

Global Alliance on Media and Gender, General Assembly

Convened by UNESCO

Dec 9th 2015

Panel on Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their implications for Gender and the Media

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SDGs are important not only for the fact that they signify the tremendous challenge and the urgent task of making a difference with respect to gender equality, but also because they give us a handle to link between different goals and targets, and construct a narrative where equality as a moral imperative is larger than the sum of its parts.

So - into this reading, we can weave in our demand for access to ICTs as a foundational right, the absence of which will exacerbate inequalities. Let's remember that the traditional media space is no longer the same and the Internet has irrevocably transformed what we know as audiovisual and print media.

Digital technologies are vital not only for voice and free expression; they are a basic resource, an infrastructure which must be provided as a public good and MUST be regulated and governed in a manner that can ensure equal outcomes. The Internet is not to be seen as a space for private innovation where some exceptions for public good are to be carved out, but as a default public arena, where business and private interests can be - with appropriate governance - allowed to participate.

And using the SDGs, it is possible to create within our country contexts the legal and policy climate and the jurisprudence, that can make sure that people of different gender identities, regardless of their social status, can have access to digital technologies.

The first Goal in the SDGs has some important implications for gender:

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

1.4 By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance

1a Ensure significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources, including through enhanced development cooperation, in order to provide adequate and predictable means for developing countries

1b Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in

poverty eradication actions

It may be argued that development efforts for poverty eradication are completely dependent on the given information and communication architecture – a resource with public goods and rights-based policy implications.

Similarly, the second goal – *End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture* – requires states to adopt measures to ensure inter alia, *timely access to market information*, which then goes to the heart of the 'right to Internet access' question for women, whose exclusion from markets is historical.

Goal number 5 – *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls* – specifically invokes the role of technology in women's all-round development, and the legal-policy environment:

5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

5.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

Similarly, Goal 9 on *infrastructure, inclusive and sustainable industrialization and innovation calls for quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all*. Goal 10 appeals to the need for *reducing inequality within and among countries, calling for the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status*.

It may therefore be useful to consider the SDGs as a good foundation for making a strong rights-oriented case on gender, media and new technologies.

However, indicators to measure targets with respect to the SDGs, leave a lot to be desired. What has been agreed is rather weak, especially with respect to structural inequalities. Further, as we know, different countries have different capabilities with respect to data. As [Barbara Adams](#) writes, “some cannot collect data, others collect incorrect data; still others cannot analyse the data they do collect; while still others lack systems to report on it. What will enable member states to address this problem, which they are all required to do, in a way that gives meaning to ‘nationally owned development’?”

In this regard, a number of the CSO proposals, especially from feminist scholars and activists, indicated a need to go beyond a single indicator and include periodic impact assessments and qualitative work - an approach reportedly under discussion by the UN Statistical Division - but, so far, this is not reflected in the framework.

Feminist policy research efforts and advocacy needs to focus on the inadequacy of simplistic indicators like mobile phone ownership, “Proportion of individuals owning a mobile phone, by sex” agreed upon

by the SDGs process. We need to show how it is vital to look deeper if we believe that gender justice is about deep change.

For example, measures such as household level computer use by gender, subscriptions to data plans by gender etc., may be more pertinent to get to the bottom of gender inequalities. There needs to be a way to assess national broadband plans for their effectiveness in reaching broadband through public access knowledge centres to women. We need to count these uncounted things we are often told are not countable because, as the old adage goes, if you can't count it, it does not exist for policy makers.

We also do need to emphasise that in the follow-up and monitoring of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the statistical analysis should be a complement to, not a substitution for, qualitative assessments.

The lack of funding to capture data to monitor and measure the SDG targets because of weak institutional capacity in developing countries has seen the establishment by the UN Statistical Commission of the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics, focusing on linking big data and the SDGs and exploring "specific big data sources for official statistics, namely, mobile phone and social media data and satellite imagery." The emergence of the data phenomenon and of powerful private sector players portends a scary spectacle - as someone said, in god we trust, but the rest of us must bring data!

The role of big data needs to be debated first and foremost for the widespread abuse of women's privacy and freedoms to use the public Internet anonymously. Big data, let us remember, does not have an international governance framework. Interlinking of big data sets can easily violate people's basic rights. So, is the solution to lack of resources a new spectre of big data based monitoring? Feminist media practitioners and researchers need to unpack questions such as this, from an ethical and policy perspective.

Finally, I want to say that justice for women is not just about being given seats. Yes, numbers matter, and women must participate in and lead media efforts, but justice in media structures is as important. This principle is core to gender equality in and through the media.

Here, I wish to draw attention to the need to closely connect to and embed our efforts in the WSIS principles and the upcoming WSIS plus 10 review process. The document has undergone some disturbing changes between the version on 4th November 2015 and the one released on 7th December 2015. The text is due to be adopted by member countries in the middle of this month at the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Overall Review of the Implementation of WSIS Outcomes.

From "We recognise the principle and importance of network neutrality and call for its protection accordingly", we now have "We recognise the importance of the ongoing dialogue on net neutrality and the open Internet in the context of the Information Society." Clearly, the battle around what kind of an Internet we want is a concern around Internet freedoms that is more than about voice; it is about the very structures of the Internet and its architecture. The idea of Internet freedom must therefore include the idea of network justice, so that gender equality is understood as an issue of justice and not of mere inclusion.