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1 The term 'glass ceiling' was coined in a 1986 Wall Street Journal report on corporate women by Hymowitz and Schellhardt. It generally refers to the unofficial barriers women face as they climb the corporate (or other professional) ladder. So, while there may not be any legal or professional obstacles preventing women from being promoted to managerial levels and beyond, there are cultural and societal impediments, which have come to be referred to as the glass ceiling. Women can see the upper echelons, but they can't reach them. The term has since been applied to obstacles in other fields faced by different groups.

2 Adopted from Brown & Flatow (1997), sexual harassment categories are defined accordingly: verbal sexual harassment includes sexual comments, name-calling, jokes or stories of a sexual nature; nonverbal sexual harassment includes staring, winking and body gestures; threatening sexual harassment includes offering rewards or threats in return for sexual favours; environmental sexual harassment includes suggestive cartoons, calendars and nude photos; and physical sexual harassment includes unwelcome touching, physical contact and cornering.

3 Lebanese companies are only required to offer seven weeks of paid maternity leave (Alabaster, 2012).

Enlisting media and informational literacy for gender equality and women's empowerment

Alton Grizzle

ABSTRACT

The importance of affording media and information literacy (MIL) competencies to women/girls and men/boys globally has received increasing attention and has been renewed over the past decade. MIL has been positioned as a basis for the ethical use of information, freedom of expression and freedom of information. It has been proposed as a tool to stimulate personal, social, economic, cultural and political development, and to enhance education. This contribution explores how MIL could be enlisted to promote gender equality in and through media. The concept of MIL is discussed from UNESCO's standpoint, drawing on what many experts call converging literacies. The contribution considers various applications of MIL to development. It presents a cursory look at what gender equality is by purporting gender as identity and as development, and highlighting UNESCO's definition of gender equality. It proposes how gender-sensitive MIL in respect to delivery and use of these competencies could enhance gender equality in and through media. The contribution ends with suggestions as to what gender-specific MIL programmes should entail and questions which should be addressed through empirical research.

KEY WORDS: *Media and information literacy, UNESCO, gender equality, media, ethical use of information, freedom of expression, freedom of information.*

The need to ensure media and information literacy for all citizens globally has received increasing attention and has been renewed over the past decade. International institutions such as UNESCO, the European Commission, the World Bank, the Arab League, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have drawn attention to the need to promote public policies oriented to the development of media literacy and information literacy in all citizens (Frau-Meigs and Torrent, 2009).

Many countries, governments, donors, international development agencies and institutions are advocating, developing, and supporting activities, and in some cases national programmes, to achieve this goal (See Pérez Tornero and Pi, 2010; Frau-Meigs and Torrent, 2009; Horton J., 2007; and Grizzle and Torras Calvo, 2013).

Three research questions are considered in this analysis:

1. What is Media and Information Literacy?

2. What are gender and gender-based approaches to development and how are they connected to media and information literacy?

3. How might media and information literacy empower citizens to advocate for gender equality in all aspect of development including in and through the media?

Media and Information Literacy: A Necessary Convergence

Media and information literacy is a term coined by UNESCO to encapsulate two converging fields of study, information literacy and media literacy (Grizzle and Wilson 2011). A pure definitional approach to explain what information literacy (IL) and media literacy (ML) are could lead to confusion. As Virkus (2011) notes, "Since [the] 1970s many definitions of IL have been offered and several overviews and analysis of the concept have been published" (p.17). She cited Herring (2006, par.8) who points to a plethora of definitions of IL as a clear indication of the lack of agreement on what the concept means.

Consider the following definitions of IL below:

"Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and to have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. Information literacy, on the other hand, is an intellectual framework for understanding, finding, evaluating, and using information - activities which may be accomplished in part by fluency with information technology, in part by sound investigative methods, but most important, through critical discernment and reasoning. Information literacy initiates, sustains, and extends lifelong learning through abilities which may use technologies but are ultimately independent of them.[1]"

"IL is a new liberal art that extends from knowing how to use computers and access information to critical reflection on the nature of information itself, its technical infrastructure, and its social, cultural and even philosophical context and impact.[2]"

Both definitions are related but start from different vantage points. The definitions below for ML could bring even more confusion in the minds of the non-expert reader.

"Within North America, media literacy is seen to consist of a series of communication competencies, including the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate information in a variety of forms, including print and non-print messages. Media literacy empowers people to be both critical thinkers and creative producers of an increasingly wide range of messages using image, language, and sound.[3]"

This widely accepted definition of ML shares much commonality with the previous definitions of IL. It is on the basis of these terminological debates, and driven by the explosion of technology, that experts have argued that ML, IL and other related literacies are converging (See New London Group, 1996; Jenkins, 2006, Livingstone et al, 2008; Koltay, 2011 Koltay 2012, and Southard, 2011; See also Grizzle and Torros 2013). Beyond terminologies and the diverse accents given to various social, political and economic aspects of MIL, scholars and practitioners alike are turning to competency-based approaches to explain MIL. They attest to the multidimensionality of knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to deal with information, media, and technology – that these are similar in many sense, different in some and interrelated in all aspects. They give attention to the "critical – evaluative dimensions" which is necessary for all citizens to treat with authenticity of information, source reliability, misinformation, privacy, effective research, flood of messages through all forms of media and ethical use of media and information. Finally, they emphasize the new forms of participation, dialogue and citizens' engagement ushered by new technologies and that can only be amplified and effectively appropriated through MIL (cf. Parola and Ranieri, 2010).

MIL, understood as a composite concept, encompasses competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) that enable citizens to[4]:

• Recognise and articulate a need for information and media

• Understand the role and functions of media and other information providers, including those on the Internet, in democratic societies

• Understand the conditions under which those functions can be fulfilled

• Locate and access relevant information

• Critically evaluate information and the content of media and other information providers, including those on the Internet, in terms of authority, credibility and current purpose, opportunities and potential risks

• Extract and organise information and media content

• Synthesise or operate on the ideas abstracted from content

• Ethically and responsibly use information and communicate one's understanding or newly created knowledge to an audience or readership in an appropriate form and medium

• Be able to apply ICT skills in order to process information and produce user-generated content

• Engage with media and other information providers for self-expression, freedom of expression, intercultural dialogue, democratic participation, gender equality and advocating against all forms of inequalities.

The Scope of MIL and development

MIL has been positioned as an empowerment tool to enhance education and to stimulate personal, social, economic, cultural and political development (Hobbs, 1998; Hobbs et al, 2011; Matinsson, 2009; Carlsson, 2006; Tufte and Enghel, 2009; Horton, 2007; Catts, 2005; Torras Calvo, 2009; Perez Tornero and Varis, 2010, Lau and Cortes, 2009 in Frau-Meigs and Torent 2009 and other authors).

Kamerer (2013) noted that one of the most frequent applications of media literacy to research is in relation to how "the media form images of health and body image" (p. 16). He cited many media literacy in health

education research. Irving, DuPen and Berel (1998) gave short one-off training to high school girls on how attractiveness is represented by media. The study showed that students who were exposed to the study "were less likely to internalize a thin beauty standard" and showed lower perceived realism of the types of beauty images portrayed by the media (p.16; See also Wade, Davidson, and O' Dea, 2003; Watson and Vaughn, 2006; and Austin and Johnston, 1997 for similar studies relating to media literacy and health[5]).

On the side of information literacy many researchers have assessed the difference in information seeking behaviours of women and men in a personal and development context. Halder et al 2010, found that men "seem to reflect a broader range and more diversity when searching for information" than women (p. 245). The findings of the study also support other research conclusions that women "have a tendency to go to the root of a particular problem with persistence and depth" (p. 246; See also Steinerová and Šušol, 2007; Lim and Kwon, 2010). Other authors have explored information literacy and health (Seattle and King 1995; Hill, 2010; and Ku et al., 2007); information literacy and learning outcomes (Saunders, 2011; Lloyd, 2010; Torras Calva et al., 2009; and Lupton, 2008); information literacy, gender studies and politics (Broidy 2007, la Fond 2009; Weeg, 1997; and Kirk et al., 1994); and how women could be empowered through information literacy in a general sense (Farmer, 1997).

Other research where media literacy is enlisted as an empowerment tool relates to: conflict and violence, Scharrer (2009); media literacy and peace, Galan (2010); how children use new media in Egypt, Tayi (2010) and the examination of informal learning through an expanded empowerment model on aspects of media literacy such as comprehending news, creating a news broadcast and exploring pop culture, Hobbs, Cohn-Geltner and Landis (2012).

The question that needs to be posed at this point is what exactly empowerment of citizens through MIL is. The concept of empowerment is very hackneyed in the development field. It is so overused that it is often cynically perceived as devoid of meaning. However empowerment is central to development, it is both a means and an end. Some authors conceive the term as a liberating idea where individuals and groups possess the power over their lives; a form of self-determinism. Other actors see empowerment as an extension of agency, an individual's or group's ability and freedom to decide on and make purposeful choices to fulfill their desired goal (See, Lawson 2011; Ibrahim and Alkire 2007 and Moser 2013[6]).

The "World Development Report 2001: Attacking Poverty" frames empowerment by placing individuals as part of social, institutional and political structures and norms with which they must interact to have choices, use these choices and achieve desired goals[7].

Like empowerment, MIL is both an outcome and a process, and is concerned with individuals and communities alike. The next section explores gender and gender-based approaches to development before contextualizing MIL as an empowerment tool to promote gender equality.

Gender and gender-based approaches to development

According to a thematic consultation, Addressing Inequalities - Post 2015 Development Agenda, "Gender-based discrimination and the denial of the rights of women and girls remain the single most widespread drivers of inequalities in today's world[8]."

The proliferation of media, the explosion of new technologies and the emergence of social media in many parts of the world have provided multiple sources for access to gender-related information and knowledge. While inequalities and gender stereotypes exist in social structures and the minds of people, media and other information providers, including those on the Internet, have the potential to propagate and perpetuate or to ameliorate these imbalances. Imparting MIL competencies to women/girls and men/boys will enable them to be critical about and challenge these stereotypes.

In illuminating how MIL could support gender equality, it is necessary to first consider what gender is. Some theories posit "an essential gender identity", construing women and men as innately and essentially different while others assume gender as a sociological and cultural concept (cf. Van Zoonen, 1995).

According to the UNESCO Priority Gender Equality Action Plan (2014-2021), "gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. It implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is a human rights principle, a precondition for sustainable, people-centered development, and it is a goal in and of itself. UNESCO's vision of gender equality is in line with relevant international instruments such as the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* and the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. It is

also informed by the reflections concerning the post-2015 development framework[9]."

The concept of gender covers four different dimensions, which contribute to its complexity and why it generates so much debate. Gender is conceived as a sociological concept, a development approach, an operational strategy as well as an analytical method all at the same time. Gender as a sociological concept includes women and men, changes constantly and thus has no static definitions. Essentially, it is concerned with the social relations between men and women, who are based on values and norms learnt through culture and relate femininity and masculinity[10].

Gender is also a development approach[11], similar to the human rights approach to development, namely the Gender and Development Approach (GAD). In the context of MIL with a focus on the empowerment of women and men, it is necessary to distinguish between GAD and the Women in Development Approach[12] (WID). The latter acknowledges women's productive and reproductive roles and attempts to expand their livelihood. It focuses only on women and is primarily concerned with establishing small micro-enterprises operated by women in their traditional roles and responsibilities. Therefore women are integrated into existing social and economic structures and processes, and in so doing, seen as stakeholders and bene-ficiaries of development. While WID has helped to draw attention to and recognize women's contribution, particularly to the agricultural economy, it "ignores the unequal power relations between men and women and the subordinate role of women, assuming that these will change automatically as women become fully-fledged economic partners[13]." Consequently it falls short in addressing inequalities, questioning the workings of institutions and pushing for the rethinking of certain development models (cf. Grizzle and Torras Calvo, 2013).

The GAD approach on the other hand emphasises realities about the status of women vis-a-vis men that are accepted globally and aims to advocate for:

• a redefinition of traditional roles and responsibilities attributed to women and men;

• an increase in and broader debate on access to and control over resources and how these and other inequalities retard development – with a focus on solutions;

• equal participation in decision making for men and women as well as the appreciation and social and economic recognitions of their contribution in public and private spheres;

• the involvement of men in the quest to transform social relations that lead to inequality.

Aligning the GAD approach to gender-specific MIL policies and programmes demonstrates that:

• women and men do not have the same access to information, media and new technological platforms – in terms of use, operation and ownership – and that this should be changed;

• at the national level more attention should be given to the disadvantaged group to ensure that women and men have the same access to MIL competencies – as one way to change the imbalance noted above;

• men and women should participate equally in developing and implementing MIL policies and programmes.

What evidences are there about the involvement of men and women in knowledge societies and in the media? In a study carried out by Huyer and Hafkin (2007) who set out to assess gender trends in ICTs access and use, they found that comprehensive disaggregated ICT data did not exist in a large number of countries. Even where data were found, these were from isolated pockets of individual countries. Based on the available data, the researchers were able to conclude that women's participation in the information/knowledge society lagged behind that of men, especially in the poor countries of the world. For instance, less than 50% of Internet users were women in the vast majority of the countries reviewed. They pointed out that inequalities in use could hamper women's social and economic development even in countries where there is wide-scale penetration of ICTs. Among others, factors that impacted ICT use by gender include age, urban/rural location and what the researchers call ICT literacy. UNESCO places ICT literacy in the broader context of MIL as described above.

In developing countries, women are considerably more affected by obstacles to the access and beneficial use of ICTs. Socially and culturally constructed gender roles and relationships remain a cross-cutting element in shaping (or in this case, limiting) the capacity of women and men to participate on equal terms in the information society. For this reason, gender perspectives should be fully integrated into ICT-related research, policies, strategies and actions to ensure that women/girls and men/boys benefit equally from ICTs and their applications[14].

Gallagher (1980) and Fejes (1992) reviewed several seminal studies carried out by other researchers on stereotypes and found that women are underrepresented in the media, in staffing as well as in content[15]. Drawing on the summaries of Gallagher and Fejes, Van Zoonen (1995) vividly illustrated a dichotomy of gender representation in the media as seen in the list below:

Women	Men
Underrepresented	Overrepresented
Family context	Work context
Low-status jobs	High-status positions
No authority	Authority
No power	Power
Related to others	Individual
Passive	Active
Emotional	Rational
Dependent	Independent
Submissive	Resistant
Indecisive	Resolute

Fifteen years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a global study carried out by the World Association of Christian Communication's Global Media Monitoring Project[16] showed little changes in these realities. Only 24% of people seen or heard about in the news are women. Almost 48% of all stories reinforce stereotypical representations of men and women(cf. Grizzle and Torras Calvo, 2013).

How might media and information literacy empower citizens to advocate for gender equality in all aspects of development including in and through the media?

Gender-sensitive MIL in respect to delivery and use of MIL competencies could enhance gender equality in and through media. As Richards (2009) notes, "Youth media organizations that focus on girls have seen positive effects of gender-specific media [and information] literacy training – it changes girls' relationships to themselves, their bodies and each other. However, these organizations' effects are limited unless the field as a whole takes to heart the impact of media [and other information providers] on girls." (p.1)

Table 1 MIL for Gender Equality

MIL Competencies	Enlisting MIL as an empowerment tool for gender equality will enable all citizens women/girls and men/boys to:
Recognise and articulate a need for information and media	Recognise that there should be information about women/girls and men/boys in the media, books and in history Identify the absence of certain types of information about women. For instance, information about powerful women in history or present day women leaders. Call for sex-disaggregated data in reports about development such as unemployment, access to Internet and mobile phones etc.
Understand the role and functions of media and other information providers in democratic societies	Understand and recognise the power and role of media and other information providers, including those on the Internet, to offer counterbalances or to reinforce gender inequalities. Call on the media and other information providers to make gender inequalities transparent and understandable to the public. Push for diversity in the media and other information providers.
Understand the conditions under which those functions can be fulfilled	Advocate for freedom of expression, freedom of the press and their right to freely express themselves without fear of discrimination on the basis of gender.
Locate and access relevant information	Search for and retrieve gender-related information and knowledge. Use access to information laws to obtain government held information about equal treatment of women and their empowerment. Actively participate in the information life cycle - relating to all forms of development - collecting, processing and disseminating, and for women to participate in the process in separate groups as may be necessary.
Critically, evaluate information and the content of media and other information providers, including those on the Internet in terms of authority, credibility and current purpose and potential risks	Deconstruct media messages and analyse information to reveal links between sexism, gender stereotypes, and the promulgation of masculinistic male-centric status quo[17]. Be more critical of information online and for women and girls to monitor their behaviour online and that of others thereby becoming less vulnerable to potential risks.
Extract and organise information and media content	Based on their own experiences, local realities and research, gather relevant information that points to factors that hinder their empowerment and equality, and to use this information to open dialogue with relevant stakeholders and seek redress.
Synthesise or operate on the ideas abstracted from content	
Ethically and responsibly use information and communicate one's understanding or newly created knowledge to an audience or readership in an appropriate form and medium	While recognising and demanding their right to freely express themselves, accept that with rights comes certain responsibilities; for instance the responsibility not to knowingly disseminate false information or information that instigates hatred and discrimination of another individual or group based on gender etc.
Be able to apply ICT skills in order to process information and produce user-generated content	Acquire agency in producing their own information and media content (on or offline) based on MIL competencies they acquire - content about women, that more closely resembles the realities of women and girls, and that challenges gender stereotypes which have become the norm. Develop and disseminate social marketing and advocacy content relating to gender equality and based on their own research and community realities.
Engage with media and other information providers, including those on the Internet, for self-expression, freedom of expression, intercultural dialogue, democratic participation, gender equality and advocating against all forms of inequalities	Access and participate in mainstream media (public or private), community media, and the Internet as viable information sources and effective advocates of gender equality in and through media and women's participation in democratic processes and cultural expressions etc.

Gender-specific MIL Programmes

The hundreds of global youth media organizations and library programmes reaching out to youth provide great potential to mainstream gender-sensitive MIL and enable more girls and boys to advocate for gender equality in and through media.

Most gender-specific media literacy programmes target youth and are, in essence, youth media initiatives. With reference to information literacy, these programmes are largely academic and therefore involve mostly adults. Day (2005) points out that, "the importance of information literacy for teens in an ever-increasingly digital age has gained the attention of librarians and other professionals. She further noted however that "existing research is heavily skewed towards the educational field, with public libraries playing second fiddle to school and university libraries in assuming responsibility for teens' information literacy."

Youth media programmes such as TVbyGIRLS, Reel Grrls, Beyondmedia Education and the Arab Women Media Centre offer gender-focused media literacy education (Richards Bullen, 2009; See also Lapayese, 2012). Through these programmes, young girls receive training to develop their critical thinking by analyzing commercials, public service announcements and television shows, and to express themselves through creative and collaborative image, media and film productions.

UNESCO launched, in 2014, a self-paced online course targeting girls and boys aged 15 to 25. The course focuses on MIL as a tool to promote gender equality and covers related topics including intercultural dialogue[18]. From my research this gender-specific initiative, developed in conjunction with Athabasca University, is the only one of its kind that considers the whole range of MIL competencies described earlier.

The Gender and Media South African Network and Gender Links developed a seminal resource, *Watching the Watchdogs: a gender and media literacy toolkit for South Africa*, which formed the basis of a successful

programme in the region. According to Davidson (2006) in her assessment of the initiative, the toolkit offers a "standardized yet flexible approach to gender and media literacy training, it creates a systematic approach to training that can be adapted to any community or organization in the region" (p. 9)

Femina[19], an organization based in Tanzania, empowers youth and encourages discussion on the gender-related topics of economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and citizen engagement. Femina connects with young Tanzanians via its popular magazines and television shows, among other methods, to communicate information about these three themes. Using media to reach ten million youth in the area, the organization improves access to information to young men and women to help overcome gender inequality with respect to health as well as economic and democratic participation.

Gender-specific media and information literacy has also made its way into religion.

In Australia the See Me Media Literacy[20] Project involves the preparation of an interactive online media literacy curriculum resource aimed at addressing young people's interaction with media portrayal of body image and gender roles. Through exposing young women and young men to media literacy competencies, the project raised awareness of narrow gender stereotypes in media and helped young people reject such stereotypes while offering counter narratives. The inclusion of girls and boys, as well as those from different religious backgrounds (Christianity and Islam) offers useful insights to a more sustainable approach to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

Laypese (2012), describes an 18-month exploratory study that investigated how Catholic youths, particularly girls, respond to the teaching and learning of gender-specific media education (media and information literacy). The research focused on teachers' perceptions and how they "understand the influence of gender-specific MIL on the educational experience of female Catholic students" (p.213). The methodology included a training programme first for teachers who then delivered training to young girls, periodic interviews, and classroom observation.

While the results of this research might have benefited from deep interviews with the young girls involved in the study, the findings are still of relevance. As Mayes (2006) notes, applying the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach to learning treats participants (in this case Catholic girls) as experts of their of experience and illuminates how they makes sense of their own experiences rather than focusing on an objective account as was the case in the Catholic youth study which focused only on the teachers' account.

Laypese noted that the eleven teachers involved in the study "were clear that the lessons on media education [media and information literacy], influenced the overall classroom learning experience… through the development of critical thinking skills and research aptitudes, and the reconfiguring of the teacher-student relationship" (p. 215). In an interview, one teacher concluded that based on her observation of the young girls:

> "I finally can hear these girls talk in a passionate way. Once they get that thinking at a higher level can go beyond subjects like history, it's like a light switch goes on. The way these girls can question media images and messages really empowers them to question other things they read in their textbooks and that they deal with in life as females" (ibid, p. 217)

On the side of information literacy, most gender-specific initiatives exist at the academic or higher education level. Virkus (2003), in an analysis of information literacy in Europe, quipped, "Information literacy development has been derived from user education and library instruction in the school context." She cited several examples of related programmes of the 1980's and 1990's in countries such as the United Kingdom, Spain, Slovenia, Sweden and the Netherlands. Many cases at the higher education level were also described. None of them hand any gender-specific dimensions. Virkus presentation of information literacy in Europe ten years later seem to suggest that information literacy has largely remained at the higher education level[21].

One study examined the IL competencies of female students at four rural secondary schools in Bangladesh[22]. The researchers concluded that the majority of the female students lacked knowledge about the library and information resources available to them, such as the library catalogue, and how to best use these resources. As a result, a course on IL was developed and delivered by the Centre for Information Studies, Bangladesh (CIS, B) and United Nations Information Center (UNIC) - Dhaka. This training increased the female students' awareness of different information sources.

As Cartridge and Bruce et al., notes, "the majority of information literacy (IL) research has been conducted within the confines of educational or workplace settings. Little to no research has explored IL in community contexts." (2008: p.110; See also Bruce, 1997 and Lloyd, 2005).

The authors call for *community information literacy (CIL)* which they defined as "the application of information literacy in community contexts (ibid, p. 111). However they focus more on a research agenda for CIL. This could imply the implementation of concrete CIL projects in communities, with research components embedded, and addressing development issues such as gender equality. However, these dimensions were not explicitly explored by them. The authors did flag the need for consideration of how appropriate strategies can lead to "high levels of IL, within a hi-tech context, across communities…" and how to "bring the informational needs and context to disempowered communities to the fore." (p. 121)

Present information literacy and gender programmes are related to associations or networks of female experts and researchers; for instance, the Association of College & Research Libraries Women & Gender Studies Section[23]. The Global Framework and Action Plan of the Global Alliance for Partnerships on MIL[24] provides some useful suggestions as what needs to be done to bring MIL to disenfranchised groups (See also Horton, 2007 with a specific focus on information literacy and Grizzle and Torras Calvo, 2013 for a broader MIL context).

Herein lies the opportunity to expand CIL to develop more community-based research and projects on MIL and gender as well as other development opportunities and challenges – contributing to fostering gender-sensitive MIL for all.

Conclusion and suggestions as to questions that should be addressed through empirical research

Enlisting MIL as a tool for advancing gender equality opens up a flood of opportunities for pragmatic development programmes as well as academic research necessary to furnish the evidence needed to drive public policies and resources allocation. Effective gender-specific MIL programmes should:

- Involve women/girls and men/boys

- Look beyond just the media or the Internet and consider books, political and education processes, interpersonal relations, religious beliefs and cultural practices

- Consider the whole range of MIL competencies

- Combine innovative and concrete empowerment projects with research

- Facilitate national, regional and international networking to create an MIL and gender movement

- Include both theory and practice

- Be linked to policy debates and formulation concerning women and media as well as MIL.

Focus not only on the potential negatives of media, technology and the flood of information they mediate but more on the opportunities they provide to give impetus to gender equality.

There is consensus among MIL experts that more research needs to be done to affirm the impact of MIL on societies (Frau-Meigs, 2006; Buckingham, 1998; Casey et al., 2008; and Dovy and Kennedy, 2006 as cited in Grizzle and Torras Calvo, 2013).

Questions for empirical research:

1. Are citizens' attitudes towards participation/engagement in democratic discourses and governance processes, on such issues as gender equality, freedom of expression and diversity in media, different consequent to MIL competencies?

2. How do citizens respond to personal research needs in light of MIL competencies and do they become more critical of information and media content about women?

3. Are citizens' responses to MIL reflected in particular attitudes toward the role of women in cultural expressions and the promotion of peace?

4. Can MIL help to reduce the vulnerability of women in cyberspace?

5. Do gender-specific MIL initiatives that consider the whole range of MIL competencies result in greater empowerment or agency for women and men of all ages?

6. Can a media and information literate society help to accelerate achievement of the national gender equality objectives?

7. What new theoretical or analytic frameworks are required to assess MIL, as well as to monitor the efficiency of national and international public policies in this area?

8. Are national MIL policies gender-sensitive?

9. To what extent do MIL policies and strategies formulation and implementation which ensure the involvement of women and girls result in greater impact at the community, national, regional and international levels.

10. Are gender equality activists more effective when they are media and information literate?

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