



31st World Press Freedom Day Conference

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1. Ensuring Access to Environmental Information: Mechanisms and Challenges

Journalists and communicators, including environmental communicators, face significant challenges due to various forms of retaliation such as censorship, threats, and intimidation. These obstacles greatly hinder the collection and dissemination of environmental information, thereby restricting public access to crucial data. In response to these challenges, representatives from governments, civil society, and environmental associations convened to discuss the implementation of mechanisms aimed at safeguarding the work of environmental communicators.

Central to these mechanisms is the pivotal role played by organizations dedicated to protecting the right to access information. These entities are instrumental in ensuring individuals' ability to seek, find, and disseminate information in compliance with relevant laws and regulations. Noteworthy examples of such mechanisms include the advocacy efforts of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, who champions the effective implementation of human rights declarations, and the Escazú Agreement, designed to foster cooperation between countries and empower rights holders.

In emphasizing the importance of collaboration among diverse stakeholders, there is a recognition of the imperative to protect the rights of communicators and ensure access to environmental information. While frameworks like the Escazú Agreement provide regulatory guidance, there remains a pressing need to enhance the collection and dissemination of environmental data to reach those directly affected by environmental issues.

As of now, there is a resounding call for a comprehensive commitment among organizations and actors to safeguard the rights of individuals engaged in environmental communication. Upholding fundamental principles of human rights, particularly the right to access information, is paramount in empowering individuals with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions regarding environmental matters.

2. New Financing Models for Journalism Sector Crisis

The economic downturn plaguing independent journalism, attributed to the erosion of traditional funding channels, underscores the need for innovative solutions. One proposal suggests that digital platforms take on the responsibility of negotiating remuneration with journalism entities, a concept currently under discussion in Brazil. Alternatively, a more contributory model aims to enhance the sustainability of small independent journalism collectives, echoing discussions from the 3i festival in Brazil in 2023, which framed this approach as a "virtuous circle."

In light of these challenges, developing funding models holds paramount importance, especially for small independent journalism organizations reliant on public broadcasting in certain regions. Clarity and simplicity in funding allocation criteria are emphasized, alongside considerations of governmental and corporate involvement in funding structures.

Furthermore, recognizing the critical role of press economic viability in ensuring sustainability and integrity, there is a call to leverage public trust in the media during crises to innovate funding mechanisms. This includes seeking support from corporate entities like Google, akin to content creator sponsorship, thereby fostering financial independence from audience contributions.

Preserving journalistic independence necessitates delineating clear boundaries between journalists, media entities, and funders. This separation safeguards trust in the media and mitigates undue influence from donors. Additionally, comprehensive studies are deemed essential to assess the risks associated with diverse business models, given the rapidly evolving media landscape.

3. The Threat of New Surveillance Technologies to Freedom of Expression in Latin America

The use of spyware technology to surveil journalists in Latin America constitutes a significant violation of freedom of expression, prompting international concern regarding regressive governance practices that undermine democracy and press freedom. Evident examples, such as the monitoring of phone conversations in Chile and the Secret Folders operation, orchestrated by the Colombian military utilizing public information, underscore the severity of the situation. Moreover, in Mexico, the rampant proliferation of intrusive spying software, including notorious instances involving Pegasus, utilized by both influential families and government entities, further intensifies the threat posed to journalists and political adversaries alike.

According to Forbidden Stories, the pervasive use of Pegasus resulted in the surveillance of at least 180 journalists until 2021, highlighting the widespread adoption of such technologies. Despite these formidable challenges, journalists across Latin America remain steadfast in their commitment to combat repressive conditions that hinder their ability to disseminate information to the public. Through collaboration with media defenders on a global scale, concerted efforts are underway to advocate for legal reforms aimed at holding accountable those responsible for perpetrating surveillance activities.

Noteworthy initiatives, such as the lawsuit filed by Salvadoran journalists against the NSO Group, seek to shed light on the use of spyware and uphold the principles of freedom of expression. However, the ongoing intimidation and harassment facing journalists underscore the critical imperative of safeguarding a free press as an indispensable pillar of democracy.

4. Challenges Faced by Latin American Journalists Reporting on Environmental Issues

The challenges faced by Latin American journalists in reporting on environmental issues across Central and South America are profound. The significant impacts of extractive industries, particularly in nations like Guatemala, Peru, and Chile, highlight the complex landscape they navigate. The sobering findings of the Global Witness Report, documenting over 1,000 deaths of land and environmental defenders worldwide between 2012 and 2022, with Latin America accounting for over 300 deaths, highlight the grave dangers faced by journalists in the region.

Journalists recount firsthand experiences of authoritarian regimes suppressing press freedom, particularly concerning projects initiated by multinational corporations. For instance, a nickel mine project by Solway, a Russian company based in Switzerland, witnessed government attacks and curtailment of journalistic endeavors. The criminalization of journalists, lawyers, and environmental defenders further compounds the challenges faced by reporters.

Operating in hostile environments, while documenting the detrimental impacts of corporations on indigenous communities and rainforests, presents formidable obstacles. Nonetheless, journalists emphasize the importance of preserving indigenous wisdom and identity amidst environmental degradation, emphasizing the intrinsic value of cultural heritage.

Efforts to expose violations of environmental laws by mining companies in Chile underscore the critical role journalists play in holding entities accountable. By sharing their experiences and continuing to cover climate stories, journalists strive to seek justice for endangered communities and foster greater awareness among the public.

Amidst these challenges, there is a palpable need for journalists to unite, share experiences, and advocate collectively for press freedom and environmental justice. Through solidarity and perseverance, journalists endeavor to overcome obstacles and fulfill their vital role in society.

5. Strengthening Legal Frameworks for Environmental Reporting

The pivotal role of media in shaping public discourse on critical global issues, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution, underscores the urgent need for robust legal frameworks to safeguard the rights of journalists, media workers, and human rights defenders.

Amidst the pervasive spread of misinformation and disinformation in today's digital era, the accountability of online platforms and corporations assumes paramount importance. It is imperative for these entities to embrace human rights-based content governance policies, prioritizing the dissemination of public interest information. Concurrently, states must mandate companies to disclose pertinent details regarding their environmental and human rights impact, thereby fostering a culture of transparency and accountability.

However, the quest for access to quality information transcends mere legal obligations—it necessitates the empowerment of communities through comprehensive media literacy programs. Equipping individuals with the skills to discern credible information from falsehoods is pivotal in combating the proliferation of misinformation.

Moreover, ensuring the safety of journalists operating in remote areas, often on the frontline of environmental reporting, demands coordinated action. States must cultivate conducive environments for media professionals to conduct their work free from intimidation or violence, while also addressing the disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalized communities.

6. Addressing Gender-Based Misinformation Targeting Women

Gender-based misinformation poses a significant threat to women's freedom of expression, highlighting a stark disparity between conventional notions of free speech and the reality faced by women. This form of misinformation, as defined by the Wilson Center's report "Malignant Creativity," encompasses misogynistic abuse and violence, perpetuating false narratives based on gender and sex to dissuade women from engaging in the public sphere. Contextualizing disinformation by gender is essential, as it thrives on existing inequalities and is exacerbated by social, cultural, and religious factors. The impact of cyber violence on women's well-being is profound, with 92% reporting harm to their sense of security, leading one in three women to reconsider posting online content. Despite its diverse manifestations, gender-based violence shares common characteristics, including the sexualization of women and a personalized approach aimed at inflicting harm on both the individual and their family.

High-profile cases, such as that of Sigrid Kaag, underscore the harsh reality faced by women in leadership roles, with death threats and misogynistic comments jeopardizing not only their professional integrity but also their personal safety. Women leaders often find themselves in a vulnerable position, unable to adequately defend against attacks, particularly when confronting powerful industries such as the oil sector. Instances like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's experience demonstrate how misinformation targets women's credibility, with headlines seeking to undermine their reputation by linking unrelated issues, such as climate change, to personal aspects like fertility.

Supporting women who are targets of gender-based misinformation is paramount, necessitating the provision of resources to empower them to respond effectively. Reports, like Irene Khan's examination of gender misinformation, offer crucial insights and recommendations for combating this pervasive issue. It is imperative to challenge the impunity with which women journalists are attacked and mistreated, amplifying their voices and advocating for their rights. As Irene Khan aptly stated, it is time to listen to the voices of women themselves and take decisive action to safeguard their freedom of expression.

7. Empowering Indigenous Women in Media Discourse

The empowerment of indigenous women within media discourse requires a multifaceted approach that addresses misinformation through both a gendered and rural perspective. Across rural areas, limited educational opportunities severely hinder women and girls' ability to comprehend and engage with both traditional and digital media platforms.

Furthermore, the detrimental impact of media defamation on community leaders, particularly indigenous women defending their territories, cannot be overstated. Media discrediting aims to silence the voices of indigenous women in Latin America and obstruct their advocacy efforts, perpetuating a culture of fear that undermines their rights.

This challenge is exemplified by the case study of the Waorani indigenous community in Pastaza, Ecuador, who courageously resisted oil field bidding in their territory. However, their efforts were met with persecution and death threats, fueled by alarming narratives disseminated by the media, which sought to discredit their cause and sow panic about potential economic crises.

Moreover, indigenous women face compounded obstacles in accessing information, including illiteracy, limited internet connectivity, and a lack of access to electronic devices. To address these disparities, joint efforts are needed to improve the quality of life for marginalized populations and ensure equitable access to information resources.

Despite these challenges, indigenous women possess agency to execute positive change in their communities through collective action and advocacy. By fostering inclusive and empowering spaces for indigenous women, media discourse can be reshaped to amplify their voices and promote their rights within society.

8. Empowering Youth for Climate Action

Empowering the younger generation to actively participate in climate change discourse stands as a pivotal endeavor in addressing pressing environmental challenges. Through the provision of comprehensive education, encompassing environmental and citizenship principles, youths are equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills to comprehend and engage with climate-related issues within their respective communities. Their insights and testimonies not only underscore the tangible impact of climate change on their lives but also position them as dynamic agents of change.

Establishing inclusive platforms for youths to disseminate reliable information fosters the cultivation of critical thinking capabilities, thereby fortifying societal resilience against environmental adversities. Furthermore, the judicious governance of social media platforms assumes paramount importance in mitigating risks and ensuring the online safety of children, while actively shaping their perceptions towards climate-related matters.

Addressing eco-anxiety among youths necessitates instilling a sense of eco-hope through collaborative endeavors and fostering a reconnection with nature. In essence, the empowerment of younger generations as proactive stakeholders in climate action is indispensable for fostering a sustainable and resilient future.