# What Is Our Plan of Action?

Session Objectives

- To stress the importance of an organization's plan of action.

- To collaborate as a group in decision-making.

- To decide together a plan of action through a participatory process.

- To illustrate the role of technology in raising gender awareness.

Suggestions for Facilitation

Read aloud the following story about an organization's processes for developing its plan of action. Discuss among the group how the organization carried out its decision-making through an inclusive, non-hierarchical process. The group activity following the discussion questions is designed to help workshop participants take part in collaborative decision-making.

Dividing the participants into smaller groups or teams might work best here so that everyone gets a chance to talk about the discussion questions. Now that the group has worked together for a few sessions, this may also be a good time to facilitate an energizing exercise that would encourage the group to re-focus on the objectives of the training workshop (see Appendix B for further suggestions).
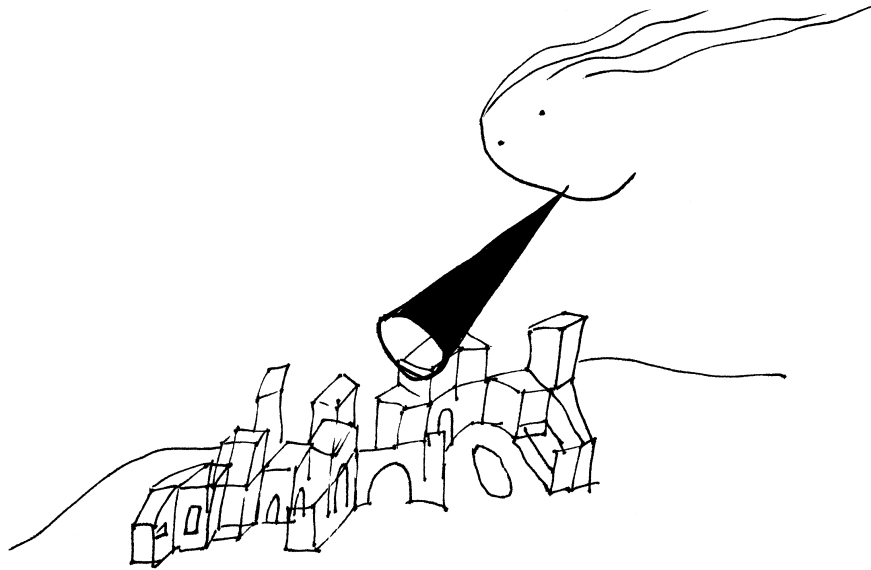
Democratizing Information for Women:
Taking to the Airwaves in Brazil

In the early 1980s, Brazil was in the throes of transitioning from a dictatorship to a representative government, from a censored media to a freer one. During this period, Brazilian women were at the forefront of advocating for this transition. It was a time of optimism for women who were seeking to occupy new and innovative public spaces through which to influence Brazil's shift to democracy. Thais Corral, a Brazilian feminist journalist, had spent several years in Italy working on a cutting-edge state radio program called "The Hour of Women," which featured programs for, by, and about women. For the first time, Corral related to the media as an advocate for women's rights and as a radio listener. When she returned to her homeland, she met with a prominent group of feminist intellectuals and politicians at the Rio parliament. They were exploring how to use communication technology to increase their outreach to women. They wanted to create a vehicle through which women could express themselves and that would play a role in promoting gender plurality and a more democratic society.

Even under Brazil's recent dictatorship, a number of sophisticated and effective progressive radio programs had been established. However, few targeted women exclusively. Thais Corral and the women of Rio felt that despite this, radio already played a unique role in women's lives and that it was "by culture close to women both as listeners and users." They noted that women listen to radio while attending to other tasks, whether in the home or the workplace. Moreover, radio transmission was less costly than television and more accessible than the print press to all consumers of news and entertainment.

Corral and the women from Rio formed a plan: to enable Brazilian women to become decision-makers in their own media, particularly on the radio, and at the same time to feminize Brazilian media, generally making it more useful, relevant, and productive for women. They would create a radio program to address the needs and interests of women. In 1988, inspired by the women's program she had worked on in Italy, Corral along with a small team of volunteers committed to increasing women's participation and to improving the ways in which women are portrayed in the media began producing a weekly talk show entitled "Fala Mulher" (Speak Women). The program's dynamic guests offer practical advice to women with the aim of addressing their daily concerns, such as reproductive health and gender violence, and helping to transform them into effective citizens. A year after the program was launched its producers created a formal organization called Communication, Education, and Information on Gender, or CEMINA, dedicated to increasing the quality, diversity, and volume of women's voices on Brazil's airwaves.

The producers of "Fala Mulher" wanted to be flexible in their approach to developing the program. They were willing to experiment with its content and length, to share their experiences with other women, and to learn from those women. This flexibility and willingness to experiment inspired CEMINA to inaugurate training seminars for women around the country who wished to launch their own radio stations and programs. During 1992-98, the number of women trained in these workshops increased by hundreds, with the result that women's stations and programs proliferated throughout Brazil. Rich in substantive and technical diversity, these stations and their programs turned women into players on the national media scene and producers of news and culture who could not be easily dismissed or ignored. CEMINA is now reaching beyond radio to interface with the Internet. The organization has constructed a website to help women's stations in Brazil obtain access to the World Wide Web in order to cultivate a larger listenership both in and outside the country. In the long term this website will enable Brazilian women to connect with their counterparts in the Global South and around the world and exchange strategies for raising gender consciousness through the production of culture and knowledge.

Realizing that no genuine transition to democracy can ever be gender-neutral, CEMINA and the stations it helped create have concentrated on women's participation, both in the substance of information and the way in which it is presented. These broadcasters have put women's concerns front and center, striving for the most effective and gender-rich democracy for Brazilians.[21]

---

[21] Based on materials sent by and a telephone interview with Thais Corral on February 20, 2001 by the Women's Learning Partnership.

Questions for Discussion

- How was CEMINA established? In what context was the organization created?

- What was the focus of "Fala Mulher"? How was this program developed?

- What was the group of women in Rio and later CEMINA's plan of action? How did the plan of action evolve?

- How does CEMINA measure success? Are there other indicators you would use to measure its success and impact on the community?

- How have CEMINA and these stations made information more available and useful to women?

- How did CEMINA's plan of action help other women's radio programs to proliferate?

- Why is it important for women to be producers and writers of radio programs as well as their targeted audience?

- Why has radio been an effective media for women, despite the existence of more advanced information and communication technologies (ICTs)?

- Which ICTs could you use to advance the rights of women in your community? Radio, television, videos, cell phones, faxes, emails, the Internet or others?

Group Activity: Deciding On a Plan of Action

Allow approximately one hour for this group activity.

In Session 7 the group was asked to draft a single vision statement that all participants supported and in which everyone had a stake. For this exercise, the facilitator or a volunteer should write down the vision statement on a chalk board or flip chart to refresh the group's memory, and take notes during the following discussion.

1. Ask the participants to suggest ideas for how the group might implement the goals to realize their vision. This should be a brainstorming session. Therefore, no idea is silly or irrelevant. The objective of brainstorming is to generate as many ideas as possible. Try to list at least 30 implementation possibilities.

2. Once the list is complete, have participants answer the following questions and make the ensuing adjustments to the list:

   - Which ideas on the list can be combined or are so similar that for all practical purposes they are the same? Start a new list combining the appropriate implementation ideas.

   - Which ideas on the list are impractical? Once there is agreement among the group, cross those ideas off the list.

- In what order would the group rank the remaining ideas for their innovativeness and creativity? Number the ideas in order of the group's preference, with number one being the most favored idea.

- In what order would the group rank the ideas for their practicality and feasibility? Distinguish this numbering system from the last by using a different style of number writing, or a different pen color, or in some other way. Number the ideas in order of the group's preference, with number one being the most practical and feasible idea.

3. With the information gathered about possible ways of implementing the vision statement, have the group review the list again and decide together on a plan (or plans) of action.

Observations

- Did the exercise above make it harder or easier for you to participate in the discussion and decision-making?

- Was brainstorming a helpful process? Why or why not?

- Are you satisfied with the final plan? Do you feel as though you helped to decide it? Why or why not?

- Did you observe examples of one person adapting or building on another's idea? Of people learning from each other?

- Have you participated in other group decisions that were conducted differently? If so, how were they conducted? Were they participatory? Were you satisfied with the final decision?

- Do you think it makes a difference whether a decision-making group is made up of all women, all men, or mixed? Why or why not?

Realistic goals cannot be selected without also making a full

and honest accounting of the human or material resources

actually or potentially available for realizing them.

"The Building Blocks of Leadership"