

# Children in the Information Age

## *A Study of the Impact of Communication Technology on Filipino Children*

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### Introduction

**T**he communication media virtually dominate every major activity of children and youth today — play and leisure, schooling, family relations, etc.

The media have become so powerful that they can shape and influence individual's attitudes, beliefs, values, and lifestyles. The recent study, *Portrait of the Filipino as a Youth* (McCann-Erickson 1993) validates this observation as it reveals that the programs teenagers watch, the music they listen to, their favorite pop idols, and what they read have all become the youth's touchstones and sources of authority regarding what is right, what is wrong and what is important. Indeed, the study concludes, "media has truly become surrogate parent."

Brzezinski (1993) in *Out of Control* also highlights the power of communication media, particularly television, which has the capability to set the standards for success, excellence, achievement and morality and can even influence individual expectations and aspirations.

The power of the media in influencing child survival, protection and development, how media images and messages affect the environment of the child so that he attains his fullest potential as envisioned in the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child, will be examined along with the roles communication media play in ensuring access to

information aimed at promoting the social, physical, spiritual and moral well-being of the child.

Using the framework on the desired attributes of an adult in the year 2020, the question we now ask is: Do the media provide the appropriate environment within which these desired qualities can be nurtured and sustained?

**"Media has truly become surrogate parent."**

An understanding of the impact of communication media is critical in visualizing the quality of our leaders in the year 2020. The images of children which media now project give us a glimpse of their priorities, values, preferences, and their vision of the future.

### The Communication Media Situationer

An indicator of our integration into the information society is shown by the exploding media infrastructure. A Metro Manila resident, for example, can now have access to as many as 100 television channels. These include five VHF stations, three UHF and over 80 cable channels. Nationwide, there are 83 VHF television stations, six UHF and 25 cable television stations. The UHF and cable channels ensure the free flow of foreign programs, mostly western, into the country.

Radio is still the most pervasive, persuasive, and credible medium. The 311 AM and 245 FM

radio stations nationwide reach 85 to 90 percent of the population with 25 million radio sets nationwide. The two biggest networks, ABS-CBN and GMA Radio Television Arts are linked with Pan American Satellite (PANAMSAT) and Palapa B2P, respectively which makes their programs available to all cable operators and direct-to-home markets within the satellites footprints.

features in offices, schools and in some urban homes. It is now possible to gain access to worldwide on-line services such as the Internet which links more than 30 million users worldwide.

## Children of the Media

### ■ Megatrends: The Wiring of Philippine Society

Technological trends have wide-ranging impact on media habits, values and preferences. It is important to keep track of these trends to be able to accurately examine the communication media's impact on the child's family relations; exercise of various rights and freedom; access to basic social services; enjoyment of leisure, recreation and cultural activities; and protection from or prevention of abuses and exploitation.

The following are some of the major technological trends which affect the fulfillment of child rights:

#### □ Information and Channel Explosion

Satellite technology, cable television system, UHF broadcasting, digitalization and compression of signals, use of fiber optics for transmission, etc. have all led to exponential increase in information and channel capacity. To illustrate, television of the near future could access as many as 600 channels that it would take almost an hour to surf through all the channels.

This increase in channel capacity will mean almost unlimited options in the application of communication media on areas which impact on child survival and development — health, nutrition, basic education, literacy, welfare etc. Specialized channels or programming for these development areas will now be available without relying solely on limited commercial

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In print media, there are 10 national daily broadsheets, about 20 tabloids and 285 provincial newspapers with an estimated total circulation of a low 1.2 million. For a pass-on readership of five, only about six million of our total population of 65 million read newspapers. In contrast, comics has an estimated readership of 17 million. There are also an undetermined number of general and special interest magazines.

Recently, children have been observed to spend more time playing video games. These gadgets have become visible not only in shopping malls but even in corner sari-sari stores. In advanced countries such as the United States and Japan, 40 to 50 percent of households now own video game players. With trade liberalization and demonopolization policies, there is now more access to improved and diverse telecommunication facilities and services nationwide — domestic satellite, cable television, cellular telephones, video phones, teleconferencing, and the popular pagers. There is also a plan for the Philippines to set up its own satellite system by 1996.

Personal computers are now more accessible. Government and business operations are now being computerized. The modem, E-mail, area networks, facsimile, etc. are becoming regular

channels. Distance education, tele-medicine, etc. are some concrete applications of these new channels available for social development.

Channel explosion would lead to expansion of the reach of (commercial) media particularly in remote villages and therefore ensure wider public access to functional information. UNICEF (1988) has acknowledged that the surge in communications capacity has made it possible for the first time to put new knowledge and technology on child survival, protection and development at the disposal of the world's people. Among these new knowledge or technology are the vaccines against deadly communicable diseases, use of oral rehydration therapies (ORT), breast-feeding, birth spacing, among others. If applied, UNICEF estimates that these techniques and knowledge could reduce by at least a half the quiet carnage of a quarter of a million child deaths each week! Likewise, the goal of universalization of basic education becomes more feasible not only through the traditional classroom but through tele-education.

Channel explosion also means closing the gap between the information poor and information rich areas. The countryside can now be linked through on-line networks, satellite and other telecommunication services, to the mainstream information society providing the rural populace access to the same information as urban dwellers are exposed to.

#### □ Specialized Channels and Niche Programming

Media programming is becoming more specialized as media users or markets are segmented according to profession, interest, ethnic background, political affiliation, religion,

etc. This is referred to as the demassification of media.

Cable television has introduced specialist channels featuring exclusively news, music, sports, public affairs, environment, education, etc. Radio stations are becoming even more differentiated. We do not only have FM music stations, but rock stations specializing in various types of rock music — soft, country, punk, and folk rock each aiming at a different sector of the youth audience.

There is a proliferation of specialized publications— magazines for specific sports, hobbies, agriculture, entrepreneurship, environment, ad infinitum. One local publishing company has a distinct magazine for pre-schoolers, elementary kids and teenagers.

The commercially-oriented Philippine (VHF) television stations are airing more diversified programs for specific audience groups. More educational or instructional programs are being aired such as *Negosiete* (entrepreneurship), *Agrisiete* (agribusiness), *More Than Export*, *Ating Alamin*, etc. Lately, there has also been a marked increase in the number of educational children's programs, some receiving international recognition such as *Batibot* (Channel 9) and *Five and Up* (Channel 5). *Hinaya Manawari* (New Age Series for Children) and *Bayani*, a show focusing on patriotism and love of country. There are three educational cable TV stations. EdTV 36 of the Skycable Network is the first educational TV channel in the Philippines. It offers educational, cultural, religious, information and public affairs

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programs. Discovery Channel Asia (available through Palapa B2P and Apstar 1) offers programming in the areas of science and technology, nature, history, human adventure, and world culture. TV 101 or Youth Campus Network serves as the educational TV of nine Manila schools.

Distance education has come of age. In addition to Sine Eskwela (Channel 2) which airs science programs for elementary students, the government station People's Television Network Inc., (PTNI) also airs Continuing Education Program for Science Teachers Via Television (Constel). The Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication (AIJC) and the UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines coordinates the National Distance Learning Program (NDLP) consisting of 15 private and state universities most of which offers distance education through radio.

Overall, there is an increase in media materials/programs and channels catering to children and youth. However, there is indication that this is due more to profit motive than the desire to secure their interest. Media producers now realize that children and youth dominate the media audience/market and therefore materials/programs should cater to their wants (and sometimes "needs") to ensure wider market and bigger profit.

#### □ Demassification of Mass Media

New communication technology revolution has introduced cheaper, miniature, portable and easy to operate technologies which enable individuals and groups to produce their own media programs. For example, desktop publishing enables any organization or community to publish their own publication.

Some even churn out newsletters using the copying machine.

In 12 remote communities nationwide, the very popular karaoke (a sing-along cassette console with loudspeaker) is used as basic equipment by local residents in producing programs for their low-powered (solar powered) FM stations. Local residents who have received training in radio production take turns in passing on information about livelihood, health care, environment, etc. The radio station also serves as a forum for discussion of local issues.

Many nongovernment organizations also now produce their own instructional and educational video programs using portable video cameras which do not require technical sophistication. Empowering the people to produce their own media programs would narrow the gap between information needs and access to relevant information. Local (commercial) media realizing possible "competition" from community-owned media become more responsible in providing information on health, nutrition and livelihood opportunities needed by parents than focusing primarily on entertainment.

Demassification empowers individuals not only to choose but to co-create products and services they need. Local community and sectoral groups, including the youth, now have a channel to express their views on sectoral, local, national and even global issues; in mobilizing community support for communal and sectoral programs or projects; and in advocating positions on certain issues or personalities, etc.

In some model community-based radio stations (e.g., dzJO-AM in Infanta, Quezon), various sectors of the community — women, youth,

farmers, religious — are given their own programs or time slots. In coastal villages of Rizal province, marginalized fisherfolks including their children, belonging to CALARIZ, an NGO, actively participate in the production of a mimeographed newsletter, poems, songs, posters, street theater and soundslides. These community channels are used in organizing, mobilizing, and educating fisherfolks and their families on issues such as illegal fishing, pollution, peace and order problems, and the lack of basic social services. In the very near future, even the young can produce their own media programs as it no longer takes technical sophistication to do so. At the same time, children, even at a young age, are now exposed to computers and other media technology.

#### □ Interactive Technology

New technology has transformed the viewer or listener from a passive audience to an active media (technology) user or participant. Interactive television introduced recently in the United States gives the viewer wider program choices and greater control of viewing schedule, and allows participative production. People will start to live their lives a little less dictated to by programme schedules. One does not have to get home in time for a dose of her favorite soap opera as the viewer can now demand her favorite program anytime.

Consumers will soon be treated to electronic newspapers and magazines, online publications tailored to individual tastes and requirements. There won't just be photos, but videoclips. Housewives will do their shopping at home through on-line computer or dial-up video.

In this age of the global market, more and more transnational businessmen transact

business more “personally” through video or teleconferencing.

But perhaps the most exciting and promising interactive media is virtual reality. It is a full-color, full-motion, three-dimensional world created by a computer and displayed inside a pair of goggles worn by a VR player. It is a powerful computer video form which has limitless applications for education, training and research. Students learn to build and test bridges in mechanical engineering; design and construct new equipment in electronics; perform operations in medical school; etc. In VR, the player makes or creates his own world and lives in it.

But like any new technology, VR has its (unintended) negative effects. There have been reports that children exposed to VR games experienced what has been described as post-battle syndrome — nightmares, sleeplessness, etc.

#### □ Women Empowering Media

Until a decade ago, women in media were confined to the so-called “lipstick beat” — coverage of home and society, fashion, food and lifestyle, etc. Positions of power and influence remained male-dominated. The highest position women journalists could aspire for was the editorship of lifestyle or society pages.

Today, this picture has substantially changed. Women in media have become more prominent, influential and credible. Many now occupy policy and decision-making positions. Many of

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the so-called hard beats such as politics, police and business are gradually being “manned” by women reporters.

This growing influence of women in media has an impact on the nature, quality and content of media coverage. For example, the so-called “soft issues” traditionally perceived as of interest only to women — health, education, nutrition — because of their natural disposition for caring and

nurturing, can now expect more media coverage and therefore support our effort to promote child survival, protection and development.

The ability to delve into latent issues, greater attention to details, patience, and perseverance in following through stories that otherwise would be relegated to the dustbin are some of the outstanding qualities of women journalists which augurs well in our effort to achieve journalistic excellence.

As proven during the Marcos regime, women journalists, more than their male counterparts, proved to be more daring and independent. They continued to write exposes on injustices, human rights abuses, graft and corruption, crime and violence, etc. Many took the risk of writing about the true conditions of our children — malnourished, do not have access to education, health and other basic social services; increasing number of child prostitutes (estimated at 60,000 in 1995) and working children; and victims of armed conflict, etc. The emergence of the so-called alternative press was essentially through the efforts of women journalists.

With the growing role of women in media, stereotyped images (and messages) of women — as sex objects, the weaker sex, etc. — are also slowly being erased. Even parenting is now presented in media, including advertisements, as a joint responsibility rather than “the job of the mother alone.” Media images are beginning to “liberate” women from multiple roles. By emphasizing parental (rather than solely maternal) responsibility, the quality of life of children is enhanced.

As women journalists have gained more experience and confidence, men are getting used to the idea of sharing of power and responsibility, and thus, the relationship is now moving towards partnership and complementarity.

#### □ The Digitized Newsroom

Computers and telecommunication services have revolutionized the newsrooms. On-line computer networks, E-mail, facsimile machine, beepers, etc. are now basic journalistic tools. The use of these new technologies has changed workstyles of journalists and improved the coverage and quality of newsreporting.

To begin with, news sourcing has never been as “easy and fun” as today’s computer-assisted reporting. Most newsrooms will soon be linked with database located anywhere in the world that can be accessed from computer work stations. These database contain data and information on any topic which can be made available in a few seconds. Interviewees or news sources, wherever they are, can also be reached through modern telecommunications. The traditional constraints of time and distance are now things of the past.

**Communication technology revolution is one of the major forces responsible for the irreversible trend of globalization.**

Improved access to information can lead to more in-depth or analytical stories (including on children's issues). The new system also facilitates journalists doing more follow-up stories as it is now easier to keep track of events. The days of news articles based on a single news source or even a press release are over. More investigative stories can also be expected. In the past, government bureaucrats could easily withhold sensitive information from journalists such as children's malnutrition rate, mortality rate on certain diseases, access to basic education, etc. Today, journalists have multiple information sources which makes public governance and even business transaction more transparent.

Other changes include greater interaction between or among the journalists, their news sources and audience through message boards, E-mail and net forums. And as mentioned earlier, the audience will soon receive online news stories that include text, audio and video elements or what is now known as the multimedia.

#### □ From Artificial Intelligence to Intelligence Amplification

A new role with unimaginable impact is emerging for computers, that of extending human intellectual capacities. Intelligence amplification (IA) enables computers to do things that the human mind cannot do or has trouble in doing such as computations, in handling and correlating large amounts of information including graphics, and in sorting information and remembering it when needed. IA should be distinguished from artificial intelligence (AI) which is computers which can perform the same tasks as the human mind and body to the extent that they can

replace humans as in the case of robots (Alonso, 1994 p. 11)

#### □ Globalization

Communication technology revolution is one of the major forces responsible for the irreversible trend of globalization. The other forces include global corporations, migration or the movement of people in unprecedented numbers across the earth, and expanding and changing markets.

One of the significant implications of globalization is the realization that every child (and adult) is now a citizen of a borderless nationstate or the "global village." Events even in seemingly remote parts of the world have impact on one's immediate community — political economy, culture and

lifestyle. Another impact is that addressing local issues and problems will now require a global perspective and "transnational action" rather than being limited to a narrow or insular efforts. Perhaps the first to be considered in the global agenda of issues is environmental concerns — global warming (climate change), thinning of the ozone layer, etc. Recently, the United Nations and other world bodies have also focused on socio-political issues such as terrorism, human rights (including the rights of migrant workers).

In particular, many children's issues (child labour, sex trade, children of migrant parents, etc.) have also been redefined from mere social welfare concerns to political issues which now require transnational action. Here, the

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Convention on the Rights of the Child has provided the framework for the discussions.

On the other hand, the globalization of the economy means every individual now has easy access to competitive products and services produced in other countries. But beyond materialism, the consumer is also exposed to other cultures these products and services bring with them — traditions, values, and lifestyles.

The global market includes the buying and selling of media programs. Here, the developed world who own and control media production and distribution systems (particularly the satellite system) has the distinct advantage. Both images and messages they sell will naturally reflect their economic interests and cultural biases.

The best illustration of global media market is Viacom Inc., music network MTV which Newsweek (24 April 1995) describes as “the ultimate New Age multinational.” MTV reaches 140 million households worldwide (MTV Asia started operation only on 04 May 1995 thus no data available on household reach). MTV’s programming consists of a mix of music videos, news briefs and promotional spots. Its audience is the 18 to 24-year-olds. Music is not totally Western (American) but also includes local talents.

## ■ Selected Issues and Concerns

### □ Communication media and Family Relations

The decline in family interaction and the rise in single-parent family are attributed to factors such as labor migration, rising rates of separation, improvements in the status of women, urbanization, and changing social values (Osteria, 1995). Mass media are also

often cited as a major contributory factor to the quality of family life. Mass media, many contend, do not by themselves result in less person-to-person communication among family members. They believe media merely fill up an existing gap because they are the most accessible and cheapest alternative to family interaction.

In particular, television is partly blamed for the “destruction” of the nuclear family by unconsciously or otherwise, projecting the desirability of “modern” family configurations (e.g., single parenthood), ignoring financial hardships and social isolation which accompany such family arrangement (Skill and Robinson, 1994). In addition, images of extra-marital and homosexual relationships have become more common in media.

World renowned sociologist Gerbner and his colleagues in their report to the 1930 White House Conference on the Family acknowledged that (US) media images of the family is a cause for concern to those involved in family policy:

*As the mass media have come to absorb many socializing functions of the family, they have offered us images of family which may act as touchstones by which we gauge our experiences. The seductively realistic portrayals of family life in the media may be the basis for our most common and pervasive conceptions and beliefs about what is natural and what is right (Skill and Robinson, p.449).*

A recent ethnographic study of the structure of family and romantic ties in US soap operas provides concrete and significant issues especially in the Philippine context. Many of



the TV soap operas studied by Liebers and Livingstone (1994) are very popular in the Philippines — Dallas, Dynasty, Young and the Restless, etc. One observation made in this study is as follows:

*The American soap opera, focusing on middle-class or upper middle class characters, promotes individualism and romance, with consequence of sacrificing community and mothering, and of denying the cycle of life. All characters are placed in a stretched, one generational space in which mothers and daughters are interchangeable (and may compete for the same men) and the elderly and the children are pushed out.*

In the case of labor migration, conservative estimates put the number of overseas Filipino workers at 4.2 million. Although two-thirds of single family households are headed by males (NSO-NCRFW, 1992), latest statistics (1985-1987) reveal that the proportion of female-headed single households has increased by more percentage points (Torres, 1994). Most of these single family households belong to the lower income group.

Parental absenteeism, according to the McCann Erickson study (1993) may have forced children and the youth to spend more time in media-related activities. But even among the youth who live with both parents, the same study noted the marked absence of shared activities and hardly any quality time together. Another favorite innovation among our youth but with undesirable impact is the pocket cassette players with earphones as they allow young people to listen to their favorite music while shutting out the world around them.

But communication technology is a double-edged sword. Many believe that technology

revolution could “free us for more leisure and give us more time to engage in more important aspects of life — civic, spiritual, personal and family life.”

O’ Hara-Devereaux and Johansen (1993) also cite the ability of new technology to bridge distances and allow us to communicate more frequently and “face-to-face” to our friends and loved ones in distant places.

To futurist Alvin Toffler (1980) in his bestseller, *Third Wave*, the ongoing electronics revolution may yet bring back the glory of the home as the center of society. New production systems which are heavily dependent on computers and telecommunication

facilities now shift millions of jobs out of factories and offices back to where they came from originally, the home or what he calls “the electronic cottage.” Office workers simply send their outputs to the office through fax, modem and E-mail. In the United States, some three (3) million employees already “tele-commute” and their numbers are increasing some 20% every year. This trend is likely to accelerate with newer and more user-friendly technology.

If the so-called electronic cottage were to spread, Toffler sees many positive consequences to the family and the community. This could mean greater community stability and sense of community belonging. There will be less forced mobility, less stress on the individual, fewer transient relationships, and greater participation in community life. Work at home, says Toffler will also lead to “a deepening of face-to-face and emotional

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relationships in both the home and the neighborhood.”

But he also foresees the danger of cultivating purely vicarious human relationships when people become too dependent on the “electric screen” in dealing with others (such as in video shopping, use of auto-mated teller machines, etc.). Even the on-line networking

system Internet has fostered closer human relationship. Time (May 1995) noted that the Network has succeeded in bringing together people with mutual interests who, for reasons ranging from geography to social and income disparity,

would otherwise never have met. Time also estimated that 80% of all users are looking for contact and commonality, companionship and community.

#### □ Media and Productivity

Watching television, listening to the radio (or audio cassette), playing video and computer games, talking over the telephone, among others, occupy a significant percentage of the average youth’s productive hours. The McCann-Erickson study (1993) shows that teenagers take in over 30 hours of broadcast media weekly. And with new and more exciting technologies coming soon — interactive and global television, video shopping, dial-up video, electronic magazines — expect more hours devoted to media use .

It is this growing dominance of media on children’s lives which worries social scientists

who believe that media’s influence and impact has been more on the negative side. Media are blamed for almost every anti-social behavior children and youth display.

But the primary danger of the television screen (mass media)says human development specialist Urie Brofenbrenner (Stephens, 1993 p.10) lies not so much in the behaviour it produces as the behaviour it prevents. Children often forego productive and educational activities in favour of media-related activities though much of the child’s or youth’s learning takes place and his character formed in non-media related activities.

A number of studies in the US concluded that school performance is inversely proportional to the number of hours spent before the “idiot box.” (Stephens, 1993 p.10).

But recent international and local studies also show that the introduction of multimedia technology (especially interactive broadcast, computers, audiovisuals) inside the classroom can significantly improve students performance and eventually the quality of education. Many children are now “rediscovering” schooling as an exciting and interesting experience.

The constant exposure of even pre-schoolers to multimedia has made it almost inevitable for schools to provide multimedia inside the classroom as children will feel alienated and therefore disinterested to learn in a Jurassic classroom setting of blackboards and flipcharts.

According to Toffler (1980), the alienation of the children and youth today flows in large measure from being forced to accept a nonproductive role in society. Communication

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technology could counteract this situation. Specifically, the electronic cottage can open up alternative ways to bring the youth back into socially and economically productive roles, he states.

This suggestion may sound controversial in the light of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on child labor. But Toffler believes that certain forms of work might be specifically designed for the youth and even integrated with their education.

#### □ New Communication Technologies and Social Equity

A question often asked is: Will new technology really serve the poor or simply give even more advantage to the already advantaged?

Often, the economically poor, least educated and functionally illiterate are the most technophobic as they have the least access to new technology. This is best illustrated in our school system. While most private schools already have their computer laboratories, less than one percent (0.46%) of our public elementary schools and only 17.31 percent in public secondary schools nationwide have computers. According to DECS, even basic school facilities are inadequate. In 1995, some 10,250 barangays (villages) nationwide did not have public elementary schools. We have a shortage of about 16,000 classrooms and 80,000 desks.

Access to the information highway will now determine socioeconomic opportunities and political participation especially for children and the youth who are about to begin pursuing their career options. Lack of access would lead to serious disenfranchisement especially

since information superhighway (particularly the on-line network) will become the major conduct through which we conduct our lives. Computer competence will, in the near future be as basic as the three R's in enabling an individual to survive.

#### □ Media , Sex and Violence

A recent study in the US shows that by the time a child is 18 years old, he has seen 25,000 murders on television (Stephens, 1993)! As early as 1970, a study of the US Surgeon General already reported that "TV encourages aggressive behaviour among children."

According to noted Filipino psychologist Dr. Lourdes Carandang, media exposure to violence, aggression and meaningless sexual activities stimulates aggressive impulses and therefore primes the child to act aggressively. For older children, Dr. Carandang adds, the impact

is different. It is somehow subtle and insidious. Even for adults, constant exposure can lead them to think that what they see are the natural state of things. Research findings reveal that the most natural way for a child to learn is through role modelling wherein a child absorbs and imitates what he sees.

Dr. Carole Lienbrman, a Los Angeles psychiatrist and former chair of the National Coalition on Television Violence believes that constant exposure to media violence makes a child insensitive to violent situations in real life. Says Lienbrman, "heavy TV watchers were desensitized by violence, suggesting the

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possibility of emotional blunting or less conscience and concern in the presence of witnessed violence. Children have developed a tolerance or indifference towards violence and suffering” (Manila Bulletin. 1993).

A recent study by the Center for Communication Policy at the University of California Los Angeles noted that a very worrisome trend in children’s television is the rise of popular cartoons with sinister combat violence or those where fighting is not incidental to the story.

Among these cartoon programs (which are mostly locally available as well) are X-Men, Skelton Warriors, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, and Wild C.A.T.S.

A related study conducted by the Asian Mass Communications Research Center (AMIC) reported that the Philippines topped the list in TV violence among ASEAN countries with 100 percent followed by Thailand, 94 percent and Indonesia, 66.67 percent.

Violence is also exported worldwide through the growing video game market. The main video producers are multinationals such as Nintendo, Sega, Camcom and Acclaim. According to Newsweek (12 December 1994), gore and mayhem dominate the content of the more popular video games such as Super Mario Bros., Street Fighter, Mortal Kombat, etc. For example, in Mortal Kombat II, players control realistic-looking digitized images of martial artists who punch, kick, hack, bash, stomp, stab and impale each other. At the more advanced levels, the action gets nastier; heads roll, arms are torn off and bodies splatter. Mortal Kombat posted a sales of some six

million copies worldwide since September 1993.

Some sectors, however, contend that exposure to media violence serves as catharsis. Children watching violence in films experience a vicarious satisfaction so that they do not have to act out violence themselves. It is acted out for them by the characters.

There is an emerging consensus on the threats posed by excessive sex and violence in media. During the Sixth MacBride Roundtable held in Hawaii in 1993, the participants asked, Is the culture of media violence our legacy for the future generations?

Young children also refer to media as the source of their first lessons on sex. At a Focused Group Discussion among Manila’s street-children, young boys and girls aged 10 to 16 disclosed that they first heard or read about sex from the tabloids. The increasing incidence of sex-related crimes is also often attributed to mass media, particularly movies and tabloids, for their penchant to show titillating and pornographic sex scenes. Sex is also often projected as a casual happening in any relation.

But a more serious yet subliminal effect of sex in media is its promotion of negative family values and lifestyle. The Liebes and Livingstone ethnographic study (1994) describes American soap opera as “ a never ending game of romantic musical chairs in which characters within a more or less closed circle keep exchanging partners until they (or the program) are taken off the screen. “ A recent research on sex on British TV by the National Viewers and Listeners Association in London revealed that of the 466 TV programs monitored over a two-week period in September 1991, only 51 portrayed faithfully married characters while

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the rest showed extra-marital affairs, promiscuity and homosexuality (Manila Bulletin, 1992).

The World Radio and Television Council warns that the increase in the number of channels as a result of communication technology revolution will inevitably lead to even greater competition among media establishments. Since the entertainment formula is the only one with proven ability to attract and maintain large audiences, entertainment will continue to dominate programming and along with this is the use of sex, violence and trivia (WRTC Primer).

Pornography threatens to affect young children worldwide through modern computer networks, telephone and satellite TV services. Internet, in particular provides what Time magazine describes as "on-line sex (also called cybersex) as wild and far ranging as the human imagination (can be)."

Time Magazine (July 03, 1995) also quoted the 18-month study conducted by the Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania which found 917,410 sexually explicit pictures, short stories and film clips online. The "End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism" (Ecpat) reported that they have intercepted messages sent by syndicates where "children are being peddled through electronic mail."

There are also European TV channels (satellite and cable) which "specialize" in blue movies or pornographic films. For example, Swedish Pornographic Satellite Service, XXXTV bills itself as the "ultimate sex channel." In many cases, there are no mechanisms, especially at home, to control access to these materials by children.

#### □ Media's Image of Children

Since entertainment programs dominate airtime, it is important to examine how children are packaged in these types of programs. A common observation is that children are dressed up like adults, made to act and dance like adults and that they no longer enjoy their childhood years.

An equally serious concern is media's coverage of children in difficult situations. In an effort to dramatize stories on violence against children, media tend to sensationalize, disregard individual privacy and become insensitive to children's plight which could all lead to traumatic events. Child victims of sex and violence perpetrated by adults are made to relate, over and over, the gruesome details of the crime. They are asked probing and cynical questions. And for the benefit of TV cameras, are made to re-enact the crime (Jimenez, 1994).

The same treatment is accorded to young delinquents who are treated like adult criminals. They are forced to face TV cameras and answer probing questions. Children who become victims of natural and man-made disasters or calamities also suffer the same fate.

#### □ Media Reshaping National Culture and Identity

The globalization of media, primarily through satellite technology, has perceived ill-effects on national culture and identity. Critics warn of homogenization of tastes, needs, wants and

**In an effort to dramatize stories on violence against children, media tend to sensationalize, disregard individual privacy and become insensitive to children's plight which could all lead to traumatic events.**

lifestyles with western images as prime models. Among our children and the young, these symbols of global culture include fast food landscape McDonalds, Shakeys, Pizza Hut, and pop and movie idols as role models.

As early as 1980, the UNESCO-sponsored MacBride Commission Report already warned

**Communication technology is a double-edged sword which can be used either for the common good or to protect the interests of a few.**

that “the rapid increase in the volume of information and entertainment has brought about homogenization of different societies ... and people become more cut off from the society in which

they live.” At the extreme, the Report added, “modern media have trampled on traditions and distorted centuries-old socioeconomic patterns.”

Similarly, the draft World Report on Culture and Development (1994) noted that “individual identity is increasingly determined by worldwide fads and fashions and transient material possessions of great diversity rather than cultural heritage.” The Report added that “products are designed for the world market, with cultural differences largely dealt with through marketing.” Social scientists have raised the issue of whether the global media could effectively sustain the notion of a global village and promote a global culture. Their initial analysis shows that while the images may have a global currency, the meanings may not necessarily be shared globally as (news) events are shaped and reshaped by (local) media in ways that make them comprehensible and palatable for domestic audience (Tomunson 1994, 69).

## Scenario Setting

No doubt, the “wave of the future” is communication technology which dominates the political, economic and sociocultural development. We are moving into the Information Society although no one, can adequately describe its contours because of rapid and continuing technological changes. But the basic question remains: Will our technological dependence lead to a better quality life for our children?

As previous analysis of trends indicate the impact of technological development could go either way — positive or negative. Communication technology is a double-edged sword which can be used either for the common good or to protect the interests of a few. Communication technology does not take its own course. There are determinant factors particularly communication policies (of government and business), economic climate (cost determines access to technology), political ideology (press freedom), democratic pluralism (role of civil society, etc.). The presence or absence of specific policy and program “interventions” will determine the impact of communication technology on our children’s lives within the next two decades. Its impact can be observed in these areas: individual privacy; family and community relations; lifestyles and workstyles; socioeconomic productivity; social equity (i.e. access to basic education and literacy, health, nutrition, other social services); culture, values and national identity; culture of peace; and political participation or democratic pluralism. (see Table 1)

On the other hand, the interventions needed are viewed as supportive of the common good and facilitative of the attainment and sustainability of children’s rights (see Table 2 for summary of these interventions and Part IV of this Report for detailed

**Table 1. Selected Megatrends in Communication Media and their Impact Areas**

Megatrend	Impact*
Information and channel explosion (including Multimedia)	Individual privacy
Niche Programming (Specialized Channels)	Family and community relations
Digitized Newsroom (print and broadcast)	Lifestyles and Workstyles
Demassification and decentralization of mass media	Socioeconomic productivity
Interactive media and convergence of technology	Social equity (basic education and literacy, health, nutrition and other social services)
Children and youth as dominant media audience	Culture of peace
Women empowering Media	Culture, values and national identity
The continuing rise of NGOs (civil society)	Political participation (democratic pluralism)
Globalization	

\* as they affect Child Survival, Protection, Participation and Development (CSPPD).

**Table 2. Selected Megatrends in Communication Media and Proposed Policy and Program Interventions**

Megatrends	Proposed Policy and Program Intervention
Information and channel Explosion	Public on-line networking subsidy Institutionalization of distance education Conversion of government broadcast networks into a PBS Communicating Technology Planning and Evaluation Commission Barangay information centers
Niche Programming (specialized channels)	Distance education (including Tele-medicine)
Demassification and decentralization of mass media	Community Media Incentives Act Community-based broadcasting Regional communication resource centers Barangay Information Centers
Interactive media and convergence of technology	Communication Technology Planning and Evaluation Commission
Children and Youth as dominant media audience/user	Children's Television Act Television Violence Act Media education in formal and nonformal education Child rights sensitivity programming Review and updating of children-related provisions of Code of Ethics
Women Empowering Media	Gender-sensitivity programs for media Review and updating of women-related provisions of Codes of ethics
Continuing Rise of NGOs	Alternative Broadcast Program Development Fund Media relations and advocacy training Media Watch (Monitoring) Policy and program advocacy campaigns
Globalization	Alternative Broadcast Program Development Fund Media Education Communication Technology Planning and Evaluation Commission

**Table 3. Matrix of Findings and Recommendations:  
Communication Technology**

Positive Trends	Scenarios	Programme/Policy Options
<p>Information and channel explosion</p> <p>Demassification of media</p> <p>Specialized channels and niche programming</p> <p>Interactive multimedia technology</p> <p>Women in media empowerment</p> <p>Increase in the number of children's programmes/ messages</p> <p>Re-skilling and re-tooling of computer and telecommunication literate workforce</p> <p>Communication and information as "new age" profession; specialization further diversifies jobs</p> <p>Emergence of small to "mega" enterprises arising from telecommunications, computer and multimedia revolutions</p> <p>Digitized newsroom</p>	<p>Multimedia applications in lifestyle, workstyle, family and community relations, political participation, etc.</p> <p>Interactive multimedia channels where media users (audience) co-create product and services they need rather than depend on market supply</p> <p>Specialized channels and programming for special sectors</p> <p>Universal computer literacy</p> <p>"Wiring of government offices, business establishments, hospitals, banks, etc.</p> <p>Global mass media complemented by community media</p> <p>Convergence of technology using wireless telecommunication</p> <p>Free flow and accessible information</p>	<p>Public on-line networking subsidy</p> <p>Institutionalization of distance education</p> <p>Conversion of government broadcast network into a Public Broadcasting System</p> <p>Creation of a Communication Technology Planning and Evaluation Commission</p>
Negative Trends	Scenarios	Programme/Policy Options
<p>Urban and elite concentration of communication technology leading to lack of access by marginalized sectors (rural populace, urban/rural poor, etc.)</p> <p>Overdependence on technology in the workplace, house, leisure, etc.</p> <p>Excessive competition among growing number of actors in mass media and tele-communications sector.</p> <p>Dominance of sex and violence in media</p> <p>Excessive commercialism and consumerism of media content</p> <p>Slow pace in the indigenization of mass media and other cultural products compared with onslaught of global (western) cultural products.</p> <p>The rise in cable TV enterprises without adequate policy framework</p> <p>Over exploitation of the Internet</p>	<p>Computer or techno-illiterate and technophobic populace</p> <p>Inequitable economic and political structure between techno-poor and techno-rich societies</p> <p>Excessive commercialism and materialism in the global and national (local) mass media</p> <p>Information wars or extreme competition for information</p> <p>Global cultural homogenization</p> <p>Monitoring and greater citizens vigilance on excessive sex and violence on media</p> <p>Competition will force small players to close down</p> <p>Win-win principles should replace competition on rights of access</p>	<p>Passage of Community Media Incentives Act</p> <p>Expansion of community-based broadcasting</p> <p>Creation of Regional Communication Resource Centers</p> <p>Passage of Children's Television Act</p> <p>Television Violence Act</p> <p>Media education in formal and non-formal education</p> <p>Policies on socio-cultural aspects of mass media and information technology</p> <p>A comprehensive policy framework especially in new information technology and cable TV</p> <p>Policies on "rationing" of information highways and redesigning of rules both for commercial markets and information-poor communities</p>



discussion). Table 3 describes the environment of the Filipino child likely to happen within the next few years with and without these interventions. The scenario likely to happen with interventions constitute our desired scenario.

## **Policy and Program Agenda**

### **Short-Term Agenda (1995-1998)**

#### **A. Executive Action**

##### **■ Public On-line Networking**

To democratize access to on-line (global) information networking, the government should either invest or subsidize the installation of on-line networking to be located in such public offices as post offices, libraries, state universities/colleges, etc. nationwide. It may also be linked to the Municipal Telephone Program of the DOTC. This will enable those who do not have (home) computers, especially students from families of modest means, opportunity to gain access to latest information on various subject matters.

##### **■ Alternative Broadcast Program Development Fund**

Production costs for quality alternative programming is prohibitive, especially for independent and non-commercial producers. At the same time, revenues for such programs are not always adequate to cover costs.

To encourage groups to continue producing alternative programs, the government, in cooperation with the private sector, may provide either seed money or counterpart fund to these independent producers. Such a development fund may be needed until the appropriate environment for alternative

programming is established or the setting up of a Public Broadcasting System (PBS) which becomes the regular channel for the airing of alternative programs is achieved.

The proposed development fund may be managed by the National Commission on Culture and Arts (NCCA) through its Broadcast Arts Committee or the Cultural Center for the Philippines (CCP).

##### **■ Institutionalization of Distance Education**

Various options can be identified to institutionalize distance education. Some do not need enabling legislations to facilitate the process.

First, universities and colleges should be encouraged to offer distance education similar to the UP Open University Program. But our schools should first invest in manpower training, self-learning module development, multimedia planning and production, monitoring and evaluation, etc. Some of them own and operate radio stations which could serve as main learning delivery channel.

Because of the high cost of investment involved in distance education (especially with the use of broadcast, on-line computers, telecom services), universities/colleges may opt to enter into consortium, joint programs, etc. Recently, the Philippine Educational Telecommunication Consortium (PETC) was organized consisting of umbrella educational

**Universities and colleges should be encouraged to offer distance education. But our schools should first invest in manpower training, self-learning module development, multimedia planning and production, monitoring and evaluation, etc.**

organization to accelerate the use of new communication technology as learning delivery channels.

More and more cable channels should be encouraged to offer educational broadcasting. Cable TV owners (and their associations) can closely link with academic institutions for a

resource-sharing scheme.

Distance education can be further boosted if the government broadcast network (especially PTV Channel 4) is converted into a Public Broadcasting System with education as one of its major mandates.

#### ■ **Media Education Program in Schools**

Considering that children and the youth constitute the bulk of media users, a sustained and systematic media education program should be instituted in all elementary and high schools. Media education develops critical awareness among media users of the value and quality of media programs. It will enable users to identify media content which are not only of technical quality, but more important, provides appropriate values and behavior.

Media education should empower children and the youth to demand or advocate for content/programs which will benefit their total development — social, cultural, political and spiritual needs.

Media education modules are now available to equip teachers with adequate knowledge and

skills in handling such course. Media education should be integrated in relevant subjects rather than taught separately. Learning methodology should ensure maximum exposure to various media outputs.

#### ■ **Decentralized Learning Centers in Marginalized Communities**

These communities are information-deprived in addition to being deprived of other basic services. These learning centers can complement existing public schools by providing print and audiovisual materials.

### **B. Legislative Agenda**

#### ■ **Children's Television Act**

In the 9th Philippine Congress, several bills were filed to rationalize television programming for children. Among these are House Bill 19183 which proposes a ratings system for TV programs; House Bill 8458 calls for the regulation of the showing of TV advertisements featuring sex and violence; House Bill 10183 provides that animated cartoons featuring violence and unethical conduct should be aired only at such times when children of formative years are not usually watching TV; and House Bill 10015 seeks to create a National Council for Children's Educational Television to contract the production of educational TV programs for children.

It is very probable that similar bills will again be filed in the 10th Congress. To integrate all these efforts, a comprehensive Children's Television Act similar to the law passed by the US Congress in 1990 is proposed. The law established the age of children that must be served by the provision as those up to 16 years

**Media education should empower children and the youth to demand or advocate for content/programs which will benefit their total development — social, cultural, political and spiritual needs.**

of age. It also defined educational and informational programming as, content that will further the positive development of the child in any respect, including the child's cognitive/intellectual or emotional/social needs."

#### ■ **Community Media Incentive Act**

Support mechanisms must be provided to encourage and strengthen community media and thereby decentralize communication resources. State incentives must be reinforced to offset major problems such as high cost of printing and broadcast equipment, newsprint and other supplies, scarcity of commercial advertising and shortage of trained print and broadcast journalists.

#### ■ **Fiscal Incentives and Support**

- Tax rates for importation of printing and broadcast equipment and spare parts must be lowered. Prices of printing and broadcast materials must be reduced or controlled and steady supply must be ensured.
- Credit should be liberalized to enable provincial publishers and broadcasters to acquire equipment.
- Distribution of provincial newspapers in each region should be rationalized. Mailing costs for newspapers should likewise be lowered (through second class privilege) and mailing system's efficiency upgraded.
- State shall study incentive schemes for individuals and corporations interested to operate media facilities in underserved or underdeveloped areas. Such measures may be adapted from

incentives granted to BOI-registered firms under the Omnibus Investment Code.

#### ■ **Advertising and Circulation Support**

- A certain percentage of "national commercial advertising - usually distributed by Manila Advertising agencies - should be channeled to provincial newspapers and local radio/television broadcasters. Big business must be encouraged to advertise in community media.
- Require regional offices of government agencies and schools to subscribe to provincial papers.

#### ■ **Professional Development**

- Regular courses on community journalism and broadcasting in professional development programs for local practitioners to be reinforced through scholarships and travel grants.
- Upgrading and standardization of salaries of provincial journalists and broadcasters. Social security (including individual or group insurance) and other social service benefits should also be provided.

#### ■ **Media cooperatives**

- Provincial Media should be encouraged to transform themselves into cooperatives to become more viable. The cooperative-ownership set up would enable the organization to raise additional funds from its members; avail of tax-free transactions; etc.

■ **Conversion of the government media network into a Public Broadcasting System (PBS)**

Essentially, the envisioned system will consist of the TV network (People's Television 4) and a few radio stations (now under the Public Broadcasting System).

There have been efforts in the previous Congress to convert PTNI into a PBS. However, the national government has opted to transform it into a government corporation instead. Several reasons were mentioned for this decision foremost of which is that the government needs a strong information channel to reach out to the entire country for political stability. There is also fear that PBS is not financially viable.

But with greater political stability and an economic turnaround, the government's reasoning may no longer hold. What is needed is an independent and alternative channel. A government-owned and controlled network may not be able to adequately reflect the views and provide the information needs of the public and sectoral interest groups as its responsibility is to first present the government's stance.

But the long-term viability of a PBS needs further study in the light of the communication technology revolution. Specialized (cable) channels providing alternative programming have substantially decreased public viewership/listenership of public broadcasting system in the US and Europe.

There may be a need to "re-engineer" the structure of the traditional "monolithic" PBS and adopt the community-based broadcasting (CBB) concept. The national network is "de-massified" or "decentralized" into local PBS for more localized alternative programming through

UHF, VHF and even cable systems. New technologies can link these community-based stations with each other and to national and even global media thus eliminating the danger of parochialism in content and outlook.

**C. Non-Government Organizations Agenda**

■ **Media Relations and Advocacy Training**

Issues and concerns of NGOs and POs as well as their views on local and national issues are not well ventilated in media. NGOs are generally not public relations conscious and do not have the communication skills to enable them to have access to mainstream media. They need a capability-building seminar-workshop for NGOs and POs especially those working for children's rights.

Training areas may include media relations and advocacy, process documentation, media production and editorial skills. Media production will not be limited to print (newsletter) and broadcast but will include traditional and folk media (theater, puppetry, etc.), low-cost technology (blackboard, newsletter, poster, flipchart, etc.).

■ **Media Watch, Policy and Program Advocacy**

Non-government organizations (NGOs) are effective advocacy and pressure groups in demanding quality media content or programming. Media managers can no longer ignore the impact of NGO lobbying on their corporate images and market shares.

What are some of the "doables" NGOs can do to sustain or enhance their growing influence?

NGOs can launch Advocacy Campaigns for

**Sensitivity does not only mean providing more children-oriented programs but more important, sensitivity in language use and visual images.**

or against a media policy, content/programming, personality, etc. which they think are inimical to the common good and the rights of the child in particular. NGOs seem to have track record of success in such activities. For example, in 1993, The Concerned Women of the Philippines (CWP) launched "We are Outraged," a letter-writing campaign addressed to media owners/managers requesting them to "clean" media of sex and violence. NGOs can initiate media monitoring activities (including content analysis) to rate or even rank media organizations against previously set criteria. Results of broadcast monitoring can be the basis for the renewal of broadcast franchise. In the United States, Violence Watch was organized to document the various instances of violence shown in media. Other caveats for children include scenes showing use of drugs and alcohol, sex and nudity, profanities, inordinately scary scenes, etc.

NGOs can also help shape media policies. For example, the Gabriela Commission on Children and Family has prepared a set of guidelines for Child-sensitive Handling and Coverage of Children's Cases especially since cases of child prostitution, abuse, delinquency, etc. seem to be on an upward trend and are regarded as "hot media items."

#### **D. Mass Media Sector**

##### **■ Child Rights Sensitive Programming**

Media owners, producers and performers should be more sensitive to children's rights as media audience are now dominated by children and the youth. Sensitivity does not only mean providing more children-oriented programs but more important, sensitivity in

language use and visual images. There are words and images which are not sensitive to socioeconomic class, ethnic background, religion, gender. Also, many words/images used in media reinforce conflict, violence, controversy, divisiveness, and materialism.

Aside from increasing CRC-related programs/content, media should also broaden access and participation of children and youth in various aspects of planning and programming.

Sensitivity must also include protecting the rights of young media personalities which essentially is a form of child labor.

All these should be undertaken within the spirit of goodwill, social responsibility and self-regulation.

##### **■ Regular Review of Children-related Provisions in Code of Ethics**

Children-related provisions of existing codes of ethics of print and broadcast journalists and advertisers should be reviewed especially since they were adopted prior to the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Review should also be based on "unofficial" scorecard of various sectors on the performance of media especially as it relates to children. The review should not be an "internal" exercise but preferably multi-sectoral to include social scientists who are able to explain the relationship of media exposure/use with individual (children's) behavior and attitude.

TV stations and corporations for the production of educational TV programs for children or grant incentives to firms engaged in children's TV programming.

**In the United States, the passage of the Television Violence Act in 1990 has been credited for the reduction of violent scenes on television.**

NCET will also be mandated to review and classify children's television programs, review the commercials shown on a

children's show and promote the use of Filipino in children's shows.

- Require a "violence report card" to rate broadcast and cable outlets according to the amount of violent programming. The result of this report card can be one of the criteria to be used in determining whether the franchise of a particular broadcast station will be extended or not.
- Require that warnings about sex and violence be broadcast before and during the airing of the program.
- ▼ In the United States, the passage of the Television Violence Act in 1990 has been credited for the reduction of violent scenes on television.

In 1990, children's programs were saturated with a record high of 32 violent scenes per hour. By the 1992-1993 season, the rate had declined to 18 violent scenes per hour.

Sixty-five percent of primetime fictional drama and nearly half of the

cases in these programs still involved violence. But the frequency of violent scenes per hour is about half of what it had been before 1990, according to a three year study by the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communication. The study involved only the three networks — ABC, CBS and NBC. (Business Star. Study Finds Violence on US TV Diminishing. August 2, 1993. p.10)

- ▼ The US Congress passed a 1992 law empowering the Federal Communication Commission to ban the showing and/or airing of "indecent materials" on television from 6 a.m. to midnight. Indecent materials is defined by law as "depicting sexual or excretory activities or organs which are patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards for the broadcast medium."

In enacting the ban, the law cited three goals: (1) ensuring parents have opportunities to supervise their children's radio listening and TV viewing; (2) ensuring the well-being of minors; and (3) protecting the public that from indecent materials in the privacy of their homes.

However, the US Court of Appeals unanimously struck down the law as violative of the freedom of speech. The Court declared that the ban is too broad and sweeping.

## B. Program and Project Options

### ■ Role of Nongovernment Organizations

- NGOs, particularly those with media production capabilities should seriously consider producing alternative broadcast (audio and video tapes) which promote positive values for children.

These programs may be produced individually by the NGOs or co-produced by a network of NGOs.

- NGOs may be empowered to monitor and content analyze television programs to determine the number of violent scenes they contain. TV stations would be graded according to their dependence on violent programs to lure their audiences. The ranking should influence the renewal of licenses of TV stations (Note: suggestion given by Sen. Orlando Mercado).

In the US, Violence Watch has been organized to categorize the different instances of violence to be found in films, for better evaluation. Aside from instances of violence, other categorized caveats for young viewers include: Scenes showing the use of drugs and alcohol; sex and nudity; profanities; inordinately scary scenes.

- Integration of media education lessons in relevant subjects or courses from the elementary level to college.

Media education aims to develop critical consciousness among media users.

- The Gabriela Commission on Children and Family has prepared a set of guidelines

“for Child-Sensitive Media Handling and Coverage of Children’s Cases.”

Media establishments should consider adapting some of these guidelines and including them in their own code of ethics or canons of good taste.

There should be a multisectoral review and update of KBP Codes regarding Radio and Television coverage of children.

**NGOs, particularly those with media production capabilities should seriously consider producing alternative broadcast (audio and video tapes) which promote positive values for children.**

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