



# *Media Development, Radio and Women's Rights*

*Addressing Women's Rights through Radio in Ghana*



*Street Vendors, Kayaye*

*Photo Olivier Asselin*

*Since the beginning of its work in Ghana in 2003, Journalists for Human Rights (JHR) has been working to build the capacity of the Ghanaian media to report more effectively on locally relevant human rights issues. JHR's programming approach promotes good governance by encouraging respect for and the advancement of knowledge about human rights within key sectors, including government, media and civil society. JHR offers a variety of capacity building activities for local journalists including: daily on-the-job training, formal and informal workshops, lectures, curriculum development and award sponsorship.*

*Women face many challenges in Ghana and radio offers a unique opportunity to provide educational information on a wide range of women's issues. JHR has worked tirelessly with local journalists to not only include women's rights in radio programming on a more regular basis, but to encourage the active participation of women in the newsroom. JHR's work, while inclusive of television and print, has largely focused on radio due to the medium's accessibility and comparatively low cost.*

## **Media and Women in Ghana**

In 1992 Ghana was brought back to civilian rule after a 12-year military regime. The country's constitution was established and the rights and freedoms of Ghanaians became protected under Chapter Five of the Constitution, which closely follow the rights and freedoms found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).<sup>1</sup> It was a time of immense change for the people of Ghana, but it did not end there: the constitution also lifted previous restrictions on local media. The airways were opened and media pluralism was born.

Fifteen years later Ghana's media environment is seen as one of the most lively, vibrant and active in West Africa. The country has a strong cross-section of government, community and commercial media outlets spanning print, radio, television and Internet forums. Journalists are generally free to report on issues of their choosing, openly questioning and criticizing the government without fear of reprisal.

Despite the strong and rapid growth of the media industry, challenges remain, including; lack of access to formal journalism education, lack of proper equipment, and no commonly adhered to journalistic standards.

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*This case study was written by Nikki Whaites of Journalists for Human Rights. Some of the first-hand interviews were conducted by Indica Jehman (located in Accra, Ghana).*

One of the most important roles of radio in Ghana is that of an educator, spanning the borders of tribe, class, race and gender. Unfortunately, radio often falls short when it comes to addressing women's rights and including women equally in stories and programming. While similar challenges exist at television and print outlets, the reach and accessibility of radio makes it far and above the most important communication medium in the country.

A 2005 analysis of radio programming<sup>2</sup> showed that only 0.8% of total weekly programming time was dedicated specifically to women's issues. Health and sanitation and children's issues, also generally considered to be women's issues, sat at 1.3% of total programming time each.

Even with the small percentage of time women's issues receive on radio, there is a broad perception that women's rights are not accurately portrayed. Stations run women's programs on how to be a good wife or how to raise children, which limit women to traditional roles. Outside of this, stories tend to focus on negative issues such as homeless women living in the markets, women who cannot afford to pay their children's hospital bills or women who have been abused.

One contributing factor to these challenges could be the lack of women in newsrooms. An analysis of women in the media conducted in 2007<sup>3</sup> showed that female students make up as much as 68% of classes at some journalism schools yet female journalists occupy only 33% of full-time positions at radio stations. A clear discrepancy exists: while women are studying to be journalists, they are not entering and/or staying in the profession.

### **An Overview of Women's Rights in Ghana**

Women in Ghana are technically guaranteed many rights under the constitution, including the right to vote, the right to run for political office, the right to own property and the right to free primary education. While these rights are part of the country's constitution, enforcement of these rights can be limited. Women who are beaten or raped, for example, often forgo reporting the incident as police are known to ignore the complaints or request bribes to investigate complaints.

Additional rights enjoyed by women in other countries remain outside of Ghanaian law. For example, marital rape is still legal—meaning a husband can legally force himself on his wife at anytime without her consent.

Ghanaian women also fall behind men when it comes to education. By 2004 it was estimated that 70% of males completed primary school as compared to only 61% of females<sup>4</sup>. As a partial reflection of this, literacy rates currently sit at 66% for men and 49.8% for women<sup>5</sup>. While numerous factors affect female attendance at school, many girls who

do attend have complained of abuse and sexual harassment from teachers and male classmates.

One of the more significant challenges women face transcends tribal, economic and religious borders - domestic violence. Few reliable statistics exist, however, as only a fraction of women who experience domestic violence file formal reports or complaints.

Gladys Asmah, Minister of Women and Children's Affairs, commented that domestic violence and domestic killings is

“a dangerous, emerging culture in the country in which men lash out violently against women, not over alleged transgressions, but to control women's sexuality and sexual behavior. We find the increasing rate of domestic violence unacceptable . . . domestic squabbles can be resolved without the use of violence or guns.”<sup>6</sup>

One of the obstacles in advancing women's rights is Ghana's patriarchal social structure. It can be next to impossible to evoke change where men occupy the majority of management and decision making positions. By 2004 women accounted for less than 10% of people in public office, two women held cabinet positions, only 7% of the assembly members were women, 9% of the 200-member parliament were women, 7 of the 44 ministers were women and, of the 39 deputy ministers, 12 were women.<sup>7</sup>

### **Moving Forward through Capacity Development**

A partial outcome of these challenges is the emergence of radio as a crucial tool for educating both women and men on women's rights.

In 2003, Journalists for Human Rights (JHR) began work in Ghana, building the capacity of local journalists to report more effectively on locally relevant human rights issues – including women's rights. The organization has increasingly focused on radio stations as the medium has unparalleled reach.

Most Ghanaian households cannot afford televisions and low literacy rates have affected the spread and effectiveness of newspapers. Individuals who cannot afford their own radio share with others; crowds regularly gather to listen on the streets, in drinking spots and at friends' houses.

According to the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) there were 13.4 million radio sets in Ghana in 2004 with 82% of the population tuning into broadcasts at least once a week.<sup>8</sup>

JHR is not the only organization to attest to the power of radio as an educational tool. Saratu Mahama of the

Federation of International Women Lawyers, talks about the ability of radio to act as a medium of education on women's rights.

“So many people do listen to some of the [radio] programs and I believe they make a great impact. People are updated on the domestic violence law for example. They realize you can't just rape a woman and go scott free. And that is because the media is playing its role greatly and impacting greatly on the people.”

JHR's capacity development activities include:

- Daily on-the-job training: Journalism trainers work side by side local journalists, conducting daily training on topics from basic journalism skills to addressing and reporting on local human rights issues in an effective and informative manner.
- Informal Workshops: Journalism trainers hold informal workshops at media partner organizations. Workshops cover a range of topics from basic journalism skills to human rights theory.
- Formal Workshops: Expert journalism and human rights trainers host and facilitate two to three day workshops in Ghana's regional capitals. The workshops provide an opportunity for journalists to come together and discuss regional human rights issues and the best ways in which to report on them.

### Insights on JHR's Approach

JHR's work with women's rights and radio in Ghana has seen significant success.

JHR has held formal workshops in every regional capital. These workshops provide an opportunity for journalists and human rights activists to come together to discuss key local human rights issues and how the media can play a positive role in public education. To date, average workshop attendance has seen a 28% representation of women attendees. Having such a representative proportion of female journalists is a success in and of itself.

These workshops are helping to create awareness on the importance of addressing women's rights. Fifty-nine percent of men attending workshops listed women's issues as some

of the most important human rights issue in Ghana today; only slightly lower than the 66% of women who said the same.

JHR also includes training on women's rights in its one-on-one, on-the-job training. JHR trainers work with local media partners to encourage the inclusion of women's rights in all programming. Approximately 38% of stories that JHR trainers have helped produce have been specifically on women's rights. Topics have included:

- Domestic violence
- Marital Rape
- Women's access to education
- Women's access to health care
- Female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Forced marriage
- Widowhood rituals
- Ghana's Domestic Violence Bill
- Witch camps
- Girl child education
- Training opportunities for women
- Trokosi

JHR understands that its work is about far more than just numbers. The organization looks to the overall effect the

program is having on Ghanaian journalists and Ghanaian women – and the impacts are both measurable and significant.

Police in Kumasi disclosed a 118% increase in reported cases of rape and defilement by women after a JHR trainer worked with local reporters to do a series of radio stories on the issue.

Florence Gbolu, a female reporter in Accra, Ghana, commented on her experience working with JHR and Ghanaian women.

“Journalists for Human Rights is a school on its own, helping voiceless victims...Most often I face

challenges with women who have been victims of domestic violence, and are not willing to tell their stories because they are scared their husbands will send them packing...I am [now] able to help them understand what I am doing by explaining what their rights are. Most often I see them relieved to speak out about their rights.”

#### Box 1.1

##### Addressing Women's Rights

JHR's long-term goal for addressing women's rights is focused on mainstreaming women's rights and women's voices in radio programming; to have them included regularly in all aspects of news and other programming rather than as separate stories and separate shows.

JHR's hopes to achieve this goal by:

1. Encouraging the regular inclusion of women's rights in news broadcasts and other programming.
2. Building the capacity of female and male journalists to report more effectively on women's rights.
3. Increasing knowledge and awareness of women's rights amongst all journalists, editors and owners.

JHR trainers have also worked to help promote the inclusion of stories that empower women. One JHR trainer worked with staff at LUV FM, the most popular radio station in the Ashanti Region, to produce a two hour documentary on International Women’s Day.

“We modeled the call-in after the concept of ‘The Greatest Canadian’ and called on listeners to tell us which woman did the most to better life in the Ashanti Region. As part of the special we also interviewed a marriage counselor about women’s role at home and how it is changing. We also spoke to the regional director for the National Council of Women and Development on the most important issues facing women today.”

### Conclusion

Despite the challenges that stand in the way of achieving an equitable attainment of women’s rights in Ghana, those interviewed and those involved with JHR’s work with women and radio agree on the benefits of JHR’s approach and several key lessons have emerged (see Box 1.2)

As with any human rights work, progress can be slow. However, as stated, both male and female journalists at JHR’s workshops have placed women’s rights amongst some of the most important issues in Ghana today. Some stations with whom JHR has worked have instituted specific programs on women’s rights, addressing the needs and concerns of women in their broadcast area.

Journalists, staff and management at the stations feel that they have benefited from JHR’s approach and are increasingly aware of the need to involve women and women’s voices in all aspects of programming. Whether this work will result in larger, national changes to the state of women and women’s rights in Ghana remains to be seen.

### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Rural Waves: An Inventory of Rural FM Radio in Ghana, Nikki Whaites (2005)  
<sup>2</sup> Rural Waves: An Inventory of Rural FM Radio in Ghana, Nikki Whaites (2005)  
<sup>3</sup> Analysis of Women in the Media in Ghana, Renee Bernard (2007)  
<sup>4</sup> World Bank 2004  
<sup>5</sup> World Bank 2004  
<sup>6</sup> As quoted in *Striving to Flush Out Democracy Violence*, Sam Sarpong (2002)  
<sup>7</sup> According to the Ghana NGO Alternative Report for Beijing +10 prepared by the Network for Women’s Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT), August 2004  
<sup>8</sup> African Meida Development Initiative, BBC World Service Trust

### Box 1.2

#### Lessons Learned

- Women need to be more actively involved in newsrooms. While educating male journalists on women’s rights is needed, greater representation of female journalists could result in greater pressure to include women’s rights in regular programming.
- Programming addressing ‘women’s issues’ needs to be more inclusive of all women’s issues and not focus largely on negative stories such as rape and domestic abuse.
- Long-term goals for any organization working in women’s rights and radio should include mainstreaming women’s rights and women’s voices in all programming, not keeping these issues separate as their own stories and shows.
- More work needs to be done with female journalism students to look at why they are not entering the workforce upon completion of their degree and, for those who do find employment, why they are not staying in the profession.



**For more information about Journalists for Human Rights (JHR) or its program in Ghana, please contact Journalists for Human Rights at (416) 413 0240 or by email at [international@jhr.ca](mailto:international@jhr.ca)**

*JHR’s Ghana program is undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)*



Canadian International  
Development Agency

Agence canadienne de  
développement international