



## Who Makes The News? The Global Media Monitoring Project 2010\*

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*'I always look forward to it because it gives me a sense of solidarity. .. I feel that I am not alone, and a lot of people are working together... so it's about solidarity, it's about understanding things together, it's about changing things together, so in a lot of ways it gives me courage...'* (Gitiara Nasreen, GMMP Coordinator for Bangladesh)

Nasreen's sentiments are echoed by media monitors in more than 125 countries worldwide, participants of the Fourth Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) in November, 2009 coordinated by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC). The GMMP has become the single most important, uniting and energizing force for those concerned about the state of gender in the news media.

The GMMP began in 1995 as a one-day study to generate a snapshot of 'who makes the news' in print and broadcast news media in over 70 countries across the world. Among the findings was that gender parity was 'a distant prospect in any region of the world. News [was] more often being presented by women but it [was] still rarely about women.'<sup>1</sup> In 2000 the Second GMMP measured the extent to which women's participation in the news had changed. The picture had remained static: women were found to be just 18% (up from 17% in 1995) of news subjects and men 82% (down from 83%), a statistically insignificant change over the 5-year period.<sup>2</sup>

By the Third GMMP in 2005 it had become imperative to integrate a new component into the project to respond to the abysmal rate of change. The new element was centred on advocacy for gender-fair news media. It included a comprehensive plan to build the capacity of civil society groups to interface with their news media as well as lobby for gender-fair media and communication policies.<sup>3</sup> The ensuing years witnessed a groundswell of interest in and concern for the gender dimensions of news media. The GMMP methodology became a template for gender-focussed media monitoring across the world, also adapted in monitoring reportage on topical themes from a gender perspective. The GMMP results were not only widely cited but also applied in training as concrete evidence of the need for change.

By the advent of the Fourth GMMP, the energy for change had gathered momentum with the snowballing of engagement from the widest cross-section ever of groups around the world. Indeed some define the GMMP as 'a global social movement of people who care about gender issues'. (Nien-hsuan Leticia Fang, GMMP coordinator for Taiwan) The diversity in the profile of participants is remarkable: grassroots groups, civil society organisations, researchers in academia, media practitioner associations, journalist unions and in some cases, government officials.

The GMMP validates the argument that while attention to media and communication in the context of women's rights and gender equality may have faded away from key post-Beijing<sup>4</sup> international policy instruments, the interest by those not directly involved in high-level policy-making is more alive than ever. Most encouraging is the interest of media practitioners who ally themselves with the ideals promoted by the GMMP, for instance, that gender-justice be an element of journalism ethics as much as are principles such as accuracy, balance and objectivity.<sup>5</sup> The GMMP is a visible confirmation that the concerns on 'women and the media' contained in

the *Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration* adopted in 1995 are not only more pressing than ever but they have gained currency as a need to be prioritized on the women's rights' agenda.

The GMMP process before and during data collection is just as important as the results themselves and the work following the report. 'What's exciting to me is [...] how the process of participation itself challenges many of our ways of thinking; it challenges many of our own stereotypes'. (Maximiliano Guzman, GMMP Coordinator for Hispanophone Caribbean) Beyond the clearly palpable excitement on the global monitoring day are the lessons in critical gender media literacy, or, understanding how to 'read' and evaluate media content using gender as an axis of analysis. GMMP monitors shift from the realm of passive media consumers to that of an active citizenry that demands accountability from news media.

Monitors who are at the same time media producers begin to question their practice, the ways in which their work re-inscribes inequalities and maintains the status quo: Following the research Edouard Adzotsa, General Secretary of the Central Africa Union of Journalists and GMMP Coordinator in Congo Brazzaville remarked, 'News media seems to serve male interests, attention to women is extremely negligible even though women outnumber men nationally, they are the lifeblood of communities particularly in informal settlements and in the rural areas'. Monitors located at the intersection of media production in their capacity as practitioners, and subjects of discrimination in their capacity as women, realize the GMMP's significance as a tool with emancipatory potential: 'We hope that what we are going to say about the representation of gender in the media will be taken seriously by media managers'. (Abebech Wolde, Ethiopian Media Women's Association and GMMP Coordinator for Ethiopia)

It will not be surprising if the trends of gender-imbalanced and stereotypical coverage are found to persist when the monitoring results are released later this year. The 2005 study revealed that 'only 21% of people who are interviewed or whom the news is about are female [...] Even in stories that affect women profoundly such as gender-based violence, it is the male voice (65% of news subject) that prevails. [...] Expert opinion in the news is overwhelmingly male'.<sup>6</sup> What will be interesting however is whether, with the efforts invested to date to train, create awareness, and lobby for better policies, the pace of change has accelerated in comparison to the preceding period. With the increase in the importance of the Internet as a news source, what will also be interesting are revelations on how choices made by online editors impact on gender portrayal and representation in online news.

What is clear from the experience of the Fourth GMMP is the significance the project and media monitoring more broadly have taken on. As Karen Ross, GMMP coordinator for Western Europe affirms, '...we are going to keep on doing this work...at some point, say Beijing +15...hopefully someone will take account of what we're doing'.

\* The GMMP 2010 report is scheduled for release in September, this year.

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<sup>1</sup> *Global Media Monitoring Project, Women's participation in the news*. National Watch on Images of Women in the Media (MediaWatch) Inc. 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Spears, George and Kasia Seydegart, Erin Research. with additional analysis by Margaret Gallagher. *Who makes the news? Global Media Monitoring Project*. 2000.

<sup>3</sup> See the resource *Mission Possible: A gender and media advocacy training toolkit*. WACC. 2007.

<http://www.whomakesthenews.org/tools/mission-possible-a-gender-and-media-advocacy-training-toolkit.html>

<sup>4</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> United Nations World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September, 1995

<sup>5</sup> White, Aidan. *The Ethical Journalism Initiative*, International Federation of Journalists. 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Gallagher, Margaret. *Who Makes The News? Global Media Monitoring Project 2005*. WACC.

[http://www.whomakesthenews.org/images/stories/website/gmmp\\_reports/2005/gmmp-report-en-2005.pdf](http://www.whomakesthenews.org/images/stories/website/gmmp_reports/2005/gmmp-report-en-2005.pdf)