

Illusions of strength become reality

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Programmes reflect the work of various community health care projects such as, "A cup of milk" while others tackle issues such as violence against women, be it rape, abortion, domestic violence or structural violence.

"The voice of women through radio programmes has opened up a public space that we've wanted access to for years. It offers legitimacy for the voices of women."

The work is not limited to radio, however, campaigns are designed as multi-media projects which include a range of activities.

"We don't treat our audience as if they're all the same people, we try to incorporate all kinds of people. We recognise that within an audience of women there will be a diversity of age, race and social class."

The style of media attempts to be more subtle and less stridently political, says Ayzanoa. "We include discussions of dreams women have for changing their daily lives. Central to our work is poetry, love and creativity."

Another field where women are at work is on the international airwaves. Feminist International Radio Endeavour (Fire) broadcasts for two hours a day, an hour each in English and Spanish from the small Caribbean state of Costa Rica.

Staffed by a multi-lingual, multi-cultural team of four women based at the studios of Radio Peace International, Fire has been on the air since May 1991. A division of their project is the Women's International News Gathering Service - Wings - through which programming material is compiled.

One of the women working at the station, Jeanne Carstensen, said their aim was to strengthen an international consciousness among women via the power of shortwave radio.

"By building this consciousness we hope to be able to contribute to, for example, inter-continental campaigns for women's rights."

At the forefront of tackling stereotyping and oppression of women in the mass media is the Women's Media Circle in the Philippines.

Ana Leah Sarabia said the power of media to create illusions meant it could be used to create illusions of strength or weakness. "We women should take over the media so that we can destroy existing illusions of weakness and create our own illusion of strength, and then make it a reality."

Elections for elections' sake?

Filipino activist Aida Santos says gender and development issues must feature prominently in South Africa's first democratic elections.

By CHANTEL EDWARDS

"The most vivid image I have of South Africa is that of black women walking down a road carrying bundles on their head, looking for water," says Aida Santos. "I spoke to women who pay R10 for a barrel of water that is so brown they can't even wash their clothes in it. Further along I saw lush green farms with irrigation systems."

She is the executive director for Wedpro (Women's Education, Development, Productivity and Research Organisation) in the Philippines, training co-ordinator for the Feminist Foundation and a women and development consultant to various local and international development organisations.

According to Santos, who visited the country as guest of the Theological Exchange Programme, the Philippines and South Africa show many similarities in gender and developmental issues, the one fundamental difference being apartheid which has had the effect of sidelining women's issues. "Many progressive political parties have a good policy of non-sexism and non-racism, but I would like to see concrete examples of this policy," she says.

Despite the relative success of the women's movement in the Philippines over the past decade, 50 per cent of women still work as domestic servants or prostitutes. The social system remains elitist and the

country's Judea-Christian principles, which disallow abortion and divorce, increase the suffering.

Women's experiences here reverberate in the Phillipine context: land resources, support services, health, migratory labour and violence (public and private) are all common issues.

Santos says it is crucial that the personal concerns of women be addressed now, and this is where developmental issues come into play.

"The gender issue is inextricably linked to developmental issues as it is the women who ultimately suffers. It is not something that can be addressed later, it must be dealt with now. Over half of the population are women and yet political parties are not addressing development issues."

Most of the women she encountered during her visit were not interested in the elections, they are consumed by the daily struggle of living.

"Women have played a very important role in your political history. What has all this struggle been for if not for the majority of people?"

"The key issue for women is what does the transition and election mean to their personal lives? You do not have elections for elections' sake. Developmental issues are election issues."

"The electoral struggle must serve the women's cause."



Aida Santos: has the struggle not been for the majority?