

WOMEN'S MEDIA WATCH REPORT

JANUARY TO MAY 1998

JANUARY

The Women's Media Watch got off to an active start in January with requests for more information about the group and new members flooding in.

Members of the public called in quite frequently and alerted us to press issues that they thought we should know about or respond to.

One of these was to provide us with a test case that allowed us to really feel the clout that we have accumulated during the past years of intensive activism.

Challenging a national talk radio station

A woman called in and reported that a talk radio programme on Punt Geselradio that she had been listening to had invited callers to call in with jokes. One of the jokes was about violence against women. The presenter, instead of explaining why violence against women is not a joke, bettered it with an even more offensive joke of his own.

We asked the woman to put her complaint in writing and then wrote to the station in question and demanded that they discipline their presenter and get him to apologise on air, that they have gender training for all their staff as a matter of priority and that they write and implement clear gender policy.

We then contacted the IBA, Independent Broadcasting Authority and asked them to watch the case. We contacted the Gender Commission and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women and informed them of the case and our demands to the station.

Finally we contacted the Network on Violence Against Women and informed them.

The radio station decided to have a spate of programmes on violence against women to prove what good work they were doing. They phoned several crisis organisations and were told by one and all that until they had apologised and agreed to meet the demands that Media Watch had made.

This infuriated the station who felt that they were being unfairly boycotted in their serious work because of a "joke". We explained to them that the joke was undoing the serious work that crisis organisations were doing.

The end of the matter was that they agreed to all our demands and we have entered into a cordial working relationship with them and have offered our professional services to them in gender training their staff.

This was a great triumph for us and showed how, if we all work together far more can be achieved than by doing it in isolation. They are a national station so it was particularly effective that our network reaches as far as crisis organisations in Johannesburg.

Producing media to help get women's voices heard

Gabrielle also helped to shape the content of the Agenda, a feminist quarterly, in its issue on violence against women. She contributed an article which was a transcript of an interview with two Media Watch members and Gender and Communications graduates, Rachel and Babalwa who shared their experiences of violence as sexworkers and homeless women respectively.

FEBRUARY

Submission to the IBA on Radio Islam

Radio Islam got a licence to broadcast on the grounds that they were serving the Muslim community and then proceeded to disallow women's voices on the air. They also broadcast a programme on how to beat your wife without leaving a mark. An Islamic youth group challenged their representivity and said that they were not fulfilling any of their claims to serving any but the narrowest and most extreme fringe.

We drew up a submission calling on the IBA not to allow them to extend their licence unless they met the conditions on which they had got it in the first place.

Radio Islam decided that they would allow women on air and have programmes of interest to them for a certain number of hours each day.

Protesting abusive MPs

The story of a prominent MP who was charged with abusing his partner featured briefly in the news and then disappeared without a sequel. Media Watch felt that it should be followed up and that media attention needed to be focused back on the issue in order to put pressure on the ANC to discipline this Member.

We duly painted eloquent banners and protested at the opening of Parliament and handed out fliers outlining the case and proposing legislation, a precedent for which exists in El Salvador to bar abusers from positions of power.

Our protest got excellent media coverage and popularised the proposed legislation and put pressure where we intended it.

DRAWING UP GENDER GUIDELINES FOR THE MEDIA

Women's Media Watch workshop on violence against women in the media.
A consultative process to get ideas from women about how they would like to be represented in the media, with a particular focus on the reporting on violence against women was begun. In collaboration with the Gender Commission and

other NGO's around the country.

The first step was a workshop between journalists, crisis workers and survivors of abuse to discuss that allowed all the role players to voice their perception of the current coverage of the issue, what would be more useful ways of dealing with it, and the constraints under which they work.

This workshop was very helpful in letting the various role-players build a relationship and a better understanding of each other's work. The first draft of the possible guidelines on reporting on violence against women also came out of this workshop.

It was then published in the Media Watch newsletter and further comment was sought and the document, still a work in progress, amended.

MARCH

Regional workshop on Violence against Women in the Media

The Gender Commission, in collaboration with Media Watch, organised for a Workshop on Violence against women in the media to be at the beginning of and to be part of the SADC regional workshop on Violence against Women in Durban.

As with any process to which we are invited we try to include as many diverse women as possible and the Gender Commission agreed to fund Media Watch participants.

During this workshop NGO's and journalists from around the country shared their experiences and ideas around representation of women in the media.

The guidelines were further debated and amended and circulated for further work to all participants.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Planning for the march and especially for media coverage of the march began in February and was stepped up at the beginning of March.

A Media Watch poster was printed to celebrate the day - copies of it are visible in one of the photographs that accompany this report.

One of the key demands handed in to Parliament was for the legislation, mentioned earlier in this report, to bar abusers from positions of power

Some publicity for Media Watch

As a result of increased interest in the group various local and international publications and newsletters featured articles on the Women's Media Watch and their activities.

Launch of WomensNet

The WomensNet has been in the making since 1997 and is a website devoted to information about South African women and their issues. Information about Media Watch can be found there and we were present at the launch.

Beyond Racism Conference

This conference was a sharing between the United States, Brazil and South Africa and the subject matter touched on the role of the media in keeping race divisions alive. It was a good networking opportunity and Gabrielle was privileged to meet and interview Gloria Steinem and Senator Benedita da Silva from Brazil. Both of them were interested to hear about Media Watch and are now on the mailing list.

APRIL

WOMEN'S MEDIA USE SURVEY

A survey looking at media that women are using and what they feel are the issues that are covered and what issues they feel are not covered adequately and whether they feel represented was drawn up.

It was circulated to Women's Media Watch members and their constituencies. The aim is to gather qualitative data on how women feel about the media they consume as well as some ideas to share with media producers about what they would like to see changed.

BUILDING TIES AT NATIONAL LEVEL

A media monitoring group forms in Gauteng

Media Watch was invited to the first public meeting of the Media Monitoring Group in Johannesburg. Fifteen NGO's, mostly crisis organisations came together to start campaigning around the treatment of violence against women in the media.

We shared ideas with them and agreed to collaborate and stay closely connected so that we don't duplicate each other's work.

Meeting editors in Kea-Zulu Natal

Gabrielle was invited to meet the Regional Editor of the SABC in Natal, also a key figure in the recently formed SANEF, South African National Editors Forum. They had heard about Media Watch and were eager to work with us.

We drew up a proposal to run workshops on gender with editors for radio, television and print media in all the provinces. The proposal was approved in principal at their next meeting.

Gender training for Punt Radio

The station manager for Punt Radio, the station with whom Media Watch had an encounter around their jokes about violence against women, came in to make

plans for them to receive gender training for staff from us.

A core of trainers is being formed to deal with this type of training which is likely to increase as Media Watch get better known.

Working with the Network on Violence Against Women

The bonds between Media Watch and other NGO's especially in the crisis sector are strengthening and more and more ways are being found to work together.

They have also requested training in various media skills.

MAY

Organising for the WACC Conference on Gender and Communication Policy

This required considerable organising, inviting speakers and press and delegates. Also preparing an input on Gender Stereotyping and whether women feel represented by the media.

Radio interview on gender

Bush Radio interviewed Gabrielle on the stereotyping of women in magazines for their gender programme series.

Collating the first results of the Media Use Survey

The first results of the Media Use Survey were translated from Xhosa and Afrikaans and collated in English. There is rich material and, collated they form a strong statement of what women would like to see in the media - unsurprisingly - themselves!

REGULAR FEATURES

MONTHLY MEETINGS

Members continue to meet monthly to plan events and interventions and develop viewpoints on the issues of the day.

PRODUCTION OF THE NEWSLETTER

The newsletter is produced on a monthly basis although Gabrielle regrets that due to a death in the family she got behind with April and May issues.

MEDIA ALERT

Media Watch continues to alert other organisations to the way in which their issues are being dealt with by the media if it seems likely that they will want to intervene.