpin gender equity in media and outline a practical program of action to support the achievement of equality in media workplaces, journalist organisations and the media itself.

As a preliminary step towards networking, especially using social media, a Facebook page [‘SAMSN Gender Alliance’](#) is now focusing on the issues of women journalists in South Asia.

The gender networking conference also decided to observe a day across South Asia as a ‘Zero Tolerance to Sexual Harassment’ in the media to raise awareness and campaign on the issue.

In the coming years, this will include the introduction of training modules to promote gender equity and mainstreaming gender within union leadership and policies.

Participants:

Gender Networking Conference, Kathmandu, Nepal

Farida Nekzad

President, South Asia Women In Media (SAWM), Afghanistan

Nasimun Ara Haq

President, Bangladesh Nari Sanghbadhik Kendra

Sonam Pelden

Executive Committee, Journalists Association of Bhutan

Sujata Madhok

President, Delhi Union of Journalists

Parul Sharma

All India Newspapers Employees’ Federation

Laxmi Murthy

SAMSN-IFJ

Geeta Seshu

SAMSN-IFJ

Yashoda Timsina

Vice President, Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ)

Durga Bhandari

Central committee member, FNJ

Sangita Khadka

Central committee member, FNJ

Mannika Jha

FNJ

Nirmala Sharma

Sanghbadhik/ Sancharika Samuha

Syeda Nadira Mushtaque

Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists

Gagani Weerakaon

Representative, Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association and Free Media Movement

Ferni Roshinie

Representative, Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association and Free Media Movement



asiapacific.ifj.org

The IFJ is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation that promotes coordinated international action to defend press freedom and social justice through the development of strong, free and independent trade unions of journalists. IFJ Asia-Pacific coordinates IFJ activities in the Asia-Pacific region. The IFJ works closely with the United Nations, particularly UNESCO, the United Nations OHCHR, WIPO and the ILO, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the European Union, the Council for Europe and with a range of international trade union and freedom of expression organisations. The IFJ mandate covers both professional and industrial interests of journalists.