



GENDER EQUALITY in Film and Media

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1. Introduction

Gender Mainstreaming

'Gender mainstreaming' can be defined as the process of incorporating gender equality issues into every stage of the development, implementation and evaluation of mainstream policies. The Irish government has adopted gender mainstreaming as a strategy to promote equal opportunities between women and men in the National Development Plan 2000-2006.

Why is it important to consider gender equality issues in mainstream policies? There is a dominant ethos in Western societies that opportunities should be equally open to all people, which is a fair and positive aspiration. However, it can be difficult for all people to access opportunities equally, as this cartoon shows.



Clearly some of the animals will find it much easier than others to climb the tree! A recognition of this inequality forms the underlying principle of gender mainstreaming: the process of gender mainstreaming begins with acknowledging the fact that women and men are not able to access opportunities with the same ease. In the past, other approaches – such as the introduction of legislation, and positive action programmes – have been adopted to redress gender inequality. However, gender mainstreaming is more extensive in scope, aiming to take gender-related issues

into account at every stage of policy development and implementation. In order for men and women to be equally able to avail of all services and facilities, policy makers need to take account of the different situations and lifestyles of men and women, and plan for this. Gender mainstreaming has therefore been adopted to promote equality between women and men in the National Development Plan 2000-2006.

The National Development Plan

This Plan is for the investment of over €51 billion over seven years in Irish regional development. Funding is provided for a range of policy fields, including infrastructure, education, training, industry, agriculture, forestry, fishing, tourism, and social inclusion. Over 130 measures are being funded, and these are organised into six 'Operational Programmes'. These Programmes are Employment and Human Resources; Productive Investment; Economic and Social Infrastructure; Peace (to promote peace and reconciliation in the border region); and two regional programmes – one for the Border, Midland and West region, and the other for the Southern and Eastern region. Gender mainstreaming is required for all but six of the NDP measures (these are water, waste water, waste management, energy, coastal protection, and roads).

The NDP Gender Equality Unit has been established in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to provide advice and support to all bodies working on the NDP to meet the requirement to mainstream gender equality issues. The Unit is producing a number of factsheets which outline the main gender equality issues in different policy sectors, as well as mechanisms which have been used to redress inequalities between women and men in the relevant field. This factsheet covers gender equality issues in film and media.

2. Funding for Film and Media in the NDP

The National Development Plan provides funding for film and media under the Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme (EHRDOP) and the Productive Sector Operational Programme (PSOP). This funding supports film training under the Ongoing Sectoral Training Measure of the EHRDOP and film and television production under the film industry measure of the PSOP.

The aim of the film industry measure, which is administered by the Irish Film Board, is to assist television and film production companies to develop and produce high-quality drama and feature films for the international market. Script development funding is also provided to help film producers improve and strengthen the quality of their scripts before they enter the production phase.

The activities of the film industry measure are complemented by the training support provided under the Ongoing Sectoral Training Measure – Film. The main objectives of the film training initiative are to support the film industry to keep pace with technological and skill advances, increase training in script development and provide development opportunities for producers.

FAS/Screen Training Ireland runs a number of film training programmes and workshops each year for emerging and experienced film-makers. It also provides bursaries to help industry professionals secure appropriate advanced training abroad.

Women and men's equitable involvement and contribution to film and media activity is a core EU and Irish government policy priority. The challenge now is to integrate the gender equality dimension with all film and media activity, as required, and to make it amenable to measurement and impact assessment.

3. What are the Gender Equality Issues for the Film and Media Sector?

Film and media (print, broadcast and electronic) powerfully shape and reflect society's perception of women's and men's roles in economic, social and cultural life. There are a number of gender issues in the film and media sector and these are discussed below under the headings of representation and participation in film and media activities.

Women's Representation in Film and Media Activity

A study of women in the media (European Commission, DG Employment and Social Affairs, 1997)¹ found that research on the representation of women in different media forms in France, Ireland and the United Kingdom was strongly over-concentrated on television (and predominantly popular entertainment forms) and to a lesser extent on women's magazines. Comprehensive research on women's representation in and response to news and information genres was 'almost

¹ European Commission, DG Employment and Social Affairs. *Images of Women in the Media; 1997, European Commission.*

non-existent'. There has also been very little research into the relationships between gender, media production and media content.

Of the extant studies on popular entertainment, it appears that images of femininity are less rigid than they were twenty years ago. However, the small number of studies of media coverage of matters of public relevance (crime, sexual violence, political and sporting life) found that such coverage invariably reflected and reproduced a stereotypical view of women's and men's roles in society as a whole (*op. cit.* p.23).

The EU Commission report also highlights the tendency for gender to determine the kind of news that men and women typically cover (e.g. social affairs versus economics) which then produces differences in their professional output. This results in 'gendered' professional skills and outputs (p.12).

While the studies of women's and men's media preferences need to be interpreted cautiously because men are more likely than women to determine choice of content in a domestic setting, some trends are visible. Women tend to prefer media content that represents women as strong, attractive characters and dislike content that features violence against women or sexualised content.

A growing body of literature is concerned with the media's negative or passive representation of women, particularly in advertising campaigns. Advertising is a powerful agent of socialisation. Images portrayed in advertising campaigns can and do project inferiority messages to girls and boys, which can perpetuate and reinforce the cycle of gender inequality.

According to the Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland, some 25, 28 and 80 complaints were made about the portrayal of women and men in advertising in 1999, 2000 and 2001 respectively. The complaints that were upheld include three advertisements portraying women and one advertisement portraying men in a negative or offensive light. Upheld complaints must be immediately withdrawn or suitably amended.

The television advertisement that was held to be offensive to men showed a couple in bed, each attempting to retain the bed cover for themselves. The woman is large and is depicted using physical force to overpower a very small man. The complainants objected to the advertisement on the grounds of sexism, stereotyping and the portrayal of an act of violence, even though it was done in a humorous context.

Another case featured a magazine advertisement of a woman having just given birth with her legs in stirrups and wearing gold sandals.

A billboard advertisement featuring three women in bikinis and a man in a white suit on the deck of a yacht with a large car on the quayside was objected to on the grounds that it commodified and dehumanised women.

The Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland has recently strengthened its code, which came into effect in April 2002, to reflect the relevant provisions relating to all nine grounds, covered in the Equal Status Act 2000 on which discrimination is prohibited, including gender.

Negative images of women are not confined to advertising. A number of research studies cited in the European Commission study found that, in relation to their overall presence, women are disproportionately portrayed as victims of violence. Other studies cited by the European Commission showed that women victims are portrayed differently to their male counterparts; women were more personified, more likely to be filmed in close-up and subject to much more sensationalised coverage.

Women's Participation in Film and Media Activity

The different roles of women and men on influential television programmes, while not overtly offensive in the manner of some of the advertisements highlighted above, can project images of female passivity or submissiveness.

Women are much less likely than men to participate in serious news or current affairs programmes as authorities or experts. A study of a British current affairs programme cited in Galligan,² found that 68% of the speaking time was taken up by male experts; women comprised 37% of invited experts, and 85% of questions or comments on this programme were put to men. She also quotes surveys of the portrayal of women on television in Germany and Norway, which suggest that 70% of the viewing public is unhappy about the deprecating and discriminatory portrayal of women.

A French study³ across all broadcast and print media found that women accounted for 17% of people cited or interviewed in the news. No such studies have been conducted in Ireland to date, but anecdotal evidence suggests similar trends. Galligan also highlights content analysis research of radio advertising in the United States, which found that women were only present in 7% of advertisements and when present they were portrayed in consumer or worker roles. Men, in contrast, were typically assigned professional roles.

The Global Media Monitoring Project conducted a study of world media coverage of women on a given day. Some of the results (cited in Cliché)⁴ included: 37% of journalists (from newspapers, radio and television) were female and 63% male; there was a huge imbalance between female and male interviewees in media programming – 15% and 85% respectively; men tended to dominate in subject areas concerning politics and government (93%) as well as war and terrorism (90%).

Women's employment in broadcast and print media has increased in recent years across Europe. However women's share of senior, decision-making and creative professions remains disproportionately low (European Commission, 1999).

The Second Commission on the Status of Women Report (1993) raises a number of issues relating to women in the Irish media context that resonate with the European situation:

² Dr Yvonne Galligan, *The Development of Mechanisms to Monitor Progress in Achieving Gender Equality. Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform: December 2000.*

³ Trancart 1996, cited in European Commission, *Images of Women in the Media.* 1999.

⁴ Danielle Cliche, Ritva Mitchell, Andreas Joh. *Weisand, Pyramid or Pillars?: Unveiling the Status of Women in Arts and Media Professions in Europe (Germany: ARCCult Media/ERICarts/ZfKf, 2001).* See also website *EricArts*

- Women are underrepresented in programme-making and presentation
- Women were poorly represented as expert commentators and contributors
- The selection and treatment of material for news broadcasting seems to be a largely male preserve.

The situation of Irish women in senior media positions has not improved greatly since that report. Women continue to have limited access to and involvement in decision-making positions, as can be seen from the statistics below.

4. What are the Facts?

Film Training – Screen Training Ireland

The gendered breakdown of film training offers an early insight into later segregation in employment. As can be seen from the statistics that follow, film directing and particular technical/design jobs are strongly sex-typed. That said, film training is less gender-segregated than the corresponding occupational categories.

- Slightly more males (52%) than females (48%) were engaged in production training courses (2001).
- Slightly more males (52%) than females (48%) were engaged in multi-media training.
- Significantly more males (66%) than females (34%) are engaged in film directing courses.
- More women (55%) than men (45%) participated in script training courses.
- Lighting/camera and sound training attracted a 78% male and 12% female participation rate. All animation training participants were male. In contrast, all wardrobe/costume training participants were female.

Irish Film Board NDP – Supported Development and Production Funding/Loans

The breakdown of successful grant recipients by gender shows a male bias in the director applicant category and a less marked one in respect of producers. While women applicants appear to have been as successful as men in securing funding, they are less likely to apply for funding than men and are less likely to apply than their (50%+) uptake of script training places might suggest. The reasons for this discrepancy in gender distribution between film training and complementary employment positions are unknown. While further research is required, it is likely that the reasons include those that are pertinent in other sectors, including lack of affordable childcare and lack of women-friendly networks or career structures.

In terms of the available statistics, it appears that:

- In 2000, of 319 applicants for Irish Film Board development loans, 37% were women and 63% were men. Women received 33% of development loan offers.
- Of directors who received NDP-supported production finance from the Irish Film Board in 2000/01, 78% were male and 64% of producers were male. Gender-disaggregated applicant figures are not available.

Film Production and Employment

Film production gender statistics highlight a gendered division of labour. Men are strongly clustered in the high status (and well-paid) creative, management and technical roles, whereas women dominate in less well paying support roles.

The IBEC⁵ reports on the audiovisual industry show that:

- Of the total numbers employed in film, independent television and animation productions in 1999, 60% were male and 40% were female. The male share of employment increased to 66% and the female share decreased accordingly to 34% in 2000.
 - Of those involved in the film, independent television and animation industries in 1999, the following statistics apply.
 - 86% of directors and producers were male and 93% of scriptwriters were male
 - 72% of main cast members were male
 - 87% of camera operators and 95% of sound technicians were male
 - 99% of wardrobe and 90% of make-up personnel were female
 - 76% of production accountants (bookkeepers) were female.

Employment in Radio Telefís Éireann⁶ (RTÉ)

The gender statistics for employment positions in national television (RTÉ) show similar trends to the film and independent TV sector. Men are clustered in high status, permanent positions and women are over-concentrated in low-paying, low status, temporary positions.

- RTÉ employed a total of 2,100 staff in 1998, 40% of whom were women.
- RTÉ employed 22 top managers/directors in 1998 of which one was a woman (1.5%). According to the Administration Yearbook & Diary, published by the Institute of Public Administration, two women directors are employed in 2002.
- RTÉ employed 38 managers at top salary bands one & two. Three (8%) were women.
- Of the 96 managers at salary bands three & four, twenty-one (22%) were women.
- RTÉ employed 209 staff on salaries of £15,000 or less and of these, 159 (76%) were women.
- In 1998, a disproportionately high number of men (71%) held positions in the permanent and pensionable category.

The report notes that the proportion of women in the top three grades in 1998 (6.6%) was lower than that achieved in 1991 (9%).

Commercial and Community Radio Broadcasting

A NOW research report on women's employment positions in radio broadcasting (*Women on the Air*; 1999, see www.iol.ie/woa) found the expected gender differences in respect of seniority and high status posts. However, it is of interest that women

⁵ IBEC, *The Economic Impact of Film Production in Ireland, 1999; 2000*.

⁶ Sourced from 1998 RTÉ Report on Women in Broadcasting, unless otherwise stated.

appear to have more prominent positions in the management of community radio, compared to commercial radio:

- Women make up 40% of the boards of management in community radio, compared to 14% of the board membership of commercial radio.
- Women are more prominent in administration/sales posts than programming. The majority of disc jockeys are male.
- Women in programme-making posts in commercial radio are better educated than their male peers, but women fail to progress and this can be linked to the fact that they lack the informal networking contacts fostered by men.

5. What has Been Done? Examples of Good Practice

Infrastructural Support

A **Women's Film and Art Foundation** has been established in California for the purpose of promoting and supporting excellence in film-making and the visual arts, especially amongst women, the disadvantaged and members of different ethnic groups. Donations to the foundation are tax-deductible and are used to provide scholarships to disadvantaged and minority women who show promise, talent and motivation towards different film trades. The Foundation also provides education to the public and to future film-makers and has produced a 'how to' book called *The Great Women of Film* about the different aspects of a film career and film craft. (see <http://128.241.158.209/newfoundation.html>)

Strategy Formulation

The International Federation of Journalists (www.ifj.org) has involved women's representative organisations in its Media for Democracy programme. The programme comprises a series of regional workshops where the portrayal of women in the media is discussed amongst female journalists, women's media groups and women's groups with the objective of developing a common strategy. It was agreed that equal opportunities programmes for journalists should include measures ensuring:

- equal pay for equal work
- equal access to training
- fair and transparent promotion procedures
- reconciliation between work and family responsibilities
- action against sexual harassment.

While this proposal was agreed by the IFJ Union, it remains to be adopted by the majority of affiliated unions. According to Peters,⁷ public sector broadcasters are more amenable to adopting the equal opportunities strategy than their private sector counterparts.

⁷ B. Peters, *The Rights Agenda - Women Journalists and Press Freedom*; <http://www.ifj.org>

Encouraging Girls into Film

The Girls' Film School is run in the US by the College of Santa Fe's Moving Image Arts Department. Each summer 20 adolescent girls participate in this film-making and video production course. Each student spends two weeks writing, producing, directing, and recording sound for their own visual projects. The project is sponsored by Apple Computers, which has loaned Power Macs containing a film editing programme to the College.

See <http://www.apple.com/education/hed/macsinaction/girlsfilmschool/>

Showcasing Women Film-Makers

The St. John's International Women's Film and Video Festival in Newfoundland is a charitable organisation run by a volunteer Board of Directors working closely with a full-time Festival Director. This Board is composed of ten women with years of experience in the film, video, and new media production business. Among the goals of this group are the following:

- to facilitate dialogue between women film-makers and their audiences
- to support and encourage local women involved in film and video production
- to increase the exposure of new and unfamiliar works made by women
- to celebrate the diversity of women's cinema and to increase appreciation of women-authored films and videos
- to encourage dialogue with industry professionals at workshops which are open to the public.

Since 1989 the group has run the St John's International Women's Film and Video Festival over several days, and held in a number of local venues. International, Canadian and local women film-makers can screen their productions of various genres; public seminars by film-makers and film theorists are offered; and there is a youth programme. The Festival also attracts outside visitors, promotes and supports the local film community, and increases the national and international profile of St. John's and Newfoundland and Labrador as a vibrant cultural site. Originally the Festival received organisational support from the National Film Board, but has since developed its own organisation systems.

See <http://www.womensfilmfestival.com/organisation.htm>

Providing Supports for Women Film-Makers

Women in Film and Television - Toronto is a non-profit, membership-based professional service organisation. Founded in 1984, and part of WIFT International, an organisation with over 40 chapters around the world, WIFT-T works with its members in screen-based media industries (film, television and digital media) to build, advance and sustain their careers locally, nationally and internationally. WIFT-T is sponsored by both private sector and statutory organisations. Among the resources it provides are:

- targeted practical training in the creative, technical and business aspects of producing and selling to worldwide markets for screen-based media

- professional and training partnerships with industry organisations, associations, educational institutions and employers
- Career Hotline with listings for work in the industry
- Volunteer Programme, which fosters contacts, provides meetings with potential collaborators, and develops the careers of aspiring film-makers
- handbooks for film producers, such as those on Publicity & Marketing, and Gaining Production Finance.

See <http://www.wift.com/>

6. What can be Done? Policy Design, Monitoring and Administration

Examples of actions which could be considered by relevant departments and agencies to prepare the ground for greater participation of women in film and media activity over the course of the NDP are presented below. Many of the suggestions are focussed on training institutions since they play an important role in the professional development of film-makers, journalists and other media professionals.

Film Training

The following suggestions can be applied by policy-makers and film training institutions to enhance gender awareness and equality:

- Introduce a module on the ethics, legalities and consequences of gender stereotypes in the media, to mainstream film and media training courses.
- Encourage training institutions to develop practical reporting guidelines for the portrayal of women and men in film and media.
- Encourage film and media students to monitor the portrayal of women and men in the media.
- Set up a network under the auspices of a central or representative body for the exchange of information on the portrayal of women and men in the media.
- Produce gender-disaggregated data on participation in film training, at what level, and access to high status training and post-training employment within production companies; and identify male-female imbalances.

Film Funding and Support Policy

For departments of State agencies and resource organisations involved in supporting film and media activity, the following suggestions might usefully apply:

- Incorporate gender analysis into programme monitoring and evaluation. Gender analysis identifies how public policy affects women and men differently and the information in this factsheet is tailored towards such analysis. Gender analysis reveals the connections between gender and the problem/issue to be resolved. Its purpose is to highlight how the gender dimension is likely to have an impact on the solution to the problem, and to indicate what that impact is likely to be, and best courses of action for solving problems. In some cases gender issues may be

significant to the policy area, and play a determining role in policy outcomes. In other cases, they may be less significant, and constitute rather a set of factors to be weighed with others.⁸

- Incorporate gender equality aims and objectives into film training programmes.
- Develop appropriate gender-referenced indicators for key activities, e.g. gender-disaggregated data on applications for funding/grant aid, uptake of funding, and size of grant/loan by gender of lead applicant and form of funding by gender.
- Develop incentives to encourage film production companies to incorporate gender awareness into their projects; e.g. consider allocating additional points for initiatives that incorporate a strong gender-based strategy.
- Promote the involvement of more women as funding applicants and disseminate relevant information on women's funding success.
- Promote and recognise the artistic achievements of women film-makers and media professionals.
- Produce gender disaggregated data on women-owned production companies (defined as a 50% + shareholding), by sector, size, location (home or office-based) and urban/rural.
- Encourage the relevant trade unions and representative bodies to develop codes of conduct for film and media professionals in consultation with women's associations.
- Encourage schools to introduce gender and media perspectives into the transition year curriculum.
- Consult representative bodies and social partners on designing effective gender-sensitive programmes and projects.

National and International Commitments

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (which the Irish Government signed up to) includes a section on the media. Two important summary recommendations for film and media policy-makers to work towards, and benchmark achievements against, include:

- an increase in the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and in new technologies of communication, and
- the promotion of a balanced and non-stereotypical portrayal of women in the media.

Expert advice and support for departments and agencies is now available from the NDP Gender Equality Unit so that the commitments made to gender mainstreaming at international, European and national level can also be adopted in audiovisual activity. The first positive step towards gender mainstreaming will be to increase knowledge and information on women's participation in film sector activity. The Monitoring Committee and its constituent members have an important contribution to make in this regard and have considerable leverage to encourage beneficiaries to meet gender-mainstreaming obligations by way of available funding under the NDP and enhanced co-funding for gender-based activities.

⁸ T. Keays, M. McEvoy, and S. Murison (2001) *UNDP Gender and Development Programme : Learning and Information Pack on Gender Analysis, United Nations Development Programme, New York.*

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Bord Scannan na hEireann / Irish Film Board

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