

Augmenting Children's Right to Broadcasting: Strengthening Skill, Capacity and Leadership

March to June 2001

Introduction

The Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR) has been closely examining the issue of children and their representation in the media. Children are no longer treated as niche audience but a very critical mass of viewers. Since they are influencing viewership and choice of products even advertisers have been targetting them. Even very adult programmes use certain ad breaks to target children.

Children are more prone to behavioural or attitudinal changes, impacted by the images on screen. They are not only deciding for themselves but to a great extent influencing the priorities within the family.

Precisely for this reason the media does not feel necessary to be accountable for the kind of impact they are creating. Hence the child continues to be the least understood, and in fact the least defined, entity on screen but even more off screen. Here initiative of groups like CFAR assumes more importance, which has been consistently conducting media research and advocacy since 1998, particularly about entertainment media and its representation of children and their concerns.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

As we are all aware the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which India is also a signatory, guarantees minimum rights for the children. The Convention identifies media as "children's best friend." Aware of media's role in informing, educating, entertaining, it also recognises its "power and capacity to exploit, abuse, misinform, exclude and corrupt children, and thus deny them the rights the Convention aims to guarantee."

The Article 13 describing the *Freedom of Information* states "The right to seek, receive and impart information through media." Similarly Article 17 - *Media and Information* - mentions "The State is to ensure access to information and material from a diversity of national and international resources".

As a corollary to this, the children's right to access media has been recognised and UNICEF has marked the second Sunday of December as the ***International Children's Day of Broadcasting*** or ICDB.

CFAR'S TRACK RECORD

Over the last few years, CFAR's initiatives included conducting studies on the representation and impact of entertainment media on children, especially violence on television, media advocacy around child rights and media education, particularly among less-privileged sections. What the West witnessed over a period of two decades in terms of programming trends, commercialisation; in India the changes have taken place in a short span of time, virtually riding roughshod and ignoring its impact on the civil society.

Our audience research, impact studies provided insights into children's media habits, preferences, patterns of viewing and more specifically impact of violence, changing lifestyles and values. The consumer culture so openly propagated since the liberalisation of media has transformed the child into an individual with distinct choices, desires and expectations.

The Centre's research around the media habits of children in especially difficult circumstances clearly indicated a *high rate of access to diverse media outlets* by children from both socially mobile sections and the less-privileged ones. More importantly they were *discerning media users*, unlike usually assumed.

Last year CFAR was associated with the celebration of ICDB as part of the children's right to media. Collaborating with UNICEF, CFAR organised planning and sensitisation workshops with producers of children's programmes, interfaced them with children from different segments of the society. At the four regional meetings with the state-owned television channel and radio, children from different NGOs and schools interacted and provided their feedback on programming and what was their expectation from the medium.

The significance of ICDB lies in the fact that it provides the opportunity for groups like CFAR to access and influence media. The right to media is as fundamental a right as any other democratic right, especially in today's scenario where with the proliferation of channels and media outlets, this institution often determines the structure and quality of governance. In this context, it is absolutely essential that the issue of *access to and influence on media* be approached from *the rights perspective* of every section of the society, in particular highly vulnerable sections like children.

The ICDB initiative further strengthened the conviction that no advocacy around child rights can succeed if their right to broadcasting and having a fair representation on media is not addressed. The advocacy on media should be from the child's perspective, experience, needs and aspirations to avoid their marginalisation or portrayal in a negative manner.

RIGHT TO MEDIA

Keeping with the priority of the child's right to media, CFAR has been involved in the intervention *Augmenting Children's Right to Broadcasting: Strengthening Skill, Capacity and Leadership* for the last three months.

In India where many groups are actively working on different aspects of child rights, the issue of role of media has been raised from time to time. Groups have successfully mobilised media specifically in relation to their areas of work. Simultaneously a section of the media has also responded in a positive manner and sensitively handled these concerns.

Efforts have been made to bring out newsletters or radio programmes produced by children, what we need to strive at is integrating the voices of the children within the mainstream media.

However given the all-pervasive nature of media and its preponderant influence, any advocacy initiative has to go beyond targeting a particular programme, transmission or channel. This issue needs to be addressed at various levels. The issue needs to be addressed in terms of policy, regulatory mechanism, programming code to influence representation, quality and access. This is where CFAR is trying to implement an intervention that is seeking to impact the different structures i.e. business, channels, government and consumer that shapes broadcasting.

Events like ICDB provides us the option of collaborating with these groups who have already mobilised media around specific issues and move it forward. We would like to be part of the common agenda but also extend its ambit with scope for children to directly dialogue and negotiate for themselves. The child's individual, internal exploration of what media is doing to them, how it is influencing them and take it from the point where they are enjoying and deriving satisfaction to dialoguing with media. As far as we are concerned, we would like to tackle it in the following manner:

- Persuade the media to shift from a quantitative to a qualitative approach when it comes responding to children's needs and expectation
- By utilising the available spaces within the media to strengthen the authentic and diverse voices of children. What we are implying here it not empty rhetoric because much of the entertainment media assumes that all sections of viewers, and in particular children from both the privileged and unprivileged sections, prefer escaping into the world of rich, famous and glamorous. Therefore some effort has to be made to challenge these convenient assumptions.
- By creating new spaces reflecting the concerns, issues, priorities of the young people. E.g. Persuading some channels to dedicate a slot where the issues could be explored from a rights perspective with children who are actively involved in civil society movements could spearhead the programme. Within the programme have a helpline or phone-in facility to make it interactive.

- By inputting into the process of formulation of new guidelines, norms and mechanisms which make it mandatory to give programmatic representation to children, avoid stereotypes and stigmatisation of certain vulnerable groups such as children of sex workers etc.
- By facilitating a more sustained dialogue between children as viewers and media as image-makers. To strengthen this effort, the children would be made to interact with representatives of the media industry to sensitise them to their media needs, aspirations, concerns and expectations. This would not only include face-to-face interactions but articulation through creative ways – through theatre, paintings, poems, write-ups. We would also like to use the feedback given by children to advocate with other intra-industry regulatory bodies like AAA, ASCI, the marketing division of the channels, advertising agencies etc.

Therefore the management of this intervention is being done at two levels

- a. Trying to build links with policy makers, representatives of the media industry in order to influence programming decisions and other creative professionals involved in working with children and seeking to change the mindsets of the civil society.
- b. To work with the community i.e. the **children and their gatekeepers** by using well tested strategies such as participatory research in action, theatre in education, strengthening peer education etc. in order to understand and facilitate a child-centered initiative.

In the case of the former we have been exploring how to simultaneously establish links or contacts with different structures extending from the government to the industry. At the official level, we are aiming at engaging the policy makers right from the outset. This includes the Minister of Information and Broadcasting and will be soon extended to members of the Parliamentary Committee, Members of the Prasar Bharati and other experts whose advice is actively solicited by the government.

In the case of the industry we are actively soliciting the collaboration of a section of the industry, be it a supportive corporate body like CII, a child-friendly website like Pitara.com or empathetic channels, programme executives, regulatory bodies etc.

Working on children and media, the team needed to know the programming on the various channels, slots, transmissions, channels. Based on the programme schedules and our earlier studies, we taped some of the exclusive slots / programmes for children. The details of the programmes - the producers, directors, scriptwriters, production houses - needed to be identified so that they could be approached later.

Different ideas on engaging the groups in a dialogue, build rapport with them were explored. Activities were planned to initiate and carry forward the interaction. The geographical areas to be explored were discussed.

As indicated in our proposal, efforts were made to identify communities in East and South Delhi. The intervention is intended to involve children from the underprivileged sections of the society and create peer group leadership who could train their respective communities as well as interface with media representatives.

intervention

In this pursuit we worked with both individuals and institutions to identify children in the age group 8 to 14 years. We explored our contacts with people from the local area to identify the children. While selecting this group we had to take into consideration that they were familiar with media.

New Seemapuri, a resettlement colony in East Delhi, was one of the areas selected. The colony came up during emergency (1976) when people from different slums were provided plots here to build houses. However the facilities of water and sanitation facilities were not provided. Over the years while the single-storeyed houses have transformed into three-storeyed buildings, the basic infrastructure facilities have not changed much. Most of the children from this area go to the nearby government schools, while very few are enrolled in private schools.

Dakshinpuri, a fairly upwardly mobile colony in South Delhi, was identified as another area for intervention. Most of the children are second-generation literates here enrolled in the government schools.

We decided to approach *Prayas*, a non-governmental organisation working in Tigri village, Tughlakabad, South Delhi. The centre caters to two age groups of children in morning and evening shifts imparting both formal and non-formal education. Compared to the other two areas, Tughlakabad is economically backward with the men being the sole earning members. With Prayas having an outreach in the community we were able to get a group in the age group 8 to 14 years.

We also included Deepalaya, a formal school catering to children from the nearby low-income clusters of Kalkaji, Okhla and neighbouring areas, and part of the ICDB initiative last year. The only institution providing English-medium education to children from low-income households, Deepalaya provides facilities like computer education and summer activity classes for the students. This gave us the opportunity to interact with them on a sustained basis.

As we were approaching a very young group, it was important for us as strangers to the community to take into confidence the parents or teachers in each of the groups. During our visit to the communities, we spoke to the mothers about the initiative. Since the summer vacations were approaching, most parents wanted their wards to be

engaged in something more productive than watching television, playing out in the sun or fighting with each other.

The rapport building with the groups was initiated with focus group discussions on their media habits – what they watch / read / listen to, the environment for watching – where and with whom, favourite programmes and advertisements. Besides discussions, popular games like antakshari were played or children showed their talents in singing, dancing and acting.

All the groups were asked to draw their perception of television – their favourite channel, soap, character or even how they watch the medium. The children came out with very interesting portrayals – from drawing cartoon characters, montages to characters from their favourite serials.

Collage making was another group activity used to see how children perceive the medium. Each of the groups were given the theme of how television depicts the family and home and a set of similar colourful pictures of ads, models, achievers and television stars. Based on this, the groups put together interesting perceptions of the medium.

On the basis of these interactions, peer leaders have been identified in each of the areas - who would be the focal point of our training.

However this rapport building exercise was not limited to the children. The gatekeepers of the children were also part of this intervention. Both mothers and teachers have been contacted and spoken to regarding the habits of their wards, what they watch and do they as gatekeepers object to any of their viewing, do children ask for consumer products having seen the ads on tv, how do they react to ads of gutka and pan masala.

Based on these rapport-building exercises with the community, we have found the following trends:

❖ ACCESS TO MEDIA

1. Most children have access to television. Even when they don't own it, they have access to it in the house of the extended family or neighbour.
2. Access to radio is limited. Children prefer listening to music, mostly film and devotional songs, on recorders. Some children were listening to FM and acknowledged it as a source of information.
3. Very few children read newspapers or for that matter children's magazines.
4. Internet is out of reach. In an institution like Deepalaya they have access to computers.

The television set is becoming a baby-sitter in most households. Given their financial constraints, the tv is the main source of entertainment.

❖ VIEWING HABITS

1. They are hooked on to cartoons across channels. The Hindi-dubbing has further helped them access cartoons like Popeye, Mickey and Donald.
2. Serials specifically meant for the younger audience and watched by the group are Shaktimaan, WWF, talent search shows like Boogie Woogie and Mini Superstar. The later category also inspires them to pick up dance steps and aspire to feature in these programmes some day.
3. Watching with the family, they keenly follow daily soaps like Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi, Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki, Kabhi Souten Kabhi Saheli or comedies like Tu Tu Main Main.
4. The boys show a marked preference for sports events.

The viewing preferences are a cause of concern given that children are watching soaps meant for an adult audience. Since these soaps are being watched by a younger audience, they need to be sensitive to their concerns - an issue we would like to take up with the people associated with these serials in future.

❖ MEDIA DEFINING FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Television seems to have affected the dynamics within the family. There is a level of discomfort within the family watching the television together.

Some adolescent girls decided not to watch films with their fathers and other siblings. They were comfortable watching with their mothers.

Similarly advertisements are causing embarrassment when the entire family sits to watch television. Each family has negotiated this in a particular manner. Either the channels are switched at that point or some members walk out of the room. Some girls however pointed out that the above actions lead to further embarrassment hence they continue watching the channel.

WIDENING THE SCOPE OF THE INTERVENTION

The intervention was initiated with the two major objectives of

- ◆ *Changing children's representation in the media and*
- ◆ *Enhancing children's access and realisation of their constitutional and social rights*

Peer leaders had to be identified to take forward the initiative at the community level. However to build up rapport with the community, organising the focus group discussions, identifying the peer educators, training them, a series of activities had to be worked out. Towards this end, we had a series of brainstorming sessions with people from the creative field who could help us.

Chandita Mukherjee from Comet Media Foundation, Bombay, was part of the initial discussions on how to shape the interaction with children. Since the Foundation has been involved in producing educational aids for children, the possibilities of collaboration were explored. She offered help in developing creative aids and games for initiating discussions.

Suggestions were also made for audio recording of all the fgds and video taping of some specific events to enable facilitators to improve interactions and also document the process of the intervention. Paintings and photographs could also be used to elicit the reaction of the participants.

Other areas for the intervention were identified for future exploration, like involving the disabled, approaching children in institutions like orphanages, destitutes and childline projects.

Sujata Goenka, who has been working with people with disabilities, was also part of initial brainstorming session and has been interacting with the group.

Theatre, we thought, could also provide an outlet for the children to express themselves creatively. Professionals who had worked with children earlier were met. Maya Rao, involved in a day-long workshop last year with school children around ICDB, and Shakil, part of the *Jan Natya Manch*, were met to work out the scope of the medium.

Shalini from National Institute of Designing guided the group on collage making. The series of sessions with the professional helped us immensely in shaping the intervention.

Unraveling Media: A Child's View and Vision

On the 28th of May, CFAR-Viewers Forum organised an interaction *Can the Public Regulatory Mechanism on Media be Made Viewer and User-centered Addressing the Needs of Vulnerable Sections?* with Ms. Sushma Swaraj, Minister of Information and Broadcasting delivering the keynote address.

Children got an opportunity to present before her a play *TV ka Bhoot, Bachchon ke Rup*. The play reflected how they perceived the impact of the medium in their daily lives within their homes.

They enacted sequences about their fights with siblings over channels and parents asking them to watch informative channels. Children were imitating songs, dances, wrestling tactics (from WWF), or even the Indian superhero Shaktimaan from the channels. They sent across the message to elders about how the media was important for them but also impacting them adversely in some situations.

The performance enthralled an audience of channel representatives, parents of children in the age group 8 to 14 years, teachers and members of the Viewers Forum.

Simultaneously a separate children's event - *Unraveling Media: A Child's View and Vision* - was organised providing the space for children to deliberate on media. The details of the event are provided below.

On this occasion the findings of the report *TV and My Child - Mothers Reflect* was presented. This was based on interviews and focussed discussion with mothers of children aged 8 to 14 years. Mothers of some of the children part of the intervention were also included in the study.

Among the prominent speakers were *Mr. Kiran Karnik*, Former-CEO, Discovery Channel; *Mr. Dorab Sopariwala*, Ex-Chairman, Advertising Standards Council of India; *Ms. Jaya Ramanathan*, Vice-President, News and Current Affairs, Star India Ltd., *Mr. M.K.Venu*, Business Editor, Zee News besides members of the Viewers' Forum. Representatives of Doordarshan, Pitara.com, media critics were also present on the occasion.

An important outcome of this interaction was the recent announcement by the Minister herself that she was keen on a **24-hour channel for children**. In a news story in one of the national dailies she mentioned about the **Central Government's plan to look at films and special entertainment segment for children shown on Doordarshan**. We would be following up with the Ministry on these efforts and the on-going intervention could feed into the process.

Telly role models

A poll was conducted on the characters, male and female, preferred by the young viewers, their favourite ads and the leader they like the most. Shubhra Gupta, a media critic, coordinated the poll. A set of images in each category was shown to the children. For each of the categories, ballot papers were prepared and the participants were asked to tick their choices and put into boxes earmarked for each of the four areas. A few of them even spoke about their choices and the reasons for the selection.

Out of a series of ten advertisements ranging from cold drinks, consumer products, McDonald, the Coca-Cola ad with Hrithik Roshan and Aishwarya Rai was picked as the best with an overwhelming 40 percent of the votes being polled for the ad. The

Dermi cool (talcum powder) ad, a product widely used by the kids, was adjudged second.

Among the favourite male characters on tv serials, Govinda on *Jeeto Chappar Phaad Ke* (JCPK), polled 25 percent votes, followed closely by Amitabh Bachchan on *KBC* with 22 percent votes. Mihir, the eldest son on *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, was third. (17 percent votes). Kamal (*Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki*) and Shaktimaan had a tie for the fourth position. The choice of the characters reflected their role models.

Surprisingly both the top characters are associated with game shows. For Rakesh, the prizes and the shopping on JCPK are a great attraction - "itne achche prizes aur ek rupee mein itnee badi badi shopping karvaayee thi." His friend Kuldeep preferred Amitabh Bachchan's way of creating suspense in *KBC* before giving the right answer.

Mihir and Kamal feature in primetime soaps meant for an adult audience while Shaktimaan is the only character which is specifically meant for the younger audience.

Similar trend was noticed in their choice of female role models. 'Tulsi bhabi' (31 percent) on the popular *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, the daughter-in-law Radha (26 percent) in *Tu Tu Main Main* and good bahu Parvati (19 percent) in *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki* were cited as the favourites. All these were seen as positive on-screen characters who as daughters-in-law were binding the family. Both Tulsi and Parvati are very stereotypically portrayed as the ever-suffering women with strong values.

The Deepalaya children also presented the skit before the children who had gathered from the four areas. An exhibition was put up with their paintings and collages. The Minister looked around the exhibition and appreciated the children for their performance.

Pitara.com - an interactive portal designed for children participated in the panel discussion during the symposium. The site, besides providing news, stories, activities, school curriculum-related pages, asks children to contribute their drawings, poems and organises competitions for children. They also have a site for parents.

Given the limited access of internet, the site is mostly used by privileged sections of the society. To explore the possibilities of collaborating on this initiative with an underprivileged section, we met them as a follow-up to the meeting.

It was decided that creative inputs by children could feature on the site. Since the dotcom organises contest for children, those part of the intervention could participate in them. The concept of child safety in the context of media was another initiative where CFAR could collaborate.

Every year UNICEF celebrates the International Children's Day of Broadcasting (ICDB) across the globe on the second Sunday of December. Internet being yet

another media, collaboration could be worked out in not only creating awareness about the day but the participation of children.

Taking the intervention forward

In June, we decided to concentrate our efforts on Deepalaya. As the school was to reopen only by the end of the month, it provided us an opportunity to conduct activities on a regular basis as a case study before trying similar activities in the other intervention areas.

To begin with we discussed the collages prepared by the students. What emerged from the discussion was that most children were forming attitudes on the basis of the stereotypical gender imagery on the screen. For example, most girls were seen over-indulging in fashion whereas the boys were imbibing the bad habits of smoking, eve-teasing etc.

This was followed by a series of discussion on what child-friendly medium means, what kind of programmes should be shown and pictorial depiction of logos for such a channel. A survey on their current viewing habits and trends was also conducted to see how it varies with their desired programming.

Demystification of the media

One of the aims of the intervention is to acquaint the group with how the media works, how the image is crafted to convey a particular message, who is the target audience for the message.

A series of ads for both children and family were shown to the group and deconstructed by them. The use of celebrities to convey the message, ads directly targetting children, influencing the child consumer to buy products for the family, the use of jingles to popularise the product were discussed indepth.

In continuation with this we screened episodes of the popular Meena series on rights of the girl child. This exercise helped us in two ways:

- ❖ Deconstructing images
- ❖ Acquainting them with rights

Heated discussions followed with polarisation within the group. The arguments revealed their attitudes. For example: a small minority thought dowry had to be given to the groom during marriage or that girls should not work outside the house as it leads to eve-teasing. Similarly there was a notion that girls had to be cared for more in their parental home as it was not their permanent home and they would eventually get married and move to the marital home. "Ladkiyan mehmaan hoti hain," a young girl responded.

We are planning a similar set of exercises in the other areas.

Internet - the medium of the millennium

While talking about the media, internet can no more be ignored. From providing the updated news, email facilities, options to chat and of course to entertain - internet has it all.

Working with a group of children who were acquainted with computers, we took two batches of students from Deepalaya to an internet café. Prior to the visit, we checked out the sites exclusively for children. Sites of television channels like Discovery and National Geographic, or Teletubbies (a programme telecast on Doordarshan and immensely popular with children), pitara.com, news sites were some of them.

UNICEF

1. Needs Assessment and Rapport Building in three communities Rs. 15,000

For the 4 areas - DP, SP, Deep and Tigri

Facilitating Meetings Rs.500 x 7 (Rizwan) Rs.3,500

Administrative Expenses Rs.6,000

Amount kept for other two areas Rs.5,500

2. Meetings (20) - 15 with Children and 5 with gate keepers Rs.1,50,000

Venue: Rs.500 x 20

Refreshment: Rs.500 x 20

Local Travel: Rs.1,000 x 20

Audio-visual Material: Rs.1,500 x 20

Equipment: Rs. 500 x 20

Facilitation: Rs.1,000 x 20

Resource Person: Rs.2,500 x 20

3. Workshop (6) - 4 with children and 2 with gate keepers Rs.1, 25,000

Venue: Rs.2,500 x 6

Refreshment: Rs.5,000 x 6

Local Travel: Rs.2,000 x 6

Audio-Visual Material: Rs.1,000 x 6

Equipment: Rs.1,000 x 6

Facilitation: Rs.2,000 x 6

Resource Person: Rs.6,500 x 6

4. Event Related Activities Rs. 1,00,000

(Four Events - ICDB, Meena Day, Child Rights Week and Children's Day)

Preparation of Material for Press Rs.5,000 x 4

Press Coordination Rs.5,000 x 4

Organising activities/meetings

related to these events Rs.15,000 x 4

5. Projects Costs

Rs.2,50,000

Administrative Coordination

Rs.15,000 x 8

(Designing the intervention, executing the project, preparing reports - interim/final/fgds/workshops, interaction with other org., organising media outreach)

Administrative and other costs

Rs.16,000 x 8

(Transcribing tapes, local travel, telephone, courier, stationery)

TOTAL

Rs.6,40,000

WHAT WE NEED TO DO:

From the rapport building exercises/fgds, these things have to be established:

- Access to TV
- Watching Condition
- Media Habits
- Relationships with the parents, peers and community.

We need a complete report of these FGDs and the executive summary should exactly tell us what the design of the intervention would be. Justify the different approaches, designs and outputs we are going to use and expect.

For the May 28th Event, we have to assess the output and thereby the follow-ups. Justify the course for June based on that.