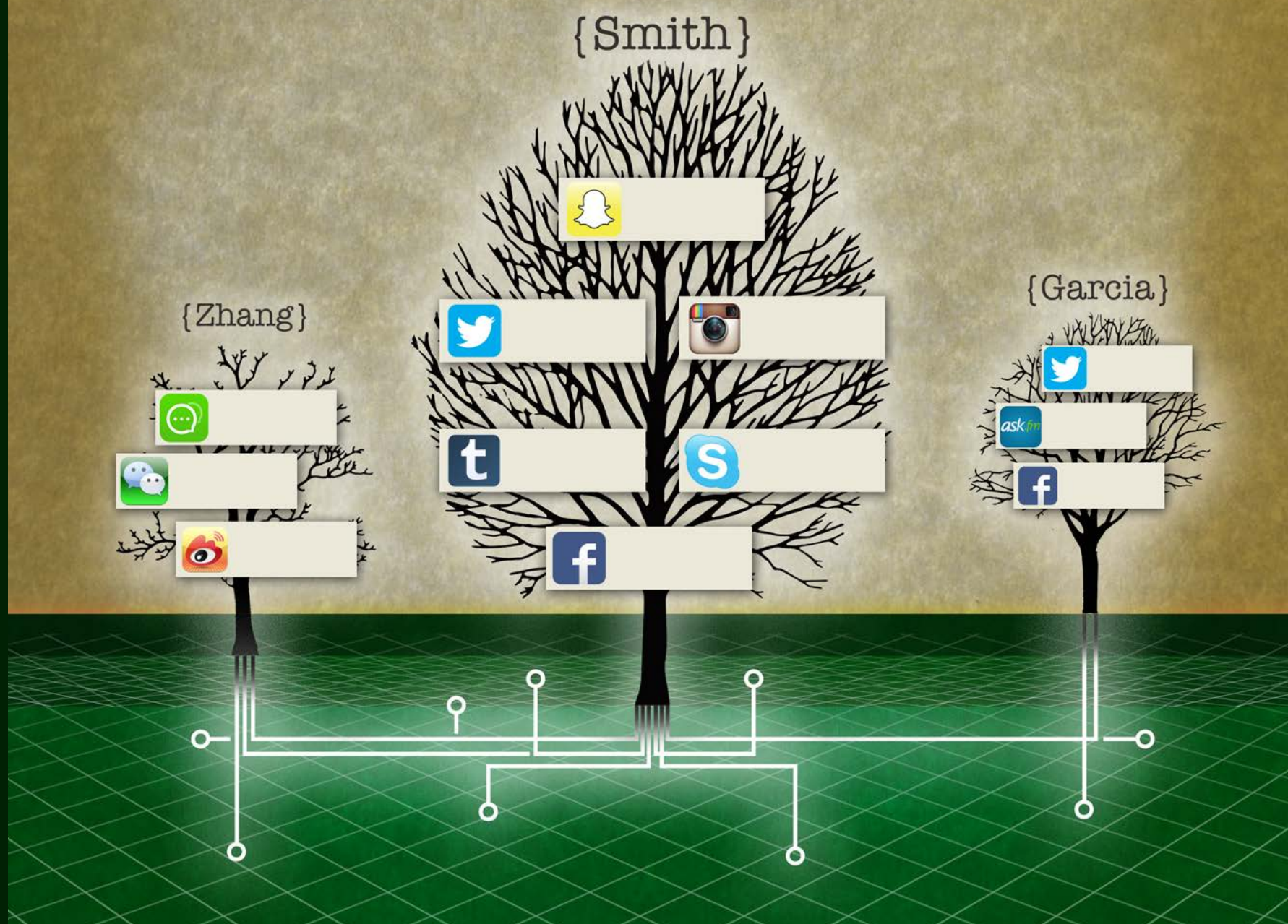


1/2014

# The Family in the Information Age



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## In the Next Issue

The 2/2014 issue of Media Development will look at "Indigenous media and digital self-determination" with a focus on how Indigenous, First Nations and Aboriginal people are building their own media and communication networks.

WACC Members and Subscribers to *Media Development* are able to download and print a complete PDF of each journal or individual articles.



It was in 1948, with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that the United Nations proclaimed the family as “the natural and fundamental unit of society entitled to protection by society and the State.” In the following decades, as the concept of the family became the subject of intense sociological scrutiny, the UN sought to draw attention to the debate by making 1994 the International Year of the Family (IYF).

2014 marks the twentieth anniversary of the IYF, providing an opportunity to focus on the role of families in society today, to review current challenges, and to recommend new directions. And in today’s information and knowledge societies, the impact of new technologies, social media, and interactive digital platforms needs to be taken into account.

In many affluent countries and in communities in many urban centres of countries in transition, communication technologies have become an essential part of everyday lives. Research into the impact of this relatively new media landscape suggests that:

- \* More family members, beginning at ever younger ages, are using interactive technologies, including the Internet and mobile phones.

- \* People within families are using these technologies in increasingly individualised contexts. Family television viewing, sharing a family computer and vying for time on a family phone are less common as TVs, mobile phones and laptops become individual devices. And busy families seem to be interacting in more fragmented ways, with fewer communal activities.

- \* For many young people, multi-tasking has become the norm, as they juggle different communication devices and experiences: downloading music while talking on the phone, engaging in IMS chat, searching the Internet for school-related information and keeping one eye on the television screen.

There is also an ongoing controversial debate about cognitive effects. Some believe that the creative aspects of engagement with interactive technologies helps young people to develop the skills needed for contemporary society. Others are concerned that this comes at the expense of focused concentration and critical thinking.



In the context of the International Year of the Family it might also be important to recall those families affected by disappearance and loss. Each year, hundreds of thousands of people are separated from their loved ones as a result of oppression, conflict, migration, and natural disasters.

The International Day of the Disappeared (August 30) draws attention to the fate of individuals imprisoned at places and in conditions unknown to their relatives through secret imprisonment and forced disappearance, as well as those detained or stranded in foreign countries.

The role of media in helping human rights groups to bring such cases to public attention is crucial – as was demonstrated in Argentina, for example, during the decades-long search for those “disappeared” under the military dictatorship.

Even so, media practitioners often find themselves treading a fine line. In Syria the recent widespread seizure of journalists has gone largely unreported by news organisations in the hope that keeping the kidnappings out of public view may help to negotiate the release of those held captive. There is also confusion over what



constitutes a journalist, since much reporting coming out of the country is not from traditional professional journalists but from “citizen journalists” affiliated with so-called local “media offices”.

The family bears the brunt of such political and social disturbances and it is children who suffer most. During International Year of the Family it is to the child that media practitioners may need to pay particular attention. Children’s rights include their communication rights – a theme often ignored by policy-makers.

In this respect, communication rights advocate Cees J. Hamelink notes:

“The mass media should disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child. This implies that the mass media should have particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous; that the mass media should develop respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations; and that the mass media should prepare the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous groups.”<sup>1</sup>

Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family is an opportunity to consider how new information and communication technologies are impacting the life of the family and its most vulnerable members: children.

It is also an opportunity to remind ourselves that while communication is what makes us human, it also offers us a means of preventing ourselves from being inhuman. ■

#### Note

1. “Media Globalisation: Consequences for the Rights of Children”, in *Children, Young People and Media Globalisation* edited by Cecilia von Feilitzen and Ulla Carlsson. UNESCO International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media (2002).

# Technology rights of the world’s families

Katharine E. Heintz

*The family remains the basic societal unit of reproduction, consumption, asset-building and – in many parts of the world – production. Families bear the primary responsibility for the development, education and socialization of children. They provide material and non-material care and support to their members and are the backbone of intergenerational solidarity and social cohesion. The achievement of development goals depends, to a significant extent, on how families are empowered to fulfill their numerous functions.<sup>1</sup>*

As we prepare to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the United Nations International Year of the Family, it is important to recognize how changing family dynamics and changing global conditions have made it as important as ever to prioritize the rights of the world’s families. Digital and mobile technologies penetrate into new areas – geographically and socially – and we must consider the influence of this spread on the well-being of families.

In order to support families, it is imperative to assess how changes in technology empower or marginalize them, and support globally the creation of sound policies, affordable technologies, and appropriate and enriching content.

To consider the role of technology in family empowerment, I will organize this essay according to the three themes identified by the U.N. General Assembly Economic and Social Council (A/68/61-E/2013/3) to guide the preparations for the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family: a) confronting family poverty and so-

cial exclusion; b) supporting families in achieving work-family balance; and c) advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity.

*Family poverty is the inability to cover adequately the family's basic cost of living – the cost of housing, clothing, education, health care, utilities and transport – as a result of insufficient income and/or access to basic social services. Chronic poverty within families is especially troubling as it is generally, bound to continue into the next generation.*

Over the past 20 years, digital literacy has become one of the most important requirements for successful participation in the global workforce. I would argue that access to digital technology, Internet connectivity, and appropriate content is as necessary to the well-being of families to be considered a “basic social service”. Policies and programs that enable families to access devices, training, and content can support adults and children in their quest for education, employment and adequate income, and perhaps, stop the cycle of chronic poverty.

Around the globe, we have seen a dramatic increase in household access to digital technology and Internet connectivity. Globally, ownership of Internet-enabled computers has doubled since 2005. Currently, 40% of the world's households have Internet enabled computers and 35% of the world's population uses the Internet. Family households in nearly every country are more likely than non-family households to have online access.

But access is not equal across and within countries. Less than half of the households in the Middle East and Africa, Asia, and Latin America have Internet-enabled computers; between 66 and 85% of households in Europe, North America, the U.K., and Australia are so enabled (Euromonitor International, 2013).

One of the discouraging realities in the U.S. is the existence of a “time wasting gap” (Rideout, Foehr & Roberts, 2010). As access to devices has spread, lower-income and ethnic minority children spend considerably more time than higher-income and Caucasian children using their technology to

watch shows and videos, play games, and connect on social networking sites. And the higher rate of cell phone Internet access among disadvantaged groups makes it more difficult to use the Internet for homework, job searching, or accessing important civic information.

If we want to truly empower families and pro-



©Photo: Stockfresh.

vide opportunities to escape chronic poverty, parents and children must be provided access to the appropriate technology and taught how to use it for education, enrichment, and employment opportunities.

*Given that gainful employment is considered the single most important factor in combating poverty, policies aiming at facilitating work-family balance have a key role in development. Moreover, since poverty rates are lower in dual-earner households, policies responding to the realities of dual-earner families are needed to reduce poverty and make it easier for both parents to combine their work and family responsibilities.*

A majority of U.S. parents with dependent children are part of the paid workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). How they balance their work and family responsibilities varies and many working parents find themselves juggling employment and parental responsibilities simultaneously. In 2011, more than one in five working mothers of preschoolers cared for their children *while they worked*. The rest rely on family members (27%),



center-based day care (25%) or home-based day care (13%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Where children spend their time influences how they spend their time. Christakis et al. (2009) discovered that children in home-based day care spent nearly two hours more per day watching TV than children in center-based care. While information about daily activities of children at home with working parents is hard to find, it is likely that technology is used to buy parents some uninterrupted work time.

If findings from a recent survey by the Northwestern University Center on Media and Human Development (2013) are any indication, we can assume that U.S. children are very likely to spend time with technology while their parents work at home. The parents surveyed reported that they are *somewhat* or *very likely* to use electronic technology to keep their children busy at home when the parent has to get things done around the house (77% use TV; 47% use handheld video game player; 37% use mobile device; 35% use computer).

Given the previously stated need for digital literacy, the changing media landscape of family households, and the financial challenges of affording out-of-home daycare, it is important to examine the *content* available to children and families. Parents have the right to provide technology experiences for their children that support their family's values and goals, provide enriching experiences, and keep their children safe.

Programs exist to allow parents to remotely monitor their children's online activities, and to block access to inappropriate content online and on TV. Some of these programs are free – indeed, in the U.S. all television sets (13" or larger) manufactured since 2000 include a device that can be programmed to work with the TV rating system to block selected content. Internet browsers can be set to "safe" modes, reducing the likelihood of children stumbling on inappropriate content. Parents need to be informed about these devices and programs, and allowed to customize the software to suit the needs of their particular family (what is "inappropriate" for one family is not for another).

To facilitate digital literacy skills, families need to feel comfortable and welcome online. They

need safe online spaces for children to explore, and content that families can enjoy together. In the U.S., the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) was designed to provide some assurance to parents that websites targeting children under age 12 would protect the personally identifiable information that they collect during registration or game activities, and to empower parents to exert control over the use of their children's information. But parents don't stop protecting their children when they become teens, and indeed, teens share a lot of information online.

Policies for the collection and use of information provided by teens online should also be provided by websites in easily accessible, plain language. The most popular online social networking site, Facebook, recently announced changes to its privacy policy, allowing users who are registered as teens to post status updates publicly, and to create a "following" (a group of non-friends who have access to public posts). While the company insists it will maintain strict confidentiality over its teen users' birthday, school, and contact information, this change has angered many privacy advocates.

High quality, enriching content is plentiful on U.S. television and online. In the U.S., the "E/I" label identifies television programming with an "Educational/Informational" focus. This label appears in print and online TV Guides and is shown onscreen during the first few minutes of designated programs. The Federal Communications Commission's website allows parents to search for E/I programs in their local area. Each of the major commercial cable children's channels offers blocks of enriching programming designed for preschoolers (often free of commercials), and the Public Broadcasting Service continues to supply a steady stream of excellent programs for a variety of age groups.

Finding high quality, enriching content online requires parents to teach their children to navigate away from highly commercialized sites (that are likely to top the list of web searches) and towards trusted sites with age-appropriate, well-designed content. There are many guides available online to help parents locate great content which they can then bookmark for their children.

*The scope of family policies has been gradually expanding, from focusing mainly on families with young children to the inclusion of all generations. Such expansion is further warranted by rapidly ageing societies where family-oriented policies need to take into account the changing roles and demands of all generations.*

Lengthening life spans and worsening economic realities have resulted in changing family demographics. On the one hand, nearly one in five U.S. adults over 65 years old maintains full or part-time employment, and 85% live independently (U.S. Health and Human Services Administration on Aging, 2012). On the other hand, the number of multigenerational households – now estimated to make up approximately 6% of U.S. households – grew faster between 2008 and 2010 than at any other time in the 21st century (AARP Public Policy Institute, 2011).

Technology can be used to promote inter-generational solidarity for non-multigenerational households through the use of communication applications like email, social networking, and Voice-over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services (e.g. Skype). These programs allow grandparents, parents, and grandchildren to connect and maintain relationships. While seniors make up the smallest age group online (53%), more than eight in 10 of those who do go online use email regularly (Zickuhr & Madden, 2012).

And mass media content can support the multigenerational family by providing examples of diverse family forms. In the U.S., network television programs have increasingly featured multi-generational families. For example, *The Simpsons* (Fox), *Modern Family* (ABC), *Parenthood* (NBC), and *The Good Wife* (CBS) feature three generations living in the same city; on *Raising Hope* (Fox), *Mom* (CBS) and *Back in the Game* (ABC), three generations live in the same household. As television remains the most used medium in the U.S., these shows can normalize and dignify this emerging family form.

Celebrating the important roles of families globally is certainly a worthy endeavor. Taking this opportunity to highlight their changing

demographics and needs, and assessing how technology can serve them, should be an important consideration. ■

#### Note

1. United Nations General Assembly Economic and Social Council (2012). *Preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014*. Report of the Secretary-General, p. 2.

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Katharine E. Heintz (PhD., University of Illinois, 1992) is a media analyst, researcher, and educator specializing in the role of technology in the lives of children and families. She is a lecturer in the Communication Department at Santa Clara University in Santa Clara, California, USA where her teaching focuses on helping students think critically about technology and its role in social change. Her work has been featured in over a hundred newspapers nationwide, including the *New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *U.S.A. Today* as well as national magazines such as *Parents Magazine*, *Parenting*, and *TV Guide*. *Media pluralism and gender: Not just a question of numbers*



# A global perspective on children's rights as media change

Monica Bulger and Sonia Livingstone

*Throughout the world, children<sup>1</sup> are using media and communication technologies at ever younger ages. As technologies increasingly fill families' "time, their houses, their children's bedrooms and pockets" (Livingstone & Das, 2010:1), it seems that almost every experience – of play, learning, participation, work, and socialising – has an online dimension. Yet parents, teachers and policy makers do not always understand the associated risks or opportunities.*

**I**n our report for UNICEF, *A Global Research Agenda for Children's Rights in the Digital Age* (Livingstone & Bulger, 2013), we recommend the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a framework for considering children's rights of provision, protection and participation in relation to digital media use. Even in regions with high technology adoption – with nearly all children having multiple sources of internet and mobile access in the global North – children's provision, protection and participation in relation to digital and online technologies is still *ad hoc*, inconsistently implemented, or overlooked.

This is even more the case in developing countries, where awareness of children's needs and rights in the digital environment is often low and resources are particularly stretched. Early studies in developing countries suggest that children are often very much on their own in the digital world, without an infrastructure of support within their families or communities, or a regulatory environment that ensures their rights to safe use

and access to opportunities (Gasser, Maclay & Palfrey, 2010; Livingstone & Bulger, 2013; UNICEF, 2011).

Without implying, naively, that research (and the experiences of policy and practice) can be imported wholesale from the global North to the global South, we suggest that to neglect the possible relevance of insights already obtained in Europe and North America would be wasteful. We first review these to see what may be learned of wider applicability, before turning to considerations that arise specifically in the global South, raising new questions for researchers, practitioners and policy makers.

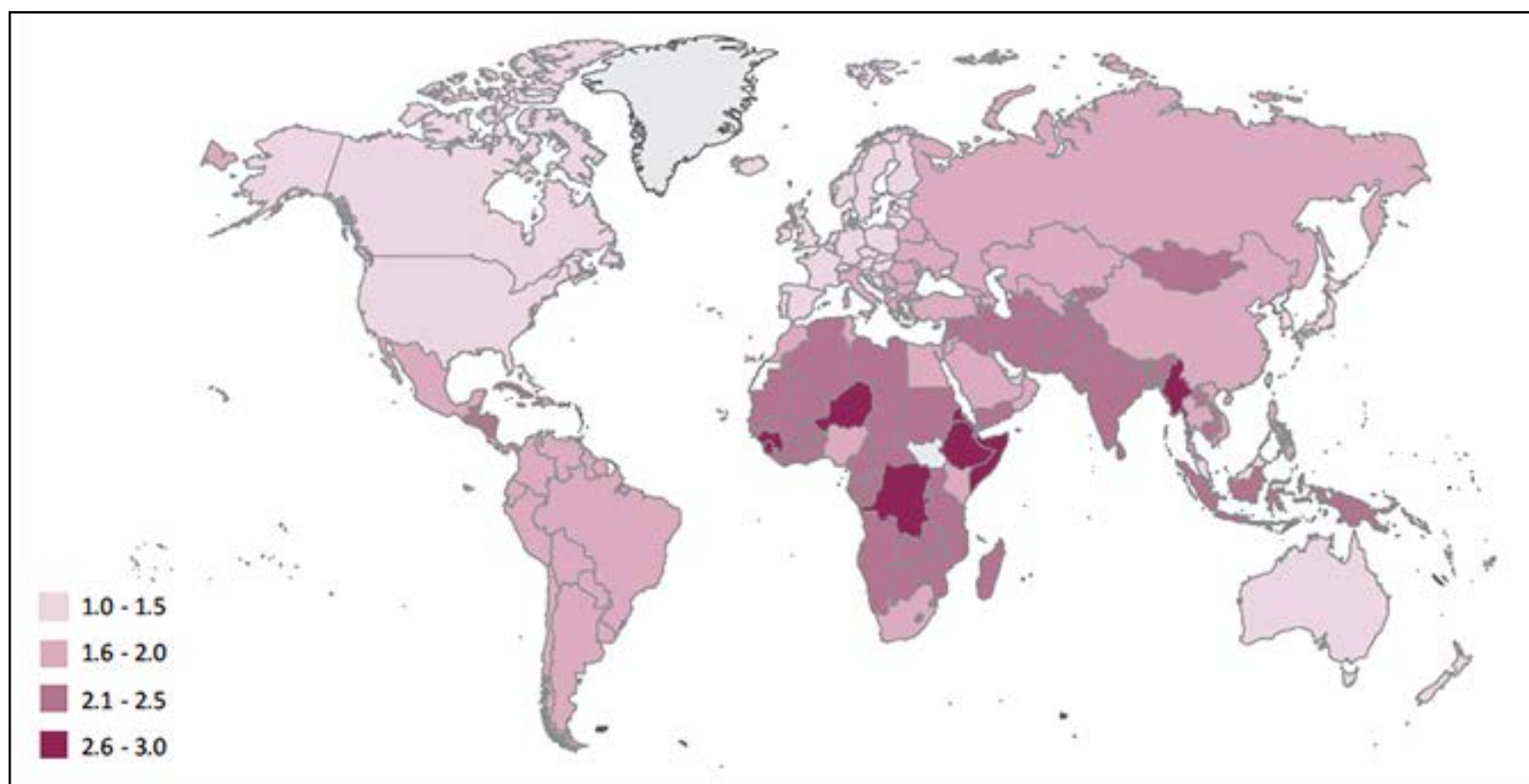
## Digital use in the global North

A particular focus of research in the global North has been the relationship between family dynamics and children's rights. In Europe, the EU Kids Online network has examined children's uptake of online opportunities, parental mediation of children's internet use, and how both children and parents respond to the risk of harm online.

A parallel body of research has been conducted in the United States, especially by Pew's Internet & American Life Project, and by the Crimes Against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire. The trends that these studies reveal over time are, perhaps, the most useful to developing countries, insofar as they reveal the diffusion processes that countries variously undergo at different rates.

For example, when media and communication technologies first reach the mass market, children and young people tend to use them well before their parents and teachers, producing a gap in use and understanding that is initially large, but which reduces over time as adults "catch up". ITU (2013) reports that in developing countries on average twice as many youth aged 15-24 use the internet than the population as a whole (Figure 1). The ratio of child to adult internet users decreases in developed countries and as internet use among the general population increases (Figure 2).

Relatedly, the digital skills gap between children and parents is generally found to be higher in areas of emerging technology use and to lessen



**Figure 1:** Ratio of youth (15-24) internet users to overall internet users, 2012. Source: International Telecommunications Union (2013) *Measuring the Information Society*: 152.

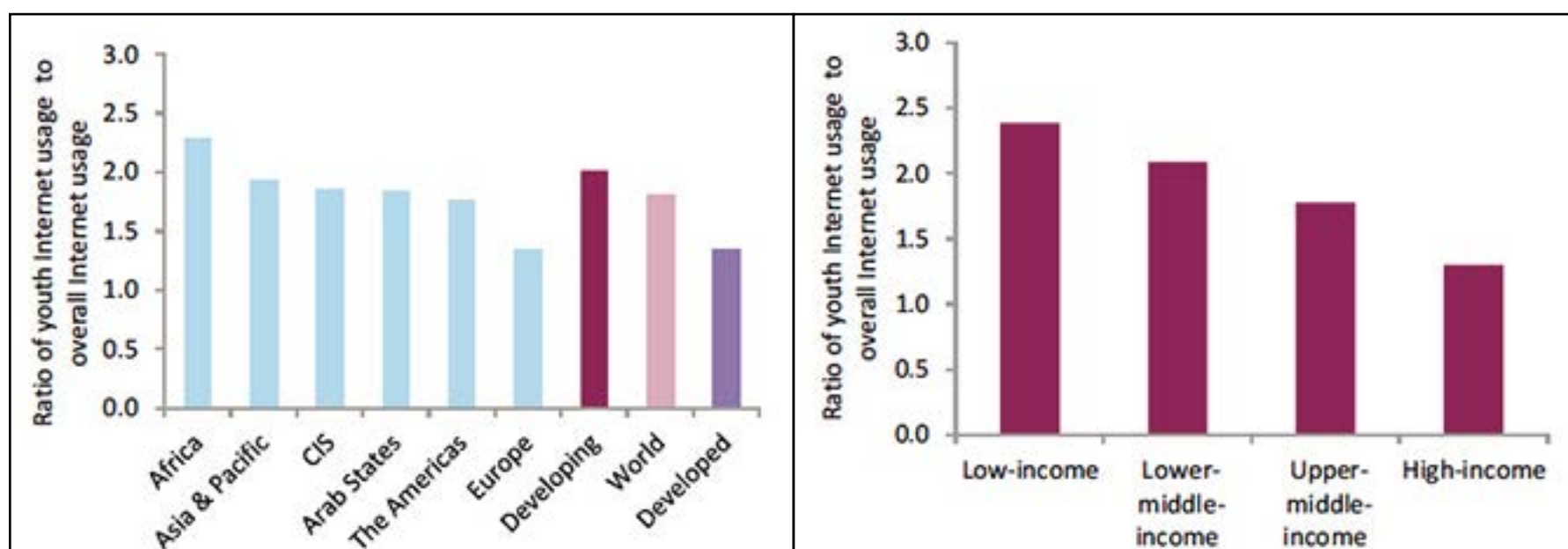
over time. Thus in Europe, 37% of children believed they knew more about the internet than their parents (Livingstone, et al., 2011a). In contrast, 53% of Brazilian children live in homes where no adults use the internet and fully 73% believe themselves more capable than their parents (Barbosa, et al., 2013).

Not only does the expertise of parents matter in supporting their children, but children's digital skills are themselves insufficient to address risk

of harm. Research shows that higher internet use and skills increases both risk and opportunity, and it remains unclear whether frequent use (or parental support) also builds resilience to problematic experiences.

In terms of opportunities, findings from the EU Kids Online studies in Europe, Australia, and Brazil support a "ladder of opportunities" hypothesis according to which most internet users engage in basic online activities but fewer progress to under-

**Figure 2:** Ratio of youth (15-24) internet usage to overall internet usage, by region and level of development (left), and by income group (right), 2012. Source: International Telecommunications Union (2013) *Measuring the Information Society*: 150.





take more complex activities, especially those which are creative or participatory (Livingstone, et al., 2011a: 33). Parent education levels, socio-economic status, internet use and mediation strategies all affect children's exposure to risk and take up of opportunities (Livingstone, et al., 2011a).

Parents' familiarity with media and communication technologies affects family interactions around technology, from choices regarding safety to points of access. For example, children who report any parental mediation of their internet use show a lower incidence of risk experiences (Livingstone, et al., 2011a). While such research may be useful in anticipating global trends, unique cultural, religious, political, and economic contexts must be considered when making comparisons or predictions across countries (ITU, 2013). The nature and role of family or parents, children's relation to school, even the internet itself are likely to vary considerably by country and culture.

### **Digital use in the global South**

Children in the global South encounter more infrastructural, cultural and environmental challenges in their access and use of mobile and communication technologies. A study conducted by Plan International of girls aged 12-18 in 13 countries found that provision of rights in the digital space were impeded by basic rights violations: obstacles to using technology included child labour, early pregnancy, lack of access to quality education, and inadequate transportation (De Pauw, 2011). Most report that their schools do not have computers and for those who do, computers are not connected to the internet.

In most of Africa, mobile phones are more common than home computers. Internet cafés, rather than libraries or other public spaces, serve as an access point for many children in the global South. ECPAT found that in Latin America, some cafés attempt to teach internet safety via posters on the walls, but for the most part globally, internet cafés have limited supervision for children (Garcia de Diego, 2012).

These preliminary snapshots create a picture of unsupervised use, frequently outside the family, with minimal or no parental support. Although

research is limited, emerging patterns suggest that where parents and teachers have less training and support in internet use, children engage in more risky behaviours online, such as contacting strangers, sharing pictures with strangers and providing personal information (Livingstone, et al., 2011b). Who do children turn to for advice or to report a negative experience? Studies in the global South consistently find that children turn first to peers and siblings for guidance in using technologies.

For some children, their basic rights and struggle for survival necessarily precede concerns about digital engagement. Access and rights in the global South vary dramatically. In places where diffusion is low, a wide gap is evident between child and parent internet use and children seem unsupported. In countries such as Uruguay and Brazil, where a stronger infrastructure supports children's use, the distribution of their online activities is similar to that of Europe, with the largest proportion of time spent on homework (Barbosa, et al., 2013).

### **Conclusions**

Much research on children's digital media use is focused on the global North. On the one hand, commonalities in children's development and life contexts result in similarities in youthful risk-taking and socialising practices, regardless of geography. On the other hand, it is vital to understand how the different cultural and support contexts in which they use the internet shape the particular opportunities and risks that arise. Consistent, comparable research is necessary to gather baseline measures as technology diffusion occurs in the global South. Global studies undertaken by Plan, ECPAT, and UNICEF provide a starting point to understand and intervene in contextual differences among and between countries, but many questions remain.

Who is vulnerable online and why? Research in the global North indicates that children who are traditionally vulnerable offline are vulnerable online. Further, children whose parents or teachers have limited technological skills are likely to have low digital skills as well. Are children who are traditionally not vulnerable offline becoming newly

vulnerable online? What infrastructure is in place to address and potentially reduce vulnerability? In the global South, it seems especially important to address questions of gender inequality, of generational change and difference, and of the particular configurations of access and use between homes, cybercafés and other public or private locations.

Is it possible to improve progression to more participatory and creative use? Current research indicates that the ladder of opportunities hypothesis holds wherever it has been measured. But there are too few evaluations of interventions made at the family, school, or national level to be sure what is effective in encouraging broader and deeper online engagement. Further, current research shows that increased use does not result in decreased risk. Can improved digital skills reduce risk experiences, or will increased exposure to online media always equal increased exposure to risk?

Research in the global North is progressing beyond individual surveys and aggregate use data to better understand family relationships and how they affect children's risk encounters and take up of opportunities. Finding out – especially in developing countries – who children can turn to if they experience problems, who can encourage and resource engagement with beneficial dimensions of internet, and how the cultural/religious context affects parental mediation, would be an important step in better focusing policy and educational initiatives that can support parental, school and community efforts.

We have proposed the UNCRC as a framework to be applied to children's rights in the digital age cross-nationally. Too often, children's rights are not a priority when governments and industry push for greater technological diffusion. Rights need to be a priority, with clear guidelines for children's rights embedded in discussions of access and technology. To advance this agenda, evidence is greatly needed. ■

## Note

1. Children are defined here as all those under the age of 18, in accordance with the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

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# En torno a la comunicación en el seno de la vida cotidiana

Daniel Prieto Castillo

*En la plenitud de su vida intelectual, Jean Paul Sartre emprendió una empresa que nadie, hasta ese momento (me refiero a los años 60 del siglo pasado) había intentado: comprender todo un hombre. Hablo de su libro El idiota de la familia, basado en la vida de Gustave Flaubert. La lección que nos dejó el filósofo francés fue preciosa: no valen las generalizaciones para referirse a un ser humano, no valen categorías que vendrían a iluminar el universo. Comprender todo un hombre significa reconocer la complejidad de la existencia, de toda existencia, de cada existencia.*

Una y otra vez Sartre plantea en su texto en lo que significó la construcción del ser del autor de *Madame Bovary* a través de una trama infinita de relaciones en el seno de su familia; una y otra vez afloran en sus escritos las referencias a la comunicación; el niño Flaubert fue construido de tal manera que cuando tuvo que asumir su propia construcción lo hizo desde una base que no pudo superar en toda su existencia.

Me detengo en algunos momentos de esa vida recuperada por Sartre para reflexionar sobre lo poco que nos ayuda en la comprensión de la comunicación y la familia el uso de generalizaciones que vendrían a esparcir explicaciones con algunos esquemas a menudo sostenidos por precarios alfileres.

La comprensión no puede sino tomar como punto de partida la niñez, pero ésta se incorpora a una totalidad de sentido que la excede. La búsqueda

se abre a la madre y el padre y, a través de ellos, a la época en que Gustave llegó a la luz del día.

No es objeto de estas líneas recorrer el arduo camino que Sartre emprende, con idas y venidas, con detalles sobre detalles, para acercarse al niño, a sus padres, a la época. Me detendré en algunos de los hallazgos surgidos a medida que la lente del investigador se acerca más y más a la manera en que se fue construyendo esa existencia.

“El pequeño Gustave aprende tarde y mal a comunicarse. Los cuidados de la madre no le han proporcionado el deseo ni la ocasión de hacerlo.”<sup>1</sup>

Estamos ante un niño “mal amado y bien cuidado”.<sup>2</sup> Dice nuestro autor:

“Cuando la valoración del niño por el amor se efectúa mal o demasiado tarde, o no se efectúa en absoluto, la insuficiencia materna constituye la vida como sinsentido...”<sup>3</sup>

“... en él la ausencia de amor materno es directamente sentida como no amor de sí.”<sup>4</sup>

Esto abre un camino a una suerte de ensimismamiento que toca en forma directa la necesidad y la práctica de la comunicación:

“Cuando Gustave se hunde en sí mismo, cuando sufre sus estados de ánimo, jamás se eleva hasta el deseo de comunicarse.”<sup>5</sup>

Hasta los siete años el niño no podía aprender a leer, fue su padre quien asumió la tarea de hacerlo entrar al mundo de las letras, su padre jefe absoluto de la familia, dueño de destinos y de maneras de ver el mundo, célebre como médico y como sabio. Dice Sartre:

“Al tomar la situación en mano, el médico filósofo se condenó a participar de la común condición de los padres profesores. Estas personas son execrables pedagogos.”<sup>6</sup>

Vendrá por ese camino la violencia que, interiorizada, se tornará violencia sobre sí mismo.

“... para amar la vida, para esperar con confianza, con esperanza a cada instante, el

# NO VIOLENCIA



*ayudémonos a crecer en paz*

instante siguiente, es menester haber podido interiorizar el amor del Otro como una afirmación fundamental de uno mismo...”<sup>7</sup>

El niño Flaubert, a partir de la fría sobreprotección que se le ejerció en sus primeros años:

“...nunca fue soberano, nunca tuvo ocasión de vociferar su hambre en la cólera o manifestarla como un imperativo; no sintió el amor materno y, puro objeto de cuidados, no conoció esa primera *comunicación*: la reciprocidad de las ternuras.”<sup>8</sup>

Todo esto desembocará en su manera de ser a través del lenguaje, precioso instrumento de su existencia de escritor. Dice Sartre:

“Para él el lenguaje sigue siendo el instrumento principal, pero, por no haber sido iniciado desde la cuna en las innumerables figuras del intercambio, una distancia infinita e infranqueable lo separará siempre de sus interlocutores.”<sup>9</sup>

En fin, en este camino que apenas si alcanzo a esbozar, un tema por demás caro a quienes trabajamos en el campo de la comunicación social:

“El diálogo, para el niño Gustave –y, más tarde, para el hombre– no es la actualización por el Verbo de la reciprocidad: es una alternancia de monólogos.”<sup>10</sup>

Hasta acá esta entrada en una obra riquísima en búsquedas metodológicas y en un compromiso inmenso con lo que significa para un ser humano, para cada ser humano, la deriva de su existencia. Flaubert no creció en un espacio en el que a menudo pensamos al referirnos al entorno familiar, no fue un niño de la calle, no estuvo a merced del trato de los asilos, no se lo privó de la figura materna o paterna.

Nació y vivió los primeros años de su vida en una honorable familia francesa que no le negó cuidados, que le ofreció alternativas para estudiar, que le dejó un patrimonio... Nada interfirió en esa crianza, mucho menos, en razón de la distancia en el tiempo, la cultura mediática encarnada en la televisión, ni tampoco el entramado de las redes sociales.

Sin embargo, en ese contexto fue objeto de formas de violencia que lo marcaron en su modo de ser y de comunicar. Toda la obra de Sartre gira en torno a esto: alguien capaz de revolucionar las letras francesas con problemas para relacionarse, para expresarse con la alegría de la palabra, para sentir la fluidez del diálogo.

Estas páginas que propongo giran en torno a la violencia intrafamiliar, pero no a la generada por la presencia de la televisión, sino a la que nunca estuvo ausente en ese espacio en el cual encontramos siempre el hogar del sentido o del sinsentido.



## La primera noche

La madre, una joven de alrededor de 20 años, dio a luz al atardecer en una clínica de mi ciudad. Cuando la trajeron a su habitación, sin la pequeña que había sido llevada a la sala de recién nacidos, encendió el televisor y subió casi al máximo el volumen. Acompañaba a la mujer su esposo, también joven, sentado a su lado con la mirada sujeta a la pantalla. Pasada la medianoche le entregaron la criatura, pero nada cambió: el televisor continuó encendido a todo volumen.

No imagino esta situación: me tocó vivirla hacia 1995, año del nacimiento de nuestro nieto Tomás. La escena que describo transcurrió al lado del cuarto que ocupó nuestra hija Ana. Todo siguió así hasta cerca del mediodía, cuando la pareja y la niña abandonaron la clínica.

Las primeras horas de esa recién nacida fueron invadidas por risas grabadas, gritos, publicidad, música estridente, voces de policías persiguiendo a saber qué delincuentes, frenadas, ruidos de armas empecinadas en esparcir la muerte..., todo un mar de sonidos en una mezcla atroz. Si así fue el inicio de esa existencia, no alcanzo a imaginar cómo continuó.

Afirma Vigotsky que el niño tiene ante sí la forma ideal del lenguaje y que gracias al contacto con aquélla se abre en sí mismo una interioridad que un día le permitirá decir *yo*. ¿Habrá sido así? Siempre lo es, de alguna manera cada ser humano interioriza el lenguaje. Pero hay caminos y caminos. Antes de la caricia, de la voz de la madre, llegó a esa niña el ruidoso borboteo televisivo.

¿Cómo vivió la criatura el proceso de “maternación” (basado en las primeras ternuras) al que alude Sartre en su texto? ¿No entró por todos lados, gota a gota, hora a hora, día a día la violencia, sea por abandono de la madre o por (y por) esas risas, música, ruidos, risas grabadas...

Porque puedo también imaginar con algún grado de certeza que vinieron luego las imágenes, en un torrente tan agresivo como el de los sonidos.

Imposible no desencadenar preguntas: ¿qué ser te dieron en los primeros pasos de tu existencia?, ¿qué te habitó ahí, en el corazón de la semilla?, ¿cómo fueron esas manos?, ¿caricia amorosa, con todo el tiempo humano, es decir sin prisas?, ¿o

corrieron como quien necesita sacarse una obligación?

Algo es indudable: la niña, en las primeras horas de su existencia, fue abandonada a la televisión. Puedo inferir que vinieron luego otros abandonos. La comunicación, la primera, estuvo herida desde el comienzo en el seno de esa joven familia.

## Los niños y el poder

Hacia 1985 fuimos con un grupo de colegas de CIESPAL al oriente ecuatoriano para coordinar un encuentro de comunidades de la zona sobre comunicación y cultura, con especial énfasis en la recuperación de la memoria social. Imposible detenerme aquí en todo lo sentido y vivido en esa experiencia, traigo a los fines de estas notas el relato de uno de los participantes.

“A mi papá le tocaba llevar, junto con otros hombres, a los patrones desde su casa hasta el pueblo.’ Cómo era eso, no entiendo bien, pregunté. ‘Entonces no había caminos en el monte alto, se juntaban varios hombres y los patrones se sentaban en unas sillas sujetas a unas tarimas, entre todos las alzaban y así caminaban por trochas abiertas a veces a machete.’ ¿Eran muchos hombres?, pregunté. ‘Sí, porque arriba iban el patrón, su mujer y los hijos. Lo me que más le dolía a mi papá eran ellos, porque desde chicos se acostumbraban a ver a toda esa gente como animales de carga.’ Pregunté por el tiempo de esas prácticas: ‘por lo menos hasta comienzos de los 50.’”

Desconozco cómo era la familia del patrón, pero puedo imaginar que a los niños no les faltaba nada, habrán crecido sin abandonos ni privaciones. Me refiero a una familia bien constituida, con mayores responsables de sus criaturas, no abandonante... Hasta ahí estamos bien.

Pero se añade a eso que desde los primeros años se comunicaba a los niños, como forma de vivir y de ver la existencia, que los demás pueden ser reducidos a animales de carga.

Y comunicaciones como éstas, sentidas sin necesidad de prédicas o discursos, son para siempre a escala de la vida de un ser humano, porque lo que

así se aprende desde los primeros años es el poder sobre los demás.

### Los soldados del fascismo

En 1932 fue publicado el libro *Psicología de las masas del fascismo* de Wilhelm Reich, obra que pudo habernos ahorrado un buen tiempo de discusiones en el campo de los estudios de comunicación social. El autor propuso una explicación para aclarar la llegada del fñh-rer al gobierno: no había aparecido de la nada un discurso capaz de llevar a las masas de la culta Alemania en cualquier dirección; si ellas apoyaban al líder la explicación no estaba en la maquinaria propagandística, sino en las familias. La condición de posibilidad del triunfo fascista era el autoritarismo en el seno de las relaciones familiares.

Pocos años más tarde, hacia 1939 (a 21 de la finalización de la primera gran guerra) esas familias entregaron a sus hijos a una demencia colectiva. Una explicación, en el océano de causas de lo vivido en este período histórico, es que los niños y jóvenes fueron alimentados por el autoritarismo; habitados por él llegaron a tal demencia colectiva desde familias que los prepararon para sumarse a ella.

La pregunta es aquí: ¿qué se comunica, qué se hace vivir a alguien para convertirlo en una pieza de semejante aventura? Reich propone que la respuesta debe ser buscada en las relaciones familiares sujetas a formas de autoritarismo.

### La vida cotidiana

Nacemos en el seno de una familia (con todas sus variantes contemporáneas) que nos marcará, sea para bien o para mal. De la experiencia de nuestros primeros años podemos salir bien constru-



idos como personas, mal contruidos e incluso destruidos.

En la vida cotidiana en familia aprendemos el lenguaje articulado, la convivencia, el amor, los afectos, los gestos, la manera de vestirnos, la preferencia por determinado tipo de alimento, la confianza en quienes nos rodean... Pero también podemos aprender la violencia como forma de solución de los problemas, el temor y hasta el terror, la desconfianza, la simulación, la sumisión.

En la vida cotidiana en familia tenemos la oportunidad de momentos plenos de felicidad y de encuentro con los demás. Pero en ella pueden producirse hechos terribles para el equilibrio emocional. Las acechanzas de la violencia están siempre presentes. La destructividad de los delicados lazos que sostienen la vida cotidiana aflora cuando menos lo esperamos, como una especie de constante en muchas familias.

Son posibles procesos, en todos los planos de la sociedad, de destructividad de equilibrios emocionales, de lazos afectivos, de seguridad, de confianza, de futuro, de ilusiones, de estima y autoestima. La tarea frente a cada nueva generación es cobijarla con la estima y permitir en ella la autoestima. La



recomposición de la autoestima puede llevar años.

Sabemos que en este sentido nada es para siempre, que cada ser puede remontar esas primeras experiencias por caminos que van desde el esfuerzo de construcción personal hasta el apoyo de la psicoterapia.

### Los necesarios interrogantes

Entonces... ¿de qué familias hablamos? ¿De la que abandona al niño apenas recién nacido al vocerío de la televisión? ¿De la que ya no sabe cómo comunicar ternura? ¿De la que habitúa a los hijos desde pequeños al escándalo del poder? ¿De la que siembra en la infancia un autoritarismo tal que llevará a justificar y sostener una demencia social?

¿Comunicación? En todos los casos. Por ausencia en los dos primeros, que lo no comunicado tiene también una terrible presencia; por modos cotidianos, hora a hora, día a día, que el poder y el autoritarismo se expresan de muchas maneras, se imponen por acumulación en el tejido del propio ser.

Lo que sucede en la complejísima trama de la cotidianidad no se explica por la influencia directa de la cultura mediática, como si ésta fuera a dar a un espacio vacío, a una suerte de tabla rasa que se vendría a llenar con torrentes de mensajes.

Sobre esa cuestión vale la pena revisar el texto de nuestro amigo Valerio Fuenzalida "Educación para la comunicación televisiva",<sup>11</sup> quien señala lo siguiente:

*"Los programas de TV son interpretados desde la intertextualidad adquirida por las audiencias, y no por una audiencia vacía culturalmente. También la pragmática del consumo describe cómo la recepción televisiva se inserta en los diversos ritmos diarios de los habitantes del hogar, y la conexión con los estados de ánimo y emociones que acompañan a sus actividades..."*

Primero el contexto, afirmamos, y después todos los textos que vienen a dar en él, todas las manifestaciones mediáticas del universo.

Desde el enfoque que venimos proponiendo en estas páginas, la construcción de un ser humano, de cada ser humano, está sujeta (en el estricto sen-

tido del término y de su relación con "sujeto") a la aventura de la vida de cada quien, aventura que bien puede moverse en el marco de lo venturoso o de la desventura.

El niño Flaubert, al que dedicó Sartre buena parte de su intento de comprender *todo* un hombre, no está, a más de un siglo y medio de distancia, nada lejos de nosotros. Ello a pesar de lo que aprendimos en el siglo XX, de los avances en el conocimiento de las etapas del desarrollo, de la construcción física y emocional, de bibliotecas enteras de pedagogía...; a pesar de las convenciones internacionales y de la proclamación de los derechos universales de los niños.

La cuestión primera, en el radical sentido de esa expresión, es la siguiente: ¿qué comunicamos los adultos a los niños desde el comienzo de la existencia, qué dejamos de comunicar, qué sembramos en el corazón de esa inicial relación? Lo demás vendrá a dar en esa primera trama, en un proceso siempre inacabado, en la complejidad de *todo* un ser humano. ■

### Notas

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# De la concientización a una política pública en educación medial-digital

**Claudio Avendaño Ruz**

*El presente artículo busca presentar en forma somera algunos derroteros de la Comunicación/Educación en Chile (CECh), desde la década del setenta hasta fines del 2013. Tratándose de un breve texto resume solo algunas tendencias. Asume que la CECh debe entenderse en el contexto de la investigación en comunicación y los cambios más amplios a nivel socioeconómico, político, cultural y las transformaciones tecnológicas digitales de los últimos lustros. Ofrece una visión personal del interesante y valioso esfuerzo actual por construir una Política Pública en Educación Medial-Digital que impulsa el área de Novasur del Consejo Nacional de Chile. Es un momento crucial tanto para los actores institucionales como las personas, ya que se trata de un anhelo de larga data.*

**S**iguendo el planteamiento realizado anteriormente sobre el periplo de la investigación en comunicación (Avendaño, 1999), se expondrá una breve y sintética descripción de los diferentes momentos. En cada caso se incorporarán los mapas conceptuales hegemónicos, las metodologías asumidas y algunas experiencias ilustrativas.

Se trata de un tema central para la vida de las familias y las personas en general, ya que a partir de la individualización del acceso y usos de los dispositivos de la comunicación, las prácticas

mediáticas se han vuelto vitales en la interacción familiar, la construcción de marcos axiológicos, en la participación ciudadana y el crecimiento de los sujetos como individuos y sociales.

## **Los años de la concientización y la tele-educación**

Si bien es cierto que los estudios de comunicación “modernos” comienzan en Chile en la década del cincuenta, con la fundación de las primeras escuelas de periodismo y el desarrollo de la investigación de orientación funcionalista, no es hasta mediados de los años sesenta que es posible observar algunos esfuerzos de lo que hoy llamamos Comunicación/Educación. No es seguro que los actores de aquel momento la definieran en estos términos, su acercamiento era más amplio, tenía relación con un esfuerzo por la generación y la construcción del campo de estudios de la comunicación tomando distancia del estructural-funcionalismo. El enfoque tenía elementos de la teoría crítica, marxismo y estructuralismo, que permitía comprender de mejor manera la situación de la comunicación mediática de ese momento (Garretón, 2004).

Durante la segunda mitad de los sesenta surge la Teoría de la Dependencia (Dos Santos, 1970) como un intento por generar un marco conceptual distinto del desarrollo planteado – por ejemplo, por Rostow – que reproducía el modelo dualista sociedad tradicional/ sociedad moderna, como el único camino para superar las condiciones de subdesarrollo de la región. En ese contexto surge una propuesta política desde la unidad de la izquierda, que buscaba abrir paso a los sectores excluidos en el sistema social, en el marco de la larga democracia chilena.

En este contexto de cambio social-estructural, desde algunos centros de investigación en ciencias sociales se agenda una nueva mirada hacia la comunicación. Específicamente en el CEREN (Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Nacional) y la EAC (Escuela de Artes de la Comunicación) de la Universidad Católica. Diversos investigadores – entre los que destaca Mattelart – generan una serie de trabajos y publicaciones *inaugurados* en marzo de 1970, en un número especial de la revista del



CEREN dedicado a los medios de comunicación. Para ilustrar la orientación se observa en algunos de sus artículos temas como: crítica al funcionalismo en comunicación, análisis del sistema de propiedad de *El Mercurio* (principal diario del país de orientación conservadora), análisis de la “prensa del corazón”, entre otros (Mattelart et al, 1970).

Un estudio paradigmático de la época lo constituye el libro “Para leer el Pato Donald” de Ariel Dorfman y Armand Mattelart (1971), cuyo origen se remonta a la demanda de los obreros de la imprenta estatal, por comprender críticamente los textos y revistas que imprimían, ya que además de reproducir sus propias publicaciones ofrecían servicios de impresión a otras editoriales, como es el caso de Walt Disney. Lo que partió como un taller para que los obreros pudieran reflexionar y tomar conciencia de su trabajo, se transformó en un conocido libro traducido a muchos idiomas.

La orientación de la investigación referida, también buscaba transformarse en la evidencia *científica* que permitiera a los sectores populares tomar conciencia de la situación vivida. Así, se realizan una serie de productos comunicacionales escritos y audiovisuales sobre el acontecer sociopolítico, que se difundían masivamente en las organizaciones sociales de base, sindicatos y que constituían el espacio de reflexión y análisis por definición en esa época. Un ejemplo es lo realizado por el Departamento de Cine y Televisión de la Universidad Técnica del Estado, hoy Universidad de Santiago de Chile (<http://vimeo.com/66167012>).

Se plantea, entonces, un programa de trabajo que buscaba desvelar los intereses económicos detrás de los propietarios de los medios masivos, la presencia de contenidos alienantes, la omnipresencia de una ideología que da cuenta de un determinado orden social que se desea preservar.

En este contexto la Comunicación/Educación constituía un espacio de concientización de las fuerzas sociales que apoyaban al gobierno de Salvador Allende, y que necesitaban comprender a los medios como parte de una lucha social más amplia.

Otra línea de trabajo en ese periodo era la televisión educativa concebida como una extensión de

la escuela formal. En este sentido se entendía que los medios masivos – especialmente la televisión – era un mecanismo difusor de saber escolarizado que permitiría a sectores sociales en pobreza urbana y también a ciertos grupos rurales, acceder a contenidos que la escuela formal no había logrado entregar. En cierto sentido esta matriz responde a los esfuerzos del *desarrollismo* por integrar a grupos “marginales” al polo moderno (industrial-urbano) de la sociedad.

### **La Comunicación y educación como resistencia y multiplicación de voces**

El traumático y violento quiebre institucional y político del 11 de septiembre de 1973, cambia radicalmente la situación. El país agudiza el conflicto por el uso de la violencia estatal, los medios de comunicación que apoyaban al gobierno de la Unidad Popular desaparecen: sólo se escucha una voz. En términos de la CECh es evidente que los medios de comunicación fueron utilizados por la dictadura para intentar legitimizar sus propuestas.

Específicamente, la implementación del neoliberalismo requirió, en primer lugar, convencer al empresariado que el modelo era el adecuado y, posteriormente, al resto de la población. Se usan los controlados medios masivos para explicar las “bondades” del modelo. Específicamente la televisión se transformó en un espacio para tal propósito. En la década del setenta y parte del ochenta, periodistas especializados en economía explicaban los avances del modelo, incluso en algún periodo el ministro encargado del área tenía un espacio “pedagógico” en el horario prime time de la televisión.

En el otro sector los investigadores y comunicadores que pudieron continuar en Chile, crearon ONGs apoyadas por la solidaridad internacional. Así surgen CENECA, ECO, VECTOR y un grupo en la FLACSO-CHILE, entre otras. Desde el punto de vista de la CECh el grupo que hizo aportes los más significativos fue el Programa de *Recepción Activa* que organizó Valerio Fuenzalida y en el que trabajó activamente María Elena Hermosilla. Por una parte, se dedicó a desarrollar investigaciones en distintos colectivos sociales sobre la recepción televisiva. A partir de la evidencia que los sujetos

y actores sociales eran capaces de re-significar las propuestas televisivas, se generó un conjunto de materiales para la educación en televisión. También se organizaron reuniones regionales sobre el tema, apoyadas por la UNESCO.

Por otra parte, la ONG ECO trabajó fundamentalmente apoyando los esfuerzos de sectores populares, sindicales y de las iglesias, para producir micromedios que permitieran elaborar tanto sentidos sociales sobre el momento, como permitir a las personas acceder a visiones distintas de la realidad.

También en las universidades hubo algunos intentos en Comunicación y Educación, específicamente en la Pontificia Universidad Católica se constituyó un grupo para promover la pedagogía medial, a partir de los aportes de los investigadores alemanes de aquel momento (Paredes, Colle y Avendaño, 1984).

En general, como puede observarse se manifiestan genéricamente dos tendencias en CECh en dicho momento. Por un lado, las iniciativas destinadas, por una parte, a lo que hoy día denominamos Educación Medial, es decir, la comprensión – algunas veces crítica – de los lenguajes y contenidos de los medios. De modo que las personas incorporen criterios cognitivos y afectivos que les permita recepcionar reflexivamente lo que entregan los medios de comunicación.

Por otra parte, se buscaba que amplios sectores sociales excluidos de los medios de comunicación dominantes controlados por la dictadura pudieran expresar sus puntos de vista, esperanzas e ideas y que constituirían y representaban la mayoría nacional. Esto se puede constatar en la producción de micromedios de sectores sociales organizados, una manera de mantener y desarrollar no solo una expresión crítica del momento, sino que también mantener y constituir una identidad. En algunos



*Protestas en Chile en el año 2011.*

casos, también servía para recuperar una memoria colectiva prohibida en ese Chile.

### **Los años de la democracia y el mercado.**

Tras la recuperación de la democracia entre 1990 y 2010 gobernó el país una coalición de centro-izquierda. Luego entre el 2010 y el 2014 preside el gobierno Sebastián Piñera, de orientación centro-derecha.

En el periodo de la coalición de centro-izquierda, el mercado es el factor central de la generación de riqueza, mientras que el Estado diseña y aplica políticas públicas para asegurar la equidad, la participación y el incremento de la igualdad de oportunidades, especialmente en el período gobernado por la centro-izquierda bajo el esquema de lo que Castells ha llamado el “modelo de desarrollo liberal incluyente” (Castells, 2005). Tratándose de un mercado pequeño el sector exportador es central para el crecimiento económico lo que ha generado un sector terciario y, especialmente, financiero muy activo. En esta situación se generó – entre otros elementos – una temprana e importante incorporación de las TIC (Tecnologías de la Información y Comunicación) para facilitar las transferencias y la comunicación con los mercados



externos.

A partir de la expansión creciente de las TIC por acción del mercado y su instalación en el modelo de crecimiento, comienzan a expandirse sus usos en el propio Estado y en los sujetos. En el caso del Estado a partir de la instalación del gobierno electrónico y otros modos de mediación digital con la ciudadanía.

En términos de nuestro tema una de sus dimensiones específicas es la instalación de TIC en las escuelas desde principios de los noventa, a través del Programa Enlaces del Ministerio de Educación. Esta ha sido la corriente principal desde el punto de vista del Estado en relación a la CECh: el uso de las TIC por los sujetos e instituciones escolares.

A nivel de los otros medios de comunicación, no se ha producido en el sistema educativo una incorporación sistemática y central. Es decir, la televisión, prensa, radio y cine no se han integrado en las prácticas educativas escolarizadas. A nivel curricular se ha incorporado, en forma muy tradicional, el conocimiento de los medios masivos y la publicidad en el currículum. Se les ha enfocado como un “objeto” que es necesario conocer y manejar educativamente y, por otra parte, como recurso didáctico para los docentes en el trabajo de aula. En este sentido no se ha producido una deseable continuidad entre las experiencias desplegadas en los ochenta – como ya hemos referido – y la Reforma Educativa instalada en el nuevo periodo democrático.

Las excepciones lo constituyen el Programa *El Diario en la Educación* que realiza por 20 años (1999-2009) la Facultad de Comunicación y Letras de la Universidad Diego Portales; el canal educativo Novasur del Consejo Nacional de Televisión y lo realizado por la Facultad de Comunicaciones de la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, a través de docencia de postgrado e investigación. Durante el periodo no existe una política integral y explícita sobre CECh en el Estado.

A comienzos de esta década se observa la emergencia de activos y amplios movimientos sociales en temas variados, que van desde el medioambiente, hasta los pueblos originarios, pasando por los grupos animalistas y de género. No obstante, es el movimiento estudiantil que se desarrolla

desde 2006 con la Revolución Pingüina y, especialmente, desde el 2011 con la participación de universitarios y secundarios, que comienzan a plantear demandas por una educación pública, gratuita y de calidad, fraguando esperanzas que erosionan los factores centrales del modelo de desarrollo y que conllevan necesidades de transformaciones no solo en lo educacional, sino también cambio de la Constitución.

El proceso de ciudadanización y de ampliación y profundización democrática se ha caracterizado por la centralidad de la comunicación – en sus diversas dimensiones – para expresar y compartir sus demandas por una mayor equidad y participación (Avendaño, 2012). Sin embargo, también ha develado las diferencias sociales en el acceso y usos de la comunicación mediada, lo que se traduce en diferentes formas de participación. En este contexto se ha planteado la necesidad de elaborar una Política Pública en Educación Medial-digital que ha sido impulsada y convocada desde Novasur del Consejo Nacional de Televisión, con la participación activa de diversas universidades y organizaciones del tercer sector.

Así, durante el 2013 se ha constituido una mesa de trabajo y se organizó el Seminario Educación Medial-digital en la Escuela de Periodismo de la Universidad de Santiago de Chile. A noviembre del 2013, se están construyendo los consensos y las propuestas específicas para sentar las bases de una propuesta de Política Pública en Educación Medial-Digital.

Una lectura de este momento y desde el suscrito, pero que intenta dar cuenta de los términos básicos, el debate se puede visualizar en los siguientes términos: la Educación Medial-Digital es un campo de acción, reflexión y fomento de la participación ciudadana que requiere que los diversos sectores de la sociedad chilena, estado, tercer sector, empresas y, especialmente los propios ciudadanos y ciudadanas aúnen esfuerzos, experiencias y conocimientos para ampliar sus competencias y las de sus grupos, de modo que se constituyan en actores activos, creativos e innovadores en los espacios crecientes y centrales de la comunicación mediada.

Algunos de los principios que orientan las ac-

ciones en este contexto, serían:

1.- La Educación Medial y Digital forma parte central de las habilidades humanas y sociales en este siglo, aunque tiene una larga trayectoria en instituciones como la UNESCO, tal como se indica en varios documentos desde la Declaración de Grünwald, hasta la reciente propuesta de Alfabetización mediática e información para docentes.

2.- Las transformaciones tecnológicas digitales han posibilitado que los sujetos sean capaces de recibir, crear y distribuir información en las diversas dimensiones de la vida social, política y cultural.

3.- Participar de la convergencia cultural implica desplazarse creativamente por diversos soportes y medios, aunque la televisión constituye el medio troncal para amplios sectores sociales – del sistema infocomunicativo (medios masivos+TIC).

4.- La Educación Medial y Digital se vuelve componente vital de la Sociedad de la Información y, por tanto, es un derecho universal de todos los sujetos, independiente de su condición social, etaria, género, étnica y, en consecuencia, debe promoverse en el marco de las Políticas Públicas de Comunicación.

5.- La Formación Ciudadana es una dimensión básica de la Educación Medial y Digital, ya que la convivencia democrática es crecientemente mediaticizada.

6.- Ser *prosumidor* no solo implica ser capaz de recibir y producir información, sino también ser consciente y responsable de las consecuencias de los actos comunicativos en que participan los sujetos.

7.- Se debe promover una Educación Medial Digital para todos y todas aunque las diferencias socioculturales, de género, étnicas y etarias conllevan diferentes métodos de formación.

En términos generales se desea: a) recoger lo permanente del trabajo desarrollado en el país desde la década de los ochenta, b) asumir los desafíos de la transformación tecnológica de la digitalización y c) construir un sistema de comunicación pluralista y diverso en que todos y todas puedan disponer del capital simbólico y de las competencias mediáticas y el acceso a los dispositivos de comunicación, elementos básicos de una

democratización de la comunicación.

Tal situación coincide, a su vez, con las demandas más amplias de mejoramiento y cambio del sistema infocomunicativo chileno que propone el grupo **PolCom**. ■

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#### Webgrafía

- Programa Novasur [www.novasur.cl](http://www.novasur.cl)
- Archivo DGA-Universidad de Santiago de Chile <http://vimeo.com/archivodg>

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# Online safety for families

Elza Dunkels

*In the 1990s there was no actual research concerning young people's use of the internet, which meant that safety advice tended to be underpinned by assumptions and speculations. It was common to disseminate horrific stories about the internet, pornography, sexual offenders and vulnerable children. Not only was advice based on horrible but non-typical anecdotes, it also reveals a view of young people as naïve, reckless and in unlimited need of adult protection and supervision. As with any parenting activity, keeping your children safe online is a matter of calculating risk against possibilities. And in this decision-making the family needs information based on research rather than on prejudice.*

When a phenomenon is new, there is no research on which to base views. Research takes time and we can expect to have results only after some years. Today there is a considerable body of research about young people's internet use and its accompanying problems. This research also gives guidance on how to deal with these problems. This article provides a summary of these results, discusses filtering and monitoring of children's internet use, and offers some recommendations.

## Research overview

First of all, we should discard the supposition that young people are passive and naïve when it comes to internet safety. In fact, many studies show that young people develop functional online coping strategies. However, children do this mostly on their own while adults are strikingly absent in this

process. Some of these coping strategies, however functional, lack skills that can only come with age, such as a general critical approach or perhaps a touch of cynicism.

So we can conclude that the young have control and authority over their own use, but that adult input is of great importance. At the same time the opposite also is true; adults in general need to learn from young people's approaches to contemporary media. Therefore, it would be a good idea to exchange observations and experiences between the generations.

Secondly, today we know more about threats and how to counteract them. Contrary to common belief, there is no simple correlation between giving out personal information and being exposed to online risks such as harassment or stranger danger. Research shows that the more children are online, the more they are exposed to online risk, which is a natural correlation.

One way of protecting children is to keep them away from the internet in order to keep them safe. However, for most families this is considered too heavy artillery to use. It would be the equivalent of keeping your children at home at all times because statistically traffic, school and the outdoor environment constitute threats to their health. This would probably be very safe for the child, but most people agree that the social consequences would be devastating for the child and the negative effects would greatly outweigh any benefits.

Posting personal information online used to be viewed as unsafe behaviour. However, research shows that the notion of safe conduct is more complex than that. Sharing personal information online is not unsafe as such; it is a question of what you share and with whom. Also, we must take internet culture into consideration when determining what is unsafe behaviour.

Sharing information such as your name and self-portrait is in fact a vital part of social media. Therefore, we must find ways of talking about what to post and what not to post, without claiming that sharing is dangerous. Internet users of all ages are wise to think before they post, because we can assume that everything posted stays online forever. Nevertheless, we must not demonize the

fact that online content is basically non-removable.

As time passes, being represented online, even in embarrassing situations, will seem less and less intimidating. More and more people will in fact be found online and much information will drown in the abundance. Also, one can see that a change in attitude is slowly taking place; more young people are aware that online representation is a fact and not always a threat.

The pan-European research project EU Kids Online<sup>1</sup> found that children's online counter-strategies are determined by the child's psychological wellbeing. Children who have low self-esteem and children with psychological and social problems react more passively or even fatalistically when they are exposed to upsetting content online. Instead of actively dealing with the problems, they tend to hope that the problems will disappear by themselves or they just get offline.

### **Safety measures**

Different safety measures have been recommended since the 1990s, when online safety first emerged on the global agenda. Filtering out content and monitoring children's internet use are two of the most widely used strategies. In both cases technological solutions have been employed: software solutions that help adults filter out content and supervise the child's computer activities. Recent research, however, questions these safety measures.

*Filtering* is the term for any solution aiming at creating a good internet by filtering out unwanted content. This idea is underpinned by a wish to keep the beneficial, positive sides of the internet and get rid of the destructive ones. However, research shows that filtering does not in fact work the way the user might expect. One fundamental problem is that the basis for filtering will always be our ethical values. There is no unbiased way of determining which unwanted content to filter out.

Thus, we would need to establish a set of common values in order to create a functional filter. This may actually be possible in extreme cases. For instance, it is safe to assume that any family

or school may want to filter out violent abuse, neo-Nazi propaganda and other extreme content. But as soon as it comes to more fine-tuned values, we are bound to disagree. Not every family will agree on how to teach children about religion, sex, the growing body, politics, etc. This means that there exists no way to single out content, websites or service providers, which would work for everyone. So purchasing filter software with pre-defined filtering parameters is really no option.

Another solution would be that every family or school set their own parameters, which, however, would make the software almost impossible to use. Every user would have to spend hours and hours fine-tuning the software according to their own values. Hours better spent talking to children about these issues. The Swedish expert on online ethics, Stig Roland Rask,<sup>2</sup> has coined the expression "installing a filter in children's heads instead of in the computer" to describe the process of abstaining from filtering. His advice is that we replace filters with ethical conversations.

By filtering computers we stop children from accessing unwanted content, even if they want to. Instead, by placing a filter in their heads, metaphorically, we teach them to voluntarily abstain from unethical and illegal content. This gives them tools to navigate in a complex reality, a capacity which will also be helpful offline.

Another piece of criticism in relation to filtering software targets the fact that most adults tend to reduce their online engagement in their children as soon as they have installed a technological aid. Furthermore, the filter-in-the-head solution is platform independent. The filter in the head is always present, whether children use computers or smartphones.

### **Recommendations**

This article has argued that we need to help children develop online and offline resilience to keep safe. The following are recommendations based on recent research on online threats and safety.

*Learn more!* Research shows that informed adults stand a better chance of supporting young people regarding their online activities. Therefore, par-



# S

## Be Safe

Keep your personal information safe and secret. Think carefully before you share a photo of yourself or your friends.



# M

## Don't Meet Up

Never arrange to meet an online friend because it can be dangerous. No matter how well you think you know people, they might be pretending.



# A

## Accepting Emails can be dangerous

If you receive junk mail (called spam) or messages that make you feel uncomfortable, tell an adult that you trust and delete them. Don't reply to them.



# R

## Reliable?

The Internet is full of friendly people and amazing information. However, sometimes people might say or write things which are untrue, so you should always think carefully before trusting what you see or hear.



# T

## Tell Someone!

Most of the time that you are online, you will have lots of fun. However, if you see anything that makes you feel uncomfortable or worried, make sure that you tell an adult that you trust.





ents and teachers should learn more about internet cultures. It is vital to keep an open mind in this learning process. When learning more about young people's internet use, some of the practices we might encounter may seem disturbing to the untrained adult. But to the young person many of these may be perfectly explicable and uncontroversial. So our children may very well be our best chaperons in the realm of internet culture. Yet, there is no support in research for the idea that children would stay safe if their parents monitored their online meeting places.

*Think offline!* We know for a fact that children's online resilience is affected by their offline situation. Children with high confidence in themselves and in the surrounding world stand a better chance to be safe online. Instead of monitoring children's internet use or installing expensive and time-consuming software, you should look your children in the eyes in order to see how they are doing. And do not hesitate to act if you see that something is bothering them. Naturally, if you have a monitoring parenting style offline, you might want to monitor their internet use as well. If, however, you do not believe in such parenting, then you may want to use some other strategy online as well. What is important here is synchronizing your offline and online parenting.

*Discuss strategies!* Many studies show that young people often want to talk to adults about internet use. When it comes to possible risks, however, children often turn out to have little trust in adults' ability to help them. Furthermore, some children worry that their internet access will be cut off or reduced if their parents find out what they have encountered. So parents and teachers should talk more to young people about internet use. With regard to the upsides and the downsides and what may be done to counteract the disadvantages, we should try to establish what the children's strategies consist of and then actively strengthen these strategies with applicable parts of our own offline life experience.

*Report!* Children need to learn when and how to report unwanted or illegal activities online. Adults need to take responsibility if things get out of hand. Try to create an atmosphere of trust, so

that children feel comfortable telling you what bothers them. Ask them to forward messages that upset them so that you can take over. In some cases, contacting the offender might be enough. Surprisingly many who send harassing messages are unaware of the harm they cause, and a talk might actually make them stop. In other cases you may have to report unethical messages to the service provider and illegal ones to the police.

## Summary

For most children the internet is an arena for making and keeping friends, for love and support, for learning and entertainment. We should be careful to protect and preserve this arena and take its valuable properties into consideration when we make decisions on internet safety. The most important element in online security is trying to discard the technological aspects and acting according to your own values.

Parenting is no harder in a contemporary media landscape than it used to be in the past. The problem seems to be that technology gets in the way of our parenting. If we try to view the internet as just another space for human interaction, rather than a world of its own, then we stand a better chance of helping children stay safe online.

I have no doubt that every adult has the ability to support children in their online activities, whether they are parents, teachers, grandparents or just concerned citizens. The skills and knowledge the adults may lack, the children most certainly can provide. An open-minded and earnest, ongoing dialogue about safety, conduct and ethics, online and offline, is our best way of caring for our children. ■

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# Every child's right to be heard

*A resource guide on the rights of the child general comment no.12 published by Save the Children UK on behalf of Save the Children and UNICEF (2011).*

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, included a provision that introduced a right of all children capable of forming a view to be heard and to be taken seriously. The provision, outlined in article 12 of the Convention, states that:

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

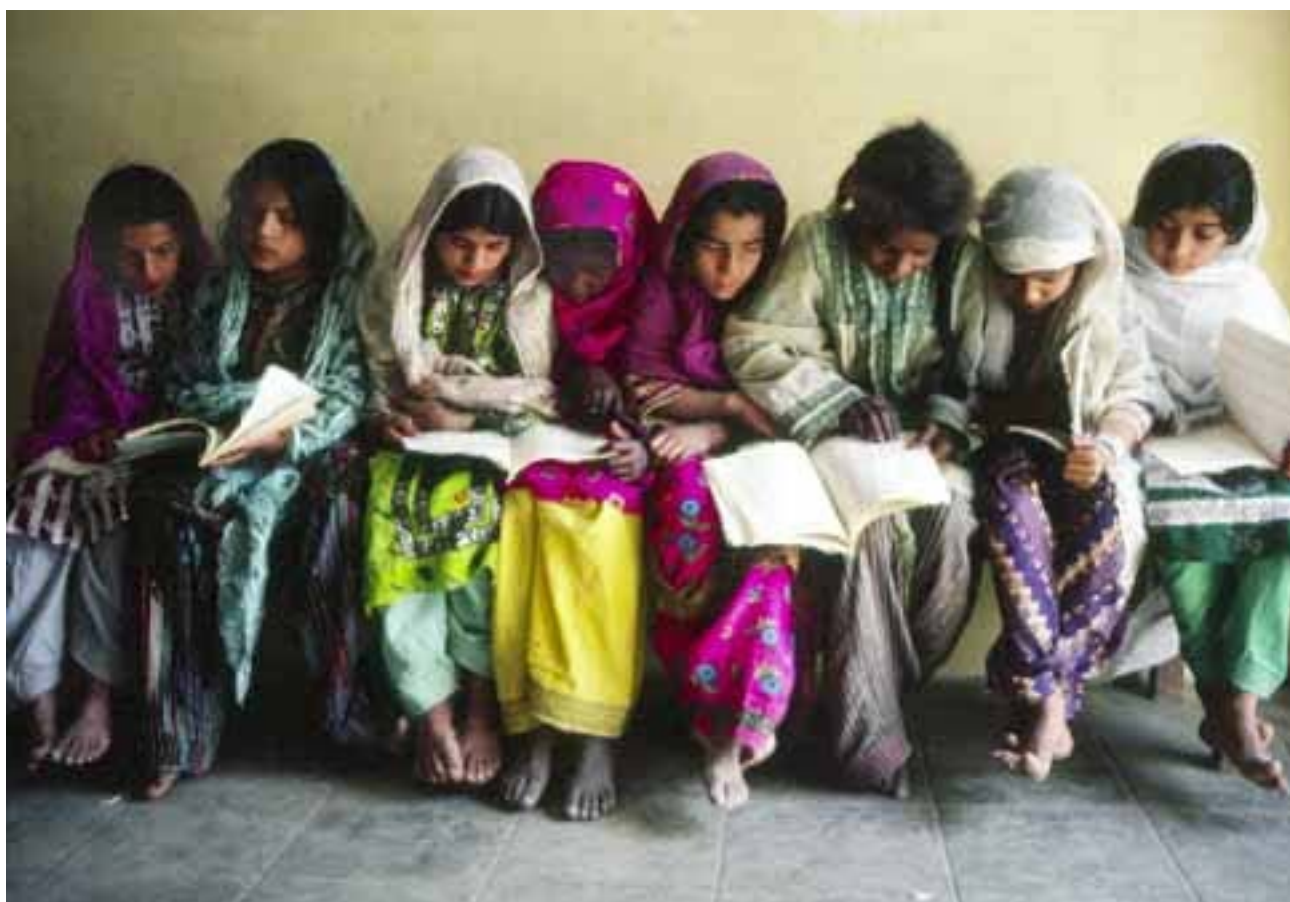
2. For this purpose the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

It was a new concept in international law, and posed a challenge to most countries throughout the world, where a culture of listening to children was not widespread or even acceptable. Over the past 20 years, many governments, alongside civil society organisations, have begun to grapple with the implications of this new obligation to recognise children as citizens, as participants and as active contributors both to decisions within their

own lives and to the wider society.

However, there is still a lack of understanding, and often of confidence, among governments as to what it means to listen to children, and how to introduce the necessary measures to fulfil that responsibility.

Accordingly, in June 2009, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the international body established to monitor governments' implementation of the UNCRC, adopted a General Comment on the Right of the Child to be Heard. This General Comment elaborates in detail the scope of Article 12, how the Committee expects gov-



*Photo: Child rights connect..*

ernments to interpret their obligations to children under its provisions, what action governments are expected to take to implement Article 12, and how to interpret its meaning.

This resource guide has been produced as a companion document to sit alongside the General Comment, largely following its structure, to provide governments with more detailed practical guidance on how to implement it. In addition to a fuller explanation of how to understand the obligation to listen to children and take them seriously, it provides:

Illustrative examples of laws and regulations that have been adopted by some governments to



give effect to the right embodied in Article 12.

Illustrative examples of guidance and policy that have been adopted by some governments, professional bodies and other institutions to give effect to the right embodied in Article 12.

Suggested practical guidance on how to create the opportunities for children to be heard.

Evidence from research, for example, regarding the impact of children's participation, or children's concerns in particular settings.

Illustrative examples from around the world of initiatives undertaken to enable children to participate in decisions and actions that affect them basic requirements for ensuring child participation that is ethical, safe and effective.

The arguments to be made to demonstrate the positive outcomes associated with realising the right of children to be heard and taken seriously.

The child's right to be heard is, as yet, far from being fulfilled for the majority of children around the world. The aim of this handbook is to try to make easier the task of governments in moving that agenda forward. It seeks to demonstrate not only that it is eminently possible to fulfil the obligations associated with Article 12, but also that there are profound benefits associated with doing so. It provides an opportunity for governments to explore the potential for building on the experiences of other countries and regions in implementing Article 12.

It is aimed primarily at governments, national and local government officials, policy-makers and parliamentarians, although it will also be valuable for those advocating with governments. Article 12 extends to matters relating to health, education, child protection, child welfare, juvenile justice, planning, transport, economic development and social protection. Therefore, even though there may be a lead department focusing specifically on children, it is important that all relevant government departments make use of the guidance the handbook contains. ■

[The handbook is available here.](#)

## Media in the Great Lakes Region foster social dialogue

Patrick Hajayandi

*Fostering dialogue in societies torn apart by ethnic conflicts is a contribution to peace-building processes in general and to reconciliation, trauma healing and positive changes in particular. This article lifts up some of the media initiatives of organisations in the Great Lakes Region that contribute to engaging the traumatised communities in this process.*

The media are playing an increasingly important role in shaping history around the world. The recent debate on what was called the CNN effect, especially during the two Gulf Wars, is one among many examples that show how media can influence peace and conflict dynamics in the modern world. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the media are being considered the fourth form of power, beside the executive, legislative and judicial.

Steven Livingstone, in his interesting article on the CNN effect, points out the three roles the media can play in times of war (Livingstone, 1997). According to him, the CNN effect can appear (1) as a policy agenda-setting agent, (2) as an impediment to the achievement of desired policy goals and (3) as an accelerant to policy decision-making.

Hawkins shows the impact of the CNN factor on decision making processes and defines this concept as "the process by which the media influence foreign policy by evoking responses in their audiences through concentrated and emotionally based coverage, which in turn applies pressure to governments to act in response to a particular conflict" (Hawkins, 2002). It is obvious that media agendas can influence a broad range of policy initiatives and, by extension, the lack of media



coverage contributes to lack of policy.

As stated by the UN Communication Department, “throughout Africa, different segments of the population have minimal access to communication media and are often not reached or provided with adequate information on issues of critical importance to national welfare and societal development. The availability and suitability of communication and information media are essential prerequisites for empowering and enabling the national population to express their views and opinions about significant development problems and to participate in the process of democratic transitions, conflict resolution and, ultimately, a peaceful society” (UNESCO, 1998).

### Promoting dialogue in the Great Lakes Region

In the Great Lakes Region the role of the media, especially radio broadcasting, has been increasing and various. In 1994, the role played by the Radio-Télévision des Mille Collines (RTLM) was overwhelmingly negative due to its contribution in the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda. In fact, RTLM served as a propaganda tool and was used by Hutu extremists to spread ethnic hatred and to incite the Hutu majority to perpetrate the massacre against the Tutsi minority.

Since 1998 there have been several media efforts, mainly by clandestine radio projects, supported by Hutu movements, to inform and manipulate the memory or history concept of their “groups”. These stations are maybe less known than RTLM, maybe less symbolic and efficient in the role as hate speech inciters, but they were nevertheless instrumental in creating or worsening the dualistic memories of antagonism between Hutu and



Tutsi. One example is Radio Rutomorangongo (wrongly called Radio Democracy in French) that aired false lists of potential Hutu victims that were going to be killed in 1996.

Despite the negative role played by some radio stations, especially during the period of turbulence in the 1990s, there were also some media that contributed to relieving the pain of people in distress, such as refugees, internally displaced people, lost children, raped women etc. For example, the availability of information during the first and second Congo war in 1996 and 1998 was vital for people who fled to the mountains where there was no connection with the outside world.

In order to help these people to be informed about what was happening, different NGOs working in the area dropped radio receivers that used solar energy or manual power generators into the forests for people who were fleeing. The aim was to help them stay informed about the situation around them, as well as help scattered families to reunite.

This was the beginning of what is known now as the BBC Gahuzamiryango Programme (meaning in the local language “the one which makes families meet”). The impact of the initiative was highly appreciated because it particularly allowed



parents and children who had been separated during the fighting to be reunited.

Another important example is the role played by media in Burundi, contributing to the peace process or even to reconciliation. After the assassination of the newly elected President Melchior Ndadaye in 1993, a political crisis, followed by ethnic violence, erupted in the country. Two main ethnic groups in Burundi – the Hutu and the Tutsi – were engaged in a violent conflict. Consequently, around 300,000 lives were lost and thousands became refugees or internally displaced people. This situation triggered strong ethnic hatred.

Many efforts were made in order to help Burundians resolve this serious problem. Peace initia-



*Photo: Ivuka Arts, Rwanda.*

tives included negotiations and other diplomatic actions with the top leaders from every side. Further, there were also initiatives that targeted average people who were manipulated by politicians. Among the initiatives targeting the grassroots level, there were radio programmes oriented at promoting reconciliation through open discussions on the root causes of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict.

The message of peace was also transmitted through radio drama. For example, a radio soap opera called “Umubanyi niwe muryango” (Your neighbour is your family kin) which was supported by Search for Common Ground, had a strong impact on the mitigation of ethnic hatred in Burundi and on promoting peace and tolerance in different parts of the country during the ethnic violence and civil war that erupted in the after-

math of the President’s assassination and the mass killings that followed.

### **Organisations promoting dialogue**

After the signing and the implementation of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in 2000, many organisations launched programmes designed to contribute to peace consolidation efforts. Three such organisations promoting dialogue through media are: La Benevolencija, Search for Common Ground and Eirene. All of them have programmes that are run across the Great Lakes Region.

Today, the programme Murikira Ukuri (Show me the truth), produced by Radio La Benevolencija in Burundi, plays a major role

in the domain of conflict prevention by addressing different issues related to understanding the origins of ethnic hatred leading up to dealing with the past. Another important issue addressed by programmes from La Benevolencija is transitional justice and reconciliation. This issue is also addressed through a radio and TV programme called “Si ma mémoire est bonne” (If my memory is still good) and “Akahise kadasorongoye” (The past which was not revisited).

These two programmes are oriented toward promoting social dialogue around problematic interpretations on concepts of Burundi’s past conflicts. They are seen as a significant contribution to the transitional justice process in preparation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In Rwanda and DRC, La Benevolencija has developed similar programmes (Musekweya in Rwanda and Kumbuka kesho in DRC). In Rwanda, La Benevolencija is conducting a media project aimed at deepening reconciliation and trust among citizens in the post-Gacaca era, that is, the period after the judgments by popular courts called Gacaca of people involved in the genocide.

The focus of La Benevolencija is on the importance of equal justice in a post-genocide society, on the sensitisation of the role of the free speech,

the dangers of hate speech and the need of empathy for others. Emphasis is placed on raising the awareness of leaders about the possible influence of survivor trauma and fears of decision-making processes.

### **Youth dialogue platform on political, social, economic and cultural matters**

Another organisation playing an important role in the Great Lakes Region and using media to promote social dialogue is Search for Common Ground (SFCG). The programmes of SFCG in Burundi are directed toward conflict management and violence reduction. Responding to the deteriorating political environment, especially in the aftermath of the 2010 elections and due to the boycott of the opposition parties, the organisation has been implementing a project aimed at encouraging Burundians, and particularly the youth, to engage in peaceful cohabitation in the midst of diversity.

One of the flagship programmes of SFCG is “Generation Grands Lacs”. It is a 60 minute radio talk show on air every Saturday, broadcast on five radio stations across the region – in Burundi, the DRC and in Rwanda. Its objective is to create a dialogue platform for the youth in the region and to enable them to give their views on political, social, economic and cultural matters. Further, the programme promotes debates on conflict related issues, allowing the youth to give their contribution on problem solving as well as calling other youth to become aware of the influence of some political entrepreneurs who use young people in advancing their personal hidden agendas.

Generation Grands Lacs has been successful and is believed to have contributed to a shift in knowledge and attitudes (Slachmuislder, L., 2012). The programme has proved that social dialogue through media is possible and that it can influence youth positively and contribute to the creation of a new generation who is ready to resolve regional problems by peaceful means.

The “Projet Pigiste” of the organisation Eirene Great Lakes is a regional project whose purpose is to develop professional skills of journalists across the region. The project was launched in 2009 as a

capacity building programme targeting journalists from three radio stations based in three countries of the Great Lakes Region: Radio Publique Africaine in Burundi, Radio Maendeleo in DRC and Radio Izuba in Rwanda.

The aim of the programme is to develop skills related to covering information in conflict affected areas in a way that promotes social cohesion. Also, the journalists are trained to cover traumatic events without causing psychological problems. The guiding philosophy is that the radio is to be used as a tool for peace.

In the Great Lakes Region there is a strongly developed oral culture, and according to Lothar Seethaler, who works for Swiss Cooperation in the DRC, “the community radios play a socially important role precisely because of such orality” (Haasen, B. and Capitolin, P., 2011). Journalists can play a significantly influencing role by sending a message that helps prevent conflict and promotes reconciliation. Through dialogue they address problems arising from stereotypes and prejudices.

### **Success and challenges**

Despite the recorded success of media efforts toward promoting social dialogue, there are still many challenges that need to be addressed. One of the stumbling blocks for media in the region, and in promoting social dialogue, are the repeated attempts by some government officials to limit the activities of the media. These limitations can be new regulations or policies implemented by the government.

The training of journalists is another specific issue. People working as journalists do not necessarily have a solid training as media professionals. In some situations there is a lack of collaboration between different organisations involved in peace-building through media. This leads to the overlapping of some radio programmes.

Fostering social dialogue is one of the important tools that can be used in order to promote peace-building processes in the Great Lakes Region. The activities carried out by the three organisations mentioned in this article are good examples of how dialogue can be used in order to



bring healing to traumatised communities.

In the Great Lakes Region where an oral culture dominates, the use of media tools, especially radio, brings positive results, because it enables peace-builders to reach wide audiences. Also, it is clear that the media can have a big influence on how people perceive their differences within communities divided along ethnic lines. These efforts towards peace and reconciliation need to be encouraged and supported. ■

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## A summary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

*The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a human rights treaty setting out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. The Convention defines a child as any human being under the age of eighteen, unless the age of majority is attained earlier under a state's own domestic legislation. Nations that ratify the Convention are bound to it by international law. It was adopted and opened for signature on 20 November 1989 and came into force on 2 September 1990. Currently, 193 countries are party to it, including every member of the United Nations except Somalia, South Sudan, and the United States.*

**A**rticle 1 (*Definition of the child*): The Convention defines a 'child' as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, the monitoring body for the Convention, has encouraged States to review the age of majority if it is set below 18 and to increase the level of protection for all children under 18.

*Article 2 (Non-discrimination):* The Convention applies to all children, whatever their race, religion or abilities; whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from. It doesn't matter where children live, what language they speak, what their parents do, whether they are boys or girls, what their culture is, whether they have a disability or whether they are rich or poor. No child should be treated unfairly on any basis.

*Article 3 (Best interests of the child):* The best interests of children must be the primary concern in making decisions that may affect them. All adults should do what is best for children. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their

services, legal, health and educational systems, as well as levels of funding for these services. Governments are then obliged to take all necessary steps to ensure that the minimum standards set by the Convention in these areas are being met.



decisions will affect children. This particularly applies to budget, policy and law makers.

*Article 4 (Protection of rights):* Governments have a responsibility to take all available measures to make sure children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. When countries ratify the Convention, they agree to review their laws relating to children. This involves assessing their social

They must help families protect children's rights and create an environment where they can grow and reach their potential. In some instances, this may involve changing existing laws or creating new ones. Such legislative changes are not imposed, but come about through the same process by which any law is created or reformed within a country. Article 41 of the Convention points out the when a country already has higher legal standards than those seen in the Convention, the higher standards always prevail.

*Article 5 (Parental guidance):* Governments should respect the rights and responsibilities of families to direct and guide their children so that, as they grow, they learn to use their rights properly. Helping children to understand their rights does not mean pushing them to make choices with consequences that they are too young to handle. Article 5 encourages parents to deal with rights issues "in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child". The Convention does not take responsibility for children away from their

parents and give more authority to governments. It does place on governments the responsibility to protect and assist families in fulfilling their essential role as nurturers of children.

*Article 6 (Survival and development):* Children have the right to live. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily.



*Article 7 (Registration, name, nationality, care):* All children have the right to a legally registered name, officially recognised by the government. Children have the right to a nationality (to belong to a country). Children also have the right to know and, as far as possible, to be cared for by their parents.

*Article 8 (Preservation of identity):* Children have the right to an identity – an official record of who they are. Governments should respect children's right to a name, a nationality and family ties.

*Article 9 (Separation from parents):* Children have the right to live with their parent(s), unless it is bad for them. Children whose parents do not live together have the right to stay in contact with both parents, unless this might hurt the child.

*Article 10 (Family reunification):* Families whose members live in different countries should be allowed to move between those countries so that parents and children can stay in contact, or get back together as a family.

*Article 11 (Kidnapping):* Governments should take steps to stop children being taken out of their own country illegally. This article is particularly concerned with parental abductions. The Convention's Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography has a provision that concerns abduction for financial gain.

*Article 12 (Respect for the views of the child):* When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account. This does not mean that children can now tell their parents what to do. This Convention encourages adults to listen to the opinions of children and involve them in decision-making – not give children authority over adults. Article 12 does not interfere with parents' right and responsibility to express their views on matters affecting their children. Moreover, the Convention recognizes that the level of a child's participation in

decisions must be appropriate to the child's level of maturity. Children's ability to form and express their opinions develops with age and most adults will naturally give the views of teenagers greater weight than those of a preschooler, whether in family, legal or administrative decisions.

*Article 13 (Freedom of expression):* Children have the right to get and share information, as long as the information is not damaging to them or others. In exercising the right to freedom of expression, children have the responsibility to also respect the rights, freedoms and reputations of others. The freedom of expression includes the right to share information in any way they choose, including by talking, drawing or writing.

*Article 14 (Freedom of thought, conscience and religion):* Children have the right to think and believe what they want and to practise their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights. Parents should help guide their children in these matters. The Convention respects the rights and duties of parents in providing religious and moral guidance to their children. Religious groups around the world have expressed support for the Convention, which indicates that it in no way prevents parents from bringing their children up within a religious tradition. At the same time, the Convention recognizes that as children mature and are able to form their own views, some may question certain religious practices or cultural traditions. The Convention supports children's right to examine their beliefs, but it also states that their right to express their beliefs implies respect for the rights and freedoms of others.

*Article 15 (Freedom of association):* Children have the right to meet together and to join groups and organisations, as long as it does not stop other people from enjoying their rights. In exercising their rights, children have the responsibility to respect the rights, freedoms and reputations of others.

*Article 16 (Right to privacy):* Children have a right

to privacy. The law should protect them from attacks against their way of life, their good name, their families and their homes.

*Article 17 (Access to information; mass media):* Children have the right to get information that is important to their health and well-being. Governments should encourage mass media – radio, television, newspapers and Internet content sources – to provide information that children can understand and to not promote materials that could harm children. Mass media should particularly be encouraged to supply information in languages that minority and indigenous children can understand. Children should also have access to children's books.

*Article 18 (Parental responsibilities; state assistance):* Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their children, and should always consider what is best for each child. Governments must respect the responsibility of parents for providing appropriate guidance to their children – the Convention does not take responsibility for children away from their parents and give more authority to governments. It places a responsibility on governments to provide support services to parents, especially if both parents work outside the home.

*Article 19 (Protection from all forms of violence):* Children have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, physically or mentally. Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents, or anyone else who looks after them. In terms of discipline, the Convention does not specify what forms of punishment parents should use. However any form of discipline involving violence is unacceptable. There are ways to discipline children that are effective in helping children learn about family and social expectations for their behaviour – ones that are non-violent, are appropriate to the child's level of development and take the best interests of the child into consideration. In most countries, laws already define what sorts of punishments are considered excessive or abusive. It is up to each

government to review these laws in light of the Convention.

*Article 20 (Children deprived of family environment):* Children who cannot be looked after by their own family have a right to special care and must be looked after properly, by people who respect their ethnic group, religion, culture and language.

*Article 21 (Adoption):* Children have the right to care and protection if they are adopted or in foster care. The first concern must be what is best for them. The same rules should apply whether they are adopted in the country where they were born, or if they are taken to live in another country.

*Article 22 (Refugee children):* Children have the right to special protection and help if they are refugees (if they have been forced to leave their home and live in another country), as well as all the rights in this Convention.

*Article 23 (Children with disabilities):* Children who have any kind of disability have the right to special care and support, as well as all the rights in the Convention, so that they can live full and independent lives.

*Article 24 (Health and health services):* Children have the right to good quality health care – the best health care possible – to safe drinking water, nutritious food, a clean and safe environment, and information to help them stay healthy. Rich countries should help poorer countries achieve this.

*Article 25 (Review of treatment in care):* Children who are looked after by their local authorities, rather than their parents, have the right to have these living arrangements looked at regularly to see if they are the most appropriate. Their care and treatment should always be based on “the best interests of the child”. (see Guiding Principles, Article 3).

*Article 26 (Social security):* Children – either through their guardians or directly – have the right to help from the government if they are poor or in need.



*Article 27 (Adequate standard of living):* Children have the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs. Governments should help families and guardians who cannot afford to provide this, particularly with regard to food, clothing and housing.

*Article 28: (Right to education):* All children have the right to a primary education, which should be free. Wealthy countries should help poorer countries achieve this right. Discipline in schools should respect children's dignity. For children to benefit from education, schools must be run in an orderly way – without the use of violence. Any form of school discipline should take into account the child's human dignity. Therefore, governments must ensure that school administrators review their discipline policies and eliminate any discipline practices involving physical or mental violence, abuse or neglect. The Convention places a high value on education. Young people should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable.

*Article 29 (Goals of education):* Children's education should develop each child's personality, talents and abilities to the fullest. It should encourage children to respect others, human rights and their own and other cultures. It should also help them learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people. Children have a particular responsibility to respect the rights their parents, and education should aim to develop respect for the values and culture of their parents. The Convention does not address such issues as school uniforms, dress codes, the singing of the national anthem or prayer in schools. It is up to governments and school officials in each country to determine whether, in the context of their society and existing laws, such matters infringe upon other rights protected by the Convention.



*A boy in Kanyabayonga, a village near Goma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photo: UNICEF*

*Article 30 (Children of minorities/indigenous groups):* Minority or indigenous children have the right to learn about and practice their own culture, language and religion. The right to practice one's own culture, language and religion applies to everyone; the Convention here highlights this right in instances where the practices are not shared by the majority of people in the country.

*Article 31 (Leisure, play and culture):* Children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities.

*Article 32 (Child labour):* The government should protect children from work that is dangerous or might harm their health or their education. While the Convention protects children from harmful and exploitative work, there is nothing in it that prohibits parents from expecting their children to help out at home in ways that are safe and appropriate to their age. If children help out in a family farm or business, the tasks they do be safe and suited to their level of development and comply with national labour laws. Children's work should not jeopardize any of their other rights, including the right to education, or the right to relaxation and play.

*Article 33 (Drug abuse):* Governments should use all means possible to protect children from the use of harmful drugs and from being used in the drug trade.

*Article 34 (Sexual exploitation):* Governments should protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse. This provision in the Convention is augmented by the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

*Article 35 (Abduction, sale and trafficking):* The government should take all measures possible to make sure that children are not abducted, sold or

trafficked. This provision in the Convention is augmented by the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

*Article 36 (Other forms of exploitation):* Children should be protected from any activity that takes advantage of them or could harm their welfare and development.

*Article 37 (Detention and punishment):* No one is allowed to punish children in a cruel or harmful way. Children who break the law should not be treated cruelly. They should not be put in prison with adults, should be able to keep in contact with their families, and should not be sentenced to death or life imprisonment without possibility of release.

*Article 38 (War and armed conflicts):* Governments must do everything they can to protect and care for children affected by war. Children under 15 should not be forced or recruited to take part in a war or join the armed forces. The Convention's Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict further develops this right, raising the age for direct participation in armed conflict to 18 and establishing a ban on compulsory recruitment for children under 18.

*Article 39 (Rehabilitation of child victims):* Children who have been neglected, abused or exploited should receive special help to physically and psychologically recover and reintegrate into society. Particular attention should be paid to restoring the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

*Article 40 (Juvenile justice):* Children who are accused of breaking the law have the right to legal help and fair treatment in a justice system that respects their rights. Governments are required to set a minimum age below which children cannot be held criminally responsible and to provide minimum guarantees for the fairness and quick resolution of judicial or alternative proceedings.

*Article 41 (Respect for superior national standards):* If the laws of a country provide better protection of children's rights than the articles in this Convention, those laws should apply.

*Article 42 (Knowledge of rights):* Governments should make the Convention known to adults and children. Adults should help children learn about their rights, too. (See also article 4.)

*Articles 43-54 (implementation measures):* These articles discuss how governments and international organizations like UNICEF should work to ensure children are protected in their rights. ■

## SIGNIS World Congress

The SIGNIS World Congress 2014 takes place from February 25 to March 1, 2014 in Rome, Italy on the theme "Media for a Culture of Peace: Creating Images with the New Generation".

The theme "underlines the continuing commitment of SIGNIS to work with children and young people to promote their rights in and through the media," according to SIGNIS President Augustine Loorthusamy. "As a Catholic association of media professionals we want to work with and encourage the new generation to create positive and powerful images that will express their hopes for a global culture of peace."

The 2014 Congress will explore responses to the question: To what extent are Catholic communicators listening to the voices of the young and working with them in creative and practical ways to transform the communications environment?

<http://www.signisworldcongress.net/2013/2/>