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## Strategic communication in women's rights organizations: Tools, challenges and best practices

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS:  
TOOLS, CHALLENGES AND BEST PRACTICES

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Anastasia Kalinina  
University of Northern Iowa

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## ABSTRACT

Despite rapid globalization and tremendous expansion of the number of women's rights organizations, international attention to the issues of women and girls remains rather low. While some women's rights networks and organizations leap to prominence, others do not receive recognition and public support.

I wanted to know why. I interviewed 13 directors and communication managers of women's rights non-governmental organizations to see how they manage communication. I used a convenience sample that included a wide range of geographical locations and sizes of NGOs. The interviews were held via Skype. I conducted a theme analysis of transcribed interviews.

The participants indicated various communication goals, which included increased visibility, higher credibility and the engagement of multiple stakeholders. The leaders felt that although having a communication specialist in an NGO is important, executives must also be engaged in delivering effective communication strategies. Relationships with employees, donors and governments were said to be particularly important. The best practices in communication included truth and honesty, and new ways of community involvement through technology. Among the most cost-efficient types of technology, participants named mobile phones, social media, and blogs. The main communication challenges for women's rights NGOs they identified were those associated with media relations and misuse of communication tools, as well as lack of resources and funding for communication goals. Generally, while some participants were

dissatisfied with current communication strategies, most of them expressed hopeful and optimistic feelings about communication strategies in their NGOs.

Through this thesis, I argue that the relative success of non-governmental organizations for women's rights is not random. I emphasize the impact of strategic communication, particularly via the Internet, on women's rights organizations. Strategic communication is an important public relations and/or marketing tool that allows the organization to enhance its overall strategic positioning and achieve visibility, accountability and sustainable development.

As a feminist activist working for women's NGO and scholar, I believe the results of this study will contribute to the understanding of both women's rights NGOs and the larger social movements in which they exist, in the context of new communication practices, digital activism and information technologies.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of Problem

Women's Human rights are appallingly violated in every country every day. There exists a multitude of women's rights Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs or non-profit organizations) that attempt to address such violations world-wide. I call them "women's rights NGOs" because of their commitment to women's and girls human rights. A large part of these NGOs focus on the elimination of multiple forms of violence against women such as domestic violence, bride-kidnapping, trafficking, custodial violence, sexual violence, and harassment and violence against lesbians (Kristof & WuDunn, 2009). In many countries, practices such as unregistered religious marriages, early marriage, and polygamy are increasingly undermining women's rights and position in the family and society. This is exacerbated by other social phenomena such as the growing feminization of poverty and economic dependence, social acceptance of certain forms of violence, and in many areas, a resurgence of patriarchal practices, which are rendering women and girls more vulnerable to violence, exploitation and destitution (Galey, 1995; Helms, 2003; Sundstrom, 2002). I argue that women's rights organizations must be strengthened in terms of their communication strategies, that is plans of action designed to achieve particular communication goals (Argenti, Howell & Beck, 2005), so that they can enhance their presence on the global human right arena. A number of specific measures to increase efficiency of the communication programs in women's rights NGOs are suggested in my study.

On the one hand, women's rights NGOs are widely considered by many academics as the most important and the fastest growing part of independent civil societies. As such, NGOs work with issues that were rarely addressed before (Papandreou, 1997; Sundstrom, 2002). Scholars often uphold women's NGOs as examples of the success in the development of civil societies in emerging democracies, or as a main ingredient of the entire NGO sector that must be supported by donors (Helms, 2003). Also, over the past decade, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of women's NGOs worldwide (Sundstrom, 2002). This is a sign that female citizens around the globe are becoming more active in public life, and they play important roles as political actors and social problem solvers, and regard themselves as autonomous citizens with diverse interests (I do recognize that more men are also assisting in the cause for women and children).

On the other hand, in many countries, women are not seen as any kind of political force or as a mass base (Sundstrom, 2002). On a multitude of fronts, such as hiring practices, media portrayals, political activity, using information and communication technologies (ICTs), women witness discrimination and blatant gender stereotypes (Kristof & WuDunn, 2009). Women are vastly unequal to men in terms of how they are treated as potential change-makers. Women's NGOs are viewed as a forum for female gossip, or, in worse-case scenarios, as a waste of precious donors' funding that can be used for other purposes instead (Harcourt, 1999).

Being a source of such controversy, women's rights NGOs represent a very interesting source for academic research. Unfortunately, there is not much research on the

successful practices of women's rights NGOs that would help them improve the quality of their efforts and boost their position as change makers and peace builders. I could find no research on the strategies women's NGOs use to enhance their impact and increase public awareness of their actions, or practitioners' advice for successful strategies that could be replicated by women's organizations worldwide.

Despite the recent expansion of the number of women's rights organizations, international attention to their issues remains unevenly distributed. While some women's rights networks and organizations enjoy recognition and respect (Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, UNIFEM, etc.), others remain in obscurity (WomensNet, Mobile for Development, Positively Women). Some groups arouse substantial attention of the public, while others do not. I wanted to know why.

In this study, I conducted a public relations and communication marketing analysis. Specifically, I asked, what communication goals do women's rights organizations want to achieve? What marketing and communication strategies do they utilize to achieve their goals? What online tools do they use for publicity and public awareness? And, what obstacles do they face in delivering their communication strategies?

My assumption for this thesis was that the relative success of non-profit organizations (hereafter called non-governmental organizations, NGOs) for women's rights is not random. In the thesis, I emphasize the impact of strategic communication, which is the public relations and/or marketing tool that allows the organization to enhance its overall strategic positioning (Argenti et al., 2005). I argue that strategic

communication techniques allow organizations to enhance their overall strategic positioning and achieve visibility, accountability and sustainable development.

One of the main reasons why this topic is of special interest to me is that I worked for an NGO for three years, from 2007 to 2010. The NGO I worked for is called Doctors to Children (DTC), and it is based in Saint Petersburg, Russia. Its mission is to protect the rights of at-risk women and families, and provide them with access to quality social, psychological and medical services. This is done by forming policies and public opinion around the issues of at-risk women, advocating for the rights of women, and providing access to high-quality medical, social and psychological care for women and families. In my organization, I was responsible for implementing a project called “Preventing Violence and Discrimination Against Women in St. Petersburg, Russia.” I was the administrator of this project, managing around 15 staff members and 10 volunteers. I also consulted with the PR managers in our organization and often assisted in marketing activities.

### Growth of NGOs and the Internet

In the past 20-30 years, the world has witnessed a growth of the NGO sector in its scale and scope gaining increased importance in society (Clarke, 1998; Fernando & Heston, 1997; Roff, 2004). In fact, NGOs nowadays are engaged in diverse functions, assume an extraordinary variety of organizational forms (Vakil, 1997), and embrace a wide range of activities – they initiate global networks, participate in multilateral political arenas, detect human rights violations, and provide basic health-related and social services (Alger, 1997). However, NGOs need to continue to grow to address the existing

and ever-emerging issues of the modern world (Roff, 2004). One of the most effective ways for NGOs to raise awareness and expand is by using online tools (Shandwick, 2010).

Several researchers and practitioners argue that the Internet and its tools such as social media, blogs and email are necessary for NGOs to grow as they can help an organization gain significant competitive advantages (Bresnahan, 1996; Harcourt, 1999; Luck & Golder, 1996; Reade-Fong & Gorman, 2005). In the world of modern technologies, there are many new ways to create publicity and raise awareness, as well as distribute information on organizational activities online. There is an alternative opinion suggesting that using digital networking tools is not very effective and that midsize organizations should not make efforts to engage in this means of communication with the public (Ogden & Starita, 2009). Such arguments are that digital networking is not cost-effective, and it is not reaching the target audiences.

However, Shandwick (2010) states that NGOs can derive great value from using social media as it makes it easier for their supporters to organize independently. The use of social media opens new channels of communication with stakeholders (Shandwick, 2010). Other researchers concur by stating that social media such as Facebook and Twitter can become platforms for successful, inexpensive issue campaigning and promotion of social causes (Jungherr, 2009; Schultz, 2008). Following this research stream, in the present thesis, I seek to analyze communication strategies, including the use of social media, utilized by NGOs in different continents using first-hand information.



### Lack of Research on NGOs' Communication Strategies

There is a clear lack of research on communication strategies in NGOs. While there are marketing studies on non-profit organizations (e.g., Andreasen & Kotler, 2003; Chew, 2006; Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009; Knox & Gruar, 2007), most researchers have focused on for-profit organizations. Similarly, many researchers have studied the concept of integrated marketing communication, which is the combination of different media to reach the optimal productivity of a communication program (Belch & Belch, 1995), but there is little research on NGOs' use of integrated marketing. It seems surprising that despite the importance given to the concept of integrated marketing communication (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009; Kotler, 1979; Kotler & Levi, 1969), and the recognition that the communication techniques NGOs use should be examined (Andreasen & Kotler, 2003; McLeisch, 1993; Sargeant, Foreman & Liao, 2002), little research is available.

In contrast to mainstream marketing literature addressing the theoretical connection between market orientation and business performance (Kotler, 1979; Kotler & Levi, 1969), in the present study, I draw on real examples relevant to the third sector, which is the sphere of social activity undertaken by NGOs, in contrast to the public sector (government) and private sector (for-profit agencies).

Various business scholars have noted a link between social media and public relations. The new technologies and social networks have been explored by public relations practitioners (Eyrich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008; Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser, & Howes, 2009; Porter, Sweetser, & Chung, 2009). However, when it comes to NGOs, I have found that research is scarce, even though social media can present a useful tool for

the third sector. Due to the often limited monetary resources of NGOs, the cost effectiveness of social media can help address crucial issues, attract the stakeholders and keep a constant contact with them (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009).

### Applying Feminist Theory

As I talk about women's NGOs and making space for women's voices, I rely on feminist approaches and values. As many women around the world do not belong to dominant groups within their cultures, they find themselves in what is called "the muted position" (Friedan, 1963, p. 218). Not having easy access to communication channels possessed by those in the dominant groups, disempowered people tend to use different modes of communication (Ardener, 1975). Feminist communication scholar Cheris Kramarae (1981) applied Ardener's Muted Group Theory to reveal ways in which language and channels of communication are controlled by patriarchal systems and thus reflect the world view of those in control, and do not serve women equally. Intercultural communication scholar, Mark Orbe (1998) further extended the theory to groups marginalized by their race or ethnicity, sex, socioeconomic class, and/or sexual orientation. He noted ways in which marginalized group members "... strategically adopt a communication orientation" for a given situation because of their muted position in the predominant society (p. 19). Oppressed groups can gain voice through creative, flexible communication choices.

### Counterpublic Spheres

If disempowered group members want to talk and be heard, how do they do so?

Nancy Fraser (1996) offers a way to think about how oppositional demands can be made in the face of dominant public discourse. She suggests instead of thinking of the public as a single sphere of society, there is actually a multiplicity of publics that should be recognized. She introduces the term “counterpublics” as an opposition to the dominant public. She calls the communication style of the group in opposition to the dominant public the “counterdiscourse”: “members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourse to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (p. 123).

When NGOs communicate, they are likely engaging in counterpublic discourse as they are a part of a larger social movement protesting the violations of human rights. Rita Felski (1989) argues that there were women’s movements that have “inspired theorists to posit the growth of counterpublic spheres, understood as critical oppositional forces within the society. . . .” (p. 166). I rely on the counterpublic sphere theory in this thesis as it draws attention to “the communicative networks, social institutions, and political and economic structures through which ideologies are produced and disseminated. . . .” (Felski, 1989, p. 9). Felski also names communication as the main determinant of power (p. 9). Counterpublics theory allows one to trace the interactions between communication and organizations, because “the category of the feminist public sphere needs to be understood in terms of a series of cultural strategies which can be effective across a range of levels both outside and inside existing institutional structures. . . .” (p. 171). As I seek

to find the connection between communication and women's NGOs, counterpublics theory is particularly helpful.

The alternative position of the counterpublic helps groups develop new rules of argument and new terms of speaking (Orbe, 1998). United by a particular field of experience that governs their perceptions of communication, counterpublics provide solidarity within opposing groups needed to challenge norms of the dominant group (Butler, 2004). Analyzing the counterpublics theory from a gender point of view, Judith Butler explains why "the capacity to develop a critical relation to these norms presupposes a distance from them, an ability to suspend or defer the need for them" (p. 3). Only then can an "alternative, minority version of sustaining norms or ideals" be developed and promoted (p. 3).

Fraser (1996) argues that in counterpublic societies, the idea of equality is more articulated than in a single public sphere. She suggests that if everybody discussed their needs only in the dominant public sphere, "members of subordinated groups would have no arenas for deliberation among themselves about their needs, objectives, and strategies" and would be less able "to articulate and defend their interests in the comprehensive public sphere" (p. 122-3). In the context of counterpublic theory, multiple publics do not threaten public deliberation, but enrich it. For example, the United Nations NGO Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 met simultaneously with the UN official conference, providing a dialogue and strategically forcing the official conference members to hear about the multiple oppressions of women around the world. The

counterpublic, multiple voices of women at the conference and via the website served the goal of enriching the public discourse (Mater, 2001).

In this study, many participants referred to the importance of letting women speak in their own words and express their experiences in creative ways. Sandra Harding (1995) talks about the same benefits of sharing experiences in one's own words:

For women to name and describe their experiences in "their own terms" is a crucial scientific and epistemological act. Members of marginalized groups must *struggle* to name their own experiences *for* themselves in order to claim the subjectivity, the possibility of historical agency that is given to members of dominant groups at birth. (p. 128)

She also says that "For marginalized people, naming their experience publicly is a cry for survival" (p. 129). Helping to enhance opportunities to be heard is crucial for my study.

### Strategic Essentializing

In this paper, I use the term "women's NGO" for any non-governmental organization that self-identifies as working specifically for the betterment of women and girls in their own countries and/or internationally. I recognize that women's NGOs represent multiple groups and include women who are marginalized and/or oppressed due to their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, poverty, etc. Women around the world face different oppressions and have different needs. That is why women's NGOs are involved in different activities such as providing health care facilities and shelters for victims of abuse, running vocational trainings and micro-credit programs, delivering psychological and social assistance, campaigning for women and girls' rights and similar activities. Women's NGOs' work addresses a vast range of issues, such as the trafficking of women

across borders, gender stereotypes in the mass media, domestic abuse and others (Basu & McGrory, 1995). These groups face certain challenges that are unique to them, because they are seen as “Women’s NGOs,” such as gender inequality, difficulties for women to make their voices heard and the so-called “digital gap,” which is the divide between people with effective access to digital and information technology, and those with very limited or no access to it. Thus, one can consider these organizations with their challenges and strategies as part of a group, even though there are differences within the category of women’s NGOs. I also acknowledge men may work for a women’s NGO.

English Professor Gayatri Spivak (1996) suggested that even though oppressed groups can be denied the language with which to speak, they might choose to speak from the very identity category that has been the basis of their marginalization. This approach is called “strategic essentialism” and refers to a sort of temporary generalization used strategically for the good of the groups that they describe. For instance, the fact that women's organizations have many different agendas makes it difficult for feminists to work for common causes. “Strategic essentialism” refers to the need to temporarily accept an “essentialist” position in order to be able to act. In this thesis, I talk about women and girls as if they are a common group, as well as refer to NGOs for women and girls as if they are a single entity.

Strategic essentialism implies that the group members identify their attributes themselves. Fraser’s (1996) counterpublics theory is based on Spivak’s argument that subordinated groups create counterdiscourses that articulate their identities, needs and interests. What is also important is that whenever the group members define their

essential attributes, they always recognize that this essentialism is artificial and seek to control what it means to be part of that group.

Identities of the group help determine where the group and its people fit within the existing society. When someone is marginalized, they can “provide us with a critical perspective from which we can disclose the complicated workings of ideology and oppression” (Moya, 1997, p. 128). Moya (1997) argues that our identities influence the experiences we have and suggests that even though “people are not *uniformly* determined by any *one* social fact, . . . social facts (such as gender and race) influence people” (p. 132).

Spivak recognizes that strategically essentializing identities can be productive to achieve particular goals, and after achieving these goals, one should consciously question that essentialism. In this thesis, I use essentialism for the purpose of revealing common communication practices for women’s rights NGOs to enhance their reputation and gain wider visibility.

### Importance of the Study

Through this study, I hope to contribute to understanding women’s NGOs in the context of new communication practices, digital activism, and information technologies. Women’s rights organizations are a good representation of NGOs struggling for recognition and acceptance. The findings from this present study should be useful to other types of NGOs which seek to increase their impact and viability by applying the practical advice attained on effective communication strategies.

The study also contributes to the knowledge in non-profit marketing and public relations communication. The main focus of most of the studies in marketing nowadays appears to benefit for-profit organizations, leaving NGOs uninformed about their communication potential. My research, based on the examples of marketing and PR techniques of women's rights NGOs, will help other NGOs realize the importance of communication tools that allow non-governmental organizations to raise their influence locally and internationally. For my study, I did not only solicit staff from NGOs that I deemed successful. For the most part, I did not know about the communication strategies of the NGOs, and I was not sure if the organizations used the Internet at all as a part of the communication activities. The basis of choosing participants was solely the fact that they worked for the NGOs as directors or communication managers.

This research also focuses on available cost-effective technologies that can enrich existing communication tools. Based on my findings, I argue that the new technologies can be efficiently used by NGOs to win the hearts and minds of various groups of stakeholders and raise public awareness of important social issues that often get lost in the flow of information of the modern world.

#### Limitations of the Study

The basic limitation of the data is that it is self-report only. I did not attempt to analyze the websites, Facebook groups, or other strategic communication instruments of the organizations the participants work for. As a preliminary study in this area, I had the interviewees answer my question and then analyzed their personal experiences with NGO



communication. Thus I did not directly assess the effectiveness of social media use by the women's NGOs.

Also, I purposefully only included women's rights NGOs, not taking into consideration all the existing types of NGOs. However, this can serve as an advantage as it contributes research to a needed focus, and it does describe specific issues common to all NGOs. In the study, I interviewed only 13 people who work for 13 different women's NGOs, which can be viewed as not enough to make conclusions. The very fact that I know about the organizations the participants work for shows that the NGOs already have decent communication strategies, which others might learn from. The list of targeted participants does not include representatives across all geographic areas, but several areas are included. The limitations of methodology are further described in the methodology chapter.

I asked the participants not to speak for their NGOs but talk from their own professional experiences. This may be perceived as another limitation of the study, however, I did not want them to feel responsible to speak for their entire NGO. I was soliciting their input as experienced practitioners in the NGO field.

#### Preview of the Study

In the following pages, I analyze existing research on non-profit marketing and the different communication strategies utilized by NGOs. In the literature review, I examine women's rights organizations and the issues on which they focus. I also review communication practices in the non-governmental sphere and the impact of the Internet

on the NGO field with a special focus on new communication tools such as social media and blogging.

In the methodology chapter, I describe interviews with 13 women from women's rights NGOs in nine countries and the qualitative theme analysis method used to examine transcripts. Results show what strategies are the most popular and have proved the most effective. The results are discussed and followed by recommendations for successful communication techniques. I conclude with a discussion of possible implications for theory and practice, and advice for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Two of the most inspirational movements of both the past and the current centuries have been the pursuit of human rights and of women's equality. The concept of full enjoyment of human rights by every individual has become universally recognized. While improvements have been made in several aspects of human rights, women's rights are still often violated throughout the world. Unbearable violations of women's rights take place every day in every country and in countless forms. Rape, exploitation of women and girls, domestic violence, trafficking, sexual harassment, dowry death and other crimes remain a major impediment to the realization of women's rights (UN Women, 2010).

In this chapter, I will first look at the history of NGOs and what their activities are in the modern world. Then I will review the existing research on women's rights NGOs: their history, classification and scope of their activities. After that, I will move on to examine strategic communication in non-governmental organizations. By showing the overall importance of marketing tactics and integrated marketing communication techniques, I will then describe the adoption of marketing strategies by women's rights NGOs. I will focus on the Internet as a cost-effective tool for NGOs and list some challenges women's rights organizations face today that prevent them from taking full advantage of the modern technologies. Finally, I will review the new Internet communication tools called social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) and blogs. In the literature review, I will provide a summary of the up-to-date research on women's rights

NGOs and marketing and communication tools used by NGOs. I already explained the feminist theoretical framework in chapter one, and I will not repeat it in the literature review in chapter two.

### History of Non-Governmental Organizations

In the modern world, NGOs around the globe are proliferating, and there is a significant range of academic literature on this wide-spread phenomenon. Nowadays, NGOs are engaged in a wide range of activities, from delivering basic goods and services such as clean water and health care, to fighting for human rights and women's rights. It was the last couple of decades when the number of NGOs has grown dramatically. The main reason behind such growth is the need for independent and politically neutral players who can provide humanitarian aid to people around the globe (Clarke, 1998). According to Clarke, there are thousands of NGOs that presently operate in both developing and developed countries.

Modern NGOs are especially influential in international forums as they represent the citizens and the civil society (Fernando & Heston, 1997) and use a people-centered vision (Korten, 1990). NGOs have become important opinion-leaders, and they have achieved high visibility in the global arena (Roff, 2004). The history of the twentieth century could not be fully written without recognition of the great role of NGOs (Iriye, 1999).

The studies of NGOs of the previous decades have conventionally described the roles of these organizations simply as the "lobbying of interest groups forced to work through mediators (i.e., states or international institutions) in their efforts to realize

organizational objectives and influence global politics” (Warkentin & Mingst, 2000, p. 238). However, recent works on NGOs have placed these organizations on a higher level of international influence. For example, Alger (1997), in his article “Transnational social movements, world politics and global governance,” places NGOs’ functions into five categories of activities: stimulating inter-state cooperation, activating public participation, creating global networks and participating in the multilateral political arenas (Alger, 1997). Heins (2008) sees the role of NGOs as moral forces that fight the harms to humanity, activate people, and create standards.

Over the past few decades, NGOs have shown a significant comparative advantage over governments in fulfilling certain service-related tasks. While addressing issues that were once exclusively the domain of governments, NGOs became a competent partner to governments, intergovernmental agencies, multilateral organizations and businesses. They also served as governmental watchdog agencies. NGOs have shown functional effectiveness and cost efficiency in facing challenges such as the struggles of stateless people victimized by war and violations of human rights policies. They have also proved to be highly reliable in providing technical support for the projects that aim to improve the infrastructure in developing countries. For many of the emerging economies, they have become a mainstay for economic growth as they support micro-credit loan programs and increasingly facilitate the distribution of goods and services for intergovernmental organizations and for some governments (Ward, 2007).

NGOs can also play an essential role in shaping international and regional socioeconomic agendas, in detecting human rights violations, in providing basic health

services, in starting disarmament initiatives, and in supporting sustainable development (Harcourt, 1999; Helms, 2003). International NGOs are characterized as diffusers of world culture who create new global models that are later adopted by other actors (Boli & Thomas, 1999). Today, NGOs continue to “provide a human touch in a world that risks being depersonalized” (Ward, 2007, p. 216).

### Women’s NGOs

Given a generally disparaging attitude towards “women’s talk,” the presence of women in NGO activities is sometimes viewed as “irrelevant” (Helms, 2003, p. 16). I often meet people – both NGO professionals and men and women beyond my professional circle – who disapprove of my choice of women’s rights NGOs as a topic for research. Their argument is that women as a group are not representative and are unimportant. In many countries, women’s NGOs make valuable efforts to increase female participation in politics and economics, being permanently derided in gendered terms: they are portrayed as forums for female gossip inflating the importance of otherwise “undeserving” women through foreign funding and promotional tools (Helms, 2003).

Oftentimes, women’s NGOs in developing countries are viewed as pure chimera, the cradle of idleness and “pocketing foreign money” (Helms, 2003, p. 24). Public statements of women activists in these communities are often dismissed as incompetent and out of place. Women are still often mocked for acting within the public, traditionally male sphere on important political issues, whether or not they have the right “qualifications” (Helms, 2003). The reason behind such an attitude is that the women involved in NGOs do not hold governmental positions, academic posts, nor play roles of

authority normally associated with and valued by male public actors. Another reason is the general degradation of women worldwide. Although some male NGO leaders are also dismissed in such communities and males do lead some NGOs for women's concerns, they are not typically neglected in gendered terms as are women (Helms, 2003).

One of my goals in this research is to challenge outdated beliefs about women's rights NGOs. In this study, I show the importance of women joining forces in unification of the civil society groups and disparate individuals, as well as filling political, regional, demographic and socio-economic gaps between contributors to peace-building. As Helms (2003) notes in her study of women as agents of ethnic reconciliation, women are known for being able to rise above the cultural differences and solve social problems. The actions women are taking in the humanitarian field are praised, especially by donors, as a step toward the fuller gender equality and confirmation of important role women play in the life of the society (Helms, 2003). The typical explanation for why women play the role of peace-builders and conflict-mediators is based on gender stereotyping, according to which women are "naturally" more interested in peace, more inclined to engage in dialogue, more tolerant, and able to compromise (Papandreou, 1997; Ruddick, 1989).

Undoubtedly, joining together with a common agenda enables women to organize nationally and globally and speak about policy and rights issues for women and girls (Baker, 2002). As women's experiences are context-specific and diverse, "female solidarity is essential in confronting and challenging a variety of power structures, which otherwise can benefit from 'maximum differentiation' amongst marginalized groups"

(Goetz, 1991, p. 138). The history of women's NGOs can help to trace the development of women uniting to achieve social goals and engage in humanitarian actions.

### History of Women's NGOs

The first international women's organizations were founded hundreds of years ago (Galey, 1995). The modern epoch of women's NGO development began with the founding of a female-led charity by a Swiss woman in 1868. Since that time, the first wave of international women's NGOs has been involved in shaping governmental policies on social justice and good governance and sending their delegates to the League of Nations, and then to the United Nations (UN). Women from trade unions joined those from women's organizations to set up a Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations in Geneva. These women, together with women from the Inter-American Commission of Women of the Pan-American Union, raised issues of women and girls in the United Nations Charter in 1945 and in the UN Commission in 1947 (Galey, 1995).

The first organizations were formally structured with hierarchical posts and procedures. The second wave of women's organizations, which appeared in the 1970s, favored coalitions and more egalitarian networks. The second-wavers focused on helping the vulnerable groups of the community (Basu & McGrory, 1995). There appeared to be two main types of women's NGOs: the action-research centers, which gathered international reports on women and girls, and the groups that worked on changing how women thought and acted (Tinker, 1999). Both tried to include women's issues in the agendas of donors and foundations.



The UN Fund for women, now called UNIFEM, was created at that time to support grassroots women's groups. In 1975, the important International Women's Year Conference took place in Mexico, uniting worldwide women's efforts to increase awareness about women and girls' situation. During the decade of 1970-1980, the amount of research on women and girls soared around the world. It had a huge impact on the policies and programs of donor agencies and international NGOs. This also resulted in a drastic increase of new women's organizations designed to work with disadvantaged women. The excitement of the new research on women and girls encouraged many international professional associations to hold conferences and panels for women. Many feminist scholars were invited to attend. During these discussions, a variety of initiatives for women was created. Among them were the Women's World Banking, an NGO that offered credit for women, and an Association of Women in Development, which united female scholars and activists around the world (Tinker, 1999).

The Copenhagen conference held in 1980 is considered to be the first meeting where the women's studies academic movement appeared in the context of activists' NGOs. At the same time, numerous NGOs kept appearing that helped poor women get vocational training and earn money, access to health and family-planning clinics, and improve their housing situation. Women and girls were thus included in all aspects of the development programs. There is still a debate about the success of these programs among the practitioners and scholars (Kabeer, 1994; Tinker, 1999). However, all agree with the empowering effect of such initiatives.

It is argued that participation in the groups outside of the patriarchal family “is in itself a positive and eye-opening move for many women, who realize that their problems are shared by many” (Tinker, 1999, p. 96). This is how topics of domestic violence and rape became openly addressed and discussed. The grassroots groups promoted participation and involvement, which is a great step towards empowerment.

According to Basu and McGrory (1995), global feminism rests on conflicting perspectives found among women’s NGOs. In the 1990s, major women’s conferences took place in different parts of the world raising a wide range of issues in different contexts. Since the beginning of the UN Decade for Women (1975-85), even more activist groups have emerged, which has created discussions around diverse issues of women and girls (Basu & McGrory, 1995, p. 71). The great achievements of many of them still exist and prove that organized women can be effective in their activities. They have managed to be successful both in their communities, lobbying governments, and in the international arena, changing global policies. At the Fourth World Conference on Women that took place in Beijing in 1995, the UN Platform for Action was passed. It was an agenda for female empowerment that aimed at removing the obstacles to women’s active participation in economic, social, cultural and political spheres. The platform outlined 10 areas for human rights improvements and benchmarks to assess improvement. It provided a way to measure progress and keep countries accountable.

The ten-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action happened in March 2005. Member States reaffirmed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and pledged to ensure their full and accelerated implementation. The outcome identified persistent

gaps and challenges and provided new recommendations for action to ensure full implementation of the commitments made in Beijing in 1995. For a full report of the review, please see UN Women (2010).

In March 2010, the Commission on the Status of Women held a fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. During the review the member states, representatives of NGOs and United Nations shared their experiences and good practices. Even though it was mentioned that few obstacles remain and new challenges appear, still the results continue to stay impressive. For a full report of the review, please see UN Women (2010).

Today, although political and economic processes are still mostly male-dominant, women's voices are increasingly more discernible. Almost half of the leaders of NGOs worldwide are now women (Sundstrom, 2002). They are responsible for influencing the way women and girls are perceived and are helping them attain equality and sustainable development. The changes of old habits in traditional societies cause the value shifts that women need to obtain power and influence. The expanding global civil society and the newest communication technologies that will be discussed later in this review are now giving greater opportunities for women and girls to mold their own future.

#### Scope of Activities of Women's Human Rights NGOs

The existing research and historical writings show that women's human rights NGOs have played a key part in the recent recognition of women's human rights as a priority concern for the international community (Bunch & Frost, 2000; Cook, 1994; Meyer & Prugl, 1999). They successfully attract global attention to the low status of

women's human rights in the international system of rights protection (Bunch & Frost, 2000; Cook, 1994). They also campaign for deepening the gender analysis and introducing new standards to protect women and girls (Meyer & Prugl, 1999).

The research on women's rights organizations is scanty. Most of the scholars review what women's NGOs' goals are, how they can be achieved, and how they are connected with the ideas of empowerment. For example, Beri and Stuart (1996) note that in women's NGOs, "participation leads to empowerment and the proof of empowerment comes from exercising collective strength" (p. 29). They also state that participatory communication skills can lead to such empowerment as they strengthen women's voices. Their research on women in Bangladesh, for example, shows that for the organization to succeed, it needs to communicate for itself. Women cannot reach their goals without communication skills and tools, and raising public awareness (Beri & Stuart, 1996).

Another mission of women's rights NGOs, besides empowerment, is holding the state accountable for violations by non-state actors such as corporations and/or individuals (Meyer & Prugl, 1999). Many local women's rights NGOs focus exclusively on reporting abuses. In the modern world of advanced technologies, NGOs can use different communication tools in their reporting, from the Internet to mobile technologies.

Most abuses of women's fundamental rights are observed in the private sphere (Cook, 1994). Most of the violations are domestic violence, unequal marital rights, lack of freedom in the sexual and reproductive choices, restricted access to property, and the like (Cook, 1994). NGOs are deeply frustrated by the states' failures to take action,

particularly on key legislation to criminalize acts of violence against women, so NGOs feel the urge to push governments in the right direction (Cook, 1994).

Apart from training officials and lobbying their ideas, NGOs can provide a legal framework for the overall development of the critical standard of governmental "due diligence," by which a state should be responsible for violations committed by others under its jurisdiction (Meyer & Prugl, 1999). Researchers argue that women's rights NGOs must play an important role in documenting gendered information and delivering it to global entities such as the United Nations, and its Women's Convention adopted in by the UN General Assembly (Meyer & Prugl, 1999).

Another example of the role NGOs can play in the protection of human rights is making reports to the UN (Meyer & Prugl, 1999). The reporting process can serve as an important empowerment tool because it allows NGOs to monitor governmental compliance with the Women's Convention and thus fight for women's rights (Meyer & Prugl, 1999). In fact, the reporting process has served as an empowerment tool for lots of women. For example, in Bangladesh, where women's rights have systematically been violated, the reporting process became an important tool in enhancing women's participation in the enforcement of the Convention (Meyer & Prugl, 1999).

Through this review, I suggest women's rights NGOs should be engaged in a wide array of political, social, material and ideological activities that have the potential to empower women and shape public opinions as well as create a forum for women to share the most relevant issues.

Sadly, what has inhibited the development of NGOs around the globe during the last ten years is a reduction in their funding (UK Gender and Development Network, 2008). This creates obstacles to the pursuit of long-term women's empowerment objectives and excludes the important areas of activities that fall outside the donor agenda (Bunch & Frost, 2000). Sufficient resources need to be invested in the third sector to ensure the implementation of international programs of gender equality. Securing sufficient budgets for women's rights work takes a lot of effort and requires employing specific communication strategies to increase public awareness of the third sector activities.

#### Strategic Communication in Women's Rights NGOs

The number of NGOs in itself is not a vehicle to achieve a democratic society. More important than the number of NGOs is their character, strengths and communication capacities (Tvedt, 1994). In the existing literature, researchers have paid a great deal of attention to the different types and activities of NGOs. However, what they have often downplayed are the communication activities of these organizations, without which NGOs cannot keep the general public informed on current developments. A way for civic associations to become global is using a wide scope of different networking and communication tools. New technologies, social media networks and electronic mass media (e.g., blogging) allow civic groups to gather and spread information that is closely linked to their causes. It can happen instantaneously from nearly any location around the globe.

Heins (2008) states that communication is the “linchpin of fabricating norms: transitional justice, landmines, biodiversity, global warming, trade and intellectual property, and sanctions, and embargoes” (Heins, 2008, p. 116). He also emphasizes the “struggle over recognition” (Heins, 2008, p. 119) among NGOs to present a picture of them as independent, proactive, helpful agents that fulfill the aspirations of international society. Heins claims, that in promoting themselves, NGOs should underline their uniqueness and the differences from politicians or states. For example, many humanitarian relief NGOs are politically neutral and refuse to take sides in conflicts. Also, they are driven by a moral purpose. These organizations strive to reach the ethic of “other regarding” (Hoffman & Bertels, 2010, p. 57), which is a focus on the well-being of others.

Every day individuals experience the importance of communication in their personal and professional activities: the way one is perceived, the way one gives back to the community, the way one voices opinions. It is all about communication. Just like individuals need communication to let other people know about them, organizations need communication to make their stakeholders and the general public aware of what they are doing.

Balmer and Gray (2000) view corporate communication as the process through which stakeholders perceive an organization’s image and reputation. The short and comprehensive definition for the business world is proposed by Argenti et al. (2005), who state that strategic communication is “the tool that allows the organization to enhance its overall strategic positioning” (p. 37). They also argue that the structure of the

communication strategies depends on the size of the organization. They state that as an organization grows in size and complexity, “there is an increased need for a clear communication strategy as the organization has to influence a rapidly expanding and diverse array of stakeholders” (Argenti et al., 2005).

Balmer and Gray (2000) state that the traditional business models have never regarded corporate identity and corporate communication as strategic tools. Instead, they viewed corporate communication as a functional instrument (Balmer & Gray, 2000). However, in contemporary business culture, corporate communication is seen as a process consisting of three phases – “primary,” “secondary,” and “third” (p. 258). According to Balmer and Gray, “primary” communication must “present a positive image of the company and set the stage for a strong reputation” (2000, p. 258); “secondary” communication “should be designed to support and reinforce primary communication” (2000, p. 258); and “third” communication “should be positive and result in a superior reputation if the other two stages of corporate communication are properly conceived” (2000, p. 258).

There are many reasons to view communication strategies as an important tool for women’s rights NGO’s. The very nature of NGO advocacy necessitates communication and sharing. To attract clients to use the services of the organization and to spread the word about its activities, there is a need for extensive networking. Such need usually calls for communication with different stakeholders and thus requires well-organized communication strategies to guarantee that the intended messages are received with coherence to the mission of an NGO by the right parties at the right time. For many



voluntary, campaign, and grass-root based women's organizations, it would be difficult to accomplish their missions without regular communication with the multiple networks of people and groups that share the organization's visions. Also, in order to attract donations and mentors, women's organizations should be able to communicate about their values and their actions to donors and sponsors. Separate communication strategies must be in place for beneficiaries, governments, local communities, etc., as all sorts of audiences might be interested in the work of the organization (Courtney, 2002; Heins, 2008; Hoffman & Bertels, 2010).

As an employee of a women's rights NGO, I have found that positive feedback from the community and an adequate reaction from the government are only possible through a well thought-out communication strategies. The strategies must be considered with the appropriate modern techniques and approaches that can allow non-profit organizations to gain access to a wide variety of audiences through suitable appeals and communication channels.

### The Importance of Marketing in Non-Governmental Organizations

Recently, many non-profit organizations have begun to model business-like strategies used in the for-profit sector (Goerke, 2003). The reason for this change is quite simple. Non-governmental organizations, and women's NGOs in particular, are challenged with market pressures that are usually associated with for-profit companies (Andreasen & Kotler, 2003, p. 117). Among these pressures are the need to earn money to fulfill their mission and the competition for funding (Alexander & Weiner, 1998, p. 228). One of the marketing tools and techniques recognized by scholars as particularly

critical is the marketing concept that advocates an understanding of the customer (Day, 1994).

Although for many people, especially those from non-governmental organizations, marketing may seem purely a for-profit tool, Kotler and Levy (1969) state that marketing plays a crucial part in the functioning of NGOs. The authors believe that all organizations use marketing strategies whether they know about them or not (Kotler & Levy, 1969). Therefore, it would be better if there was a decent understanding of marketing among NGOs. Furthermore, NGOs experience the same problems as the marketplace (Kotler, 1979), where the competition is fierce, the customer loyalty declines and the costs keep rising. Taking these indicators into account, Kotler suggests that marketing has a lot to offer to the third sector in order for it to survive and effectively fulfill its humanitarian missions (Kotler, 1979, p. 44). What can also be used in NGOs is the so-called integrated marketing concept, in which different communication tools are implemented to create a single, strategically appropriate marketing effort to maximize customer response (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1992; Tynan, 1994).

The focus on adoption of integrated marketing and communication strategies to the NGO sector has been addressed by Kotler and Levy (1969), Kotler and Zaltman (1971), and Shapiro (1974). The emphasis of the authors on the application of communication techniques to NGOs suggests a change in how marketing and strategic communication are viewed. The authors promote the advantages of marketing and communication tools in the NGO field, stressing the need for careful strategic planning (Andreasen & Kotler, 2003).

Kotler (1979) states that the adoption of marketing and communication strategies was very slow for the non-profit sector and human rights organizations. Even when it has been transferred to the non-commercial field, the term “marketing” was still used to mean primarily just a promotion without much understanding of the techniques. During the last two decades, however, NGOs have gradually started to introduce marketing and strategic communication to their activities, with the mature understanding that it can help them achieve their missions (Bendapudi, Singh & Bendapudi, 1996).

A set of guidelines for strategic marketing and communication designed specifically for NGOs has been created by Andreasen and Kotler (2003). These recommendations were made on the basis of traditional marketing approaches and principles accommodated to the needs of the third sector. Among their recommendations for strategic communication for NGOs, Andreasen and Kotler (2003) stress the importance of the adoption of a special mind frame, called “customer-centered” attitudes, that promotes listening to the customers’ wishes, demands and worldviews, as opposed to an “organization-centered” attitude (p. 49). A “customer-centered” philosophy implies putting the beneficiary in the centre of all organization’s activities. The authors also emphasize an important role of market research in assisting to analyze the needs of the beneficiaries to satisfy their various needs and ambitions.

#### The Adoption of Marketing by Women’s Rights Organizations

In an ever-expanding marketplace, many women’s rights organizations are reconsidering how they operate. As part of their growing professional perspective, these NGOs are moving from an “organization-centered” mindset to a “consumer-centered”

behavior (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009, p. 275). While adopting the concepts and principles of strategic marketing and communication, women's rights organizations have gained much understanding of marketing techniques through the cooperation with businesses (Knox & Gruar, 2007, p. 117). Still, the marketing strategies of non-profits differ from commercial organizations in several important ways (Chew, 2006; Knox & Gruar, 2007). For instance, NGOs usually pursue nonfinancial marketing goals and they typically "market for social change" (Knox & Gruar, 2007, p. 121). In the case of women's organizations, they are campaigning for women's rights and women's equality. Thus, they may attract more public attention, both favorable and unfavorable (Knox & Gruar, 2007). In contrast to commercial enterprises, NGO marketing is contingent upon a wider range of various stakeholders (Knox & Gruar, 2007). Also, influential stakeholders may have complex relationships with NGOs and be involved in developing the non-profits' marketing strategies (Chew, 2006; Knox & Gruar, 2007).

Women's rights organizations are growing progressively more aware that "simply having a *good cause* ... will never guarantee buy-in from a target market, any more than having a *great product* will guarantee buy-in from commercial markets" (Hill, 2006, p. 59). Hence, developing an integrated marketing plan, within which the communication program is located, has become essential for most women's rights organizations in achieving their long-term goals (Valentine & Powers, 2006).

A number of marketing and communication strategies can be implemented in women's organizations to increase the effectiveness in achieving their missions. Such strategies include identification of interested supporters (market segmentation), building a

positive image to attract the supporters (product positioning), development of relevant communication messages (advertising), and communicating with them through the right channels (place) (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009).

It appears, however, that the competitive advantages that can be achieved from the various marketing and communication techniques are not implemented as successfully in NGOs as they could be (Bruce, 1995). Among the factors that impede smooth adoption of marketing tools by NGOs are multiple stakeholders and the non-commercial objectives of these organizations (Bruce, 1995), as well as a competitive-collaborative relationship with other NGOs, and ever increasing financial pressures (Gallagher & Weinberg, 1991). Such factors can lead to the disregard of marketing by NGOs.

As Courtney (2002) states in his research, in NGOs, managers must deal with the needs of different groups of stakeholders, “whose interests are often in conflict with each other. The third sector usually has to satisfy various groups of interested parties such as trustees, founders, sponsors, customers, staff, media, local community, volunteers, etc.” (p. 114). However, despite the obvious need to embrace the ever-growing community of stakeholders and differentiate them according to their characteristics and demands, NGOs continue to disregard the importance of the “customer-oriented” model. Instead of following the marketing concept and analyzing what the market actually wants, as well as addressing the needs of different stakeholders (Gonzalez, Vijande & Casielles, 2002), many women’s rights organizations still engage in the “organization-centered” marketing activities and may falsely believe that the market needs their products or services

(Andreasen & Kotler, 2003, p. 136). Along the same line, other researchers also agree with the idea of NGOs needing to develop a market orientation to increase their efficiency and recognition (Kara, Spillan & DeShields, 2004; Macedo & Pinho, 2006; Padanyi & Gainer, 2004; Sargeant et al., 2002).

### Internet as an Effective Communication Tool

#### for Women's Rights Organizations

One of the advancements of modern communication practices is the use of technology that allows people to be more connected and aware of each other than ever before. Globalization has inextricably linked all the global stakeholders. With the help of new information technologies, women's rights NGOs can link with each other within and across nations and exchange information and resources with less expense (Reade-Fong & Gorman, 2005). Local groups now have the opportunities to be a part of national and international networks and improve their strategic institution-building.

The revolutionary opportunities of electronic communication have been capturing the attention, imagination and energy of the world for the two last decades. The global women's movement is no exception. Worldwide, women's organizations are using information and communications technologies (ICTs) to communicate among distant networks, participate in policy debates and voice new perspectives (Heins, 2008). Electronic communications are facilitating women's networking and advocacy in ways never possible before. For many women and women's organizations, taking hold of new technologies means a drastic change in how they live. Facing a gender gap in technology, permanent stereotypes, policies that favor commercial sectors over community

networking, and limited resources, many women have responded with practical solutions and policy advocacy (Harcourt, 1999).

Electronic communication, such as email and the Internet, became famous among women's organizations during their preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women and NGO Forum that happened in 1995 in Beijing (Harcourt, 1999). The NGO Forum took place when a large number of women's NGOs entered the electronic arena and started to regularly use the new tools. Women's NGOs wished to make their concerns heard around the world and have as many women participating in the Conference as possible (Harcourt, 1999). Electronic communication helped turn this into a reality. Also, women who met on-line found an immediate network in Beijing. Thus, newly formed coalitions planned events for the NGO Forum with partners around the world. After that, networks of women's organizations were linking by electronic mail, while others began to distribute their newsletters electronically (Harcourt, 1999).

Since then, the women's organizations that became sophisticated Internet users have been reaping huge benefits (Oehler, 1998). In the challenging environment where the boundaries between for-profit organizations and NGOs are blurring (Clutterbuck & Dearlove, 1996), scholars like Bresnahan (1996) and McLeish (1993) agree that the Internet is necessary for NGOs to survive as it can help gain significant competitive advantages (Bresnahan, 1996). Scholars note that in the world of information overload, stakeholders expect a very high quality of presentation and communication from NGOs (Luck & Golder, 1996).

Yet, there seems to be no research on electronic communication strategies used by women's rights NGOs, and there are few studies on Internet strategies in other types of NGOs. In one of the studies I found to be the most comprehensive, the authors analyze the benefits, perceptions and experiences of the Internet within environmental NGOs in Scotland (Illingworth, Williams & Burnett, 2002). Alongside the environmental organizations, the authors touch on the activities of women's organizations, noticing that that in recent years the number of web sites established by women's rights NGOs has rapidly increased (Illingworth et al., 2002). They also state that traditionally NGOs have been using a variety of communication tools such as mailings, newsletters, and press releases (Illingworth et al., 2002). The authors argue that "the cost of maintaining the existing range of traditional formats creates both an interest in and a worry about new non-traditional Internet formats" (Illingworth et al., 2002, p. 288). For their research, they surveyed 50 environmental organizations in Scotland to see whether the size of the organization and the frequency of Internet use defined the perceptions and beliefs of environmental Scottish NGOs and whether these factors also determine the costs and benefits experienced by Internet users. The researchers found that independent of size or the frequency of use, organizations view the Internet as a cost-effective way to market their NGOs and raise awareness. Almost all organizations within the sample showed that the Internet is a low cost and high benefit marketing solution.

From Illingworth et al. (2002), an important conclusion can be drawn that the Internet is useful to different types of NGOs, and any modest investments in Internet activities will pay significant dividends. This is a topic of many controversial discussions



in both the academic and the professional fields. Cordingley (1998) noticed that a lot of NGOs would like to take advantage of new technologies like the Internet and social media; however, NGOs cannot afford to make expensive mistakes (Cordingley, 1998). As a result, there is a “wariness of incurring costs without direct benefits” (Watson, 1998, p. 71).

With minimal costs, Johnson (1998) and the National Council for Voluntary Organizations (NCVO) found that with the help of the Internet, NGOs can improve communication, keep the staff updated and minimize costs associated with their transportation, as well as provide innovative fundraising and campaigning (Johnson, 1998; NCVO & BT, 1997). Besides these benefits, Johnson (1998) believes that NGOs can use the Internet for recruiting volunteers and staff, as well as research, publicity and finding supporters. Overall, the Internet proved to be a reasonably affordable way to promote the organization and attract the stakeholders.

### Social Media and Public Relations

By the definition of Harlow (1976), “public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and co-operation between an organization and its publics” (p. 36). Scholars have noted that social media and digital media (electronic media that work on digital codes) can offer various opportunities for public relations practitioners to communicate with the public and adopt new technologies. The advanced technologies have been explored by many public relations practitioners (Eyrich et al., 2008; Lariscy et al., 2009; Porter et al., 2009). Researchers, too, have noted the benefits of having NGO

public relations practitioners understand how to use social media due to their often-limited monetary resources (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Waters et al., 2009).

The notion of Web 2.0 refers to a supposed second generation of internet-based services, such as social networking sites, that emphasize online collaboration and sharing among users. New elements of Web 2.0 such as blogs, wikis, forums, and social networks, allow practitioners to share information and raise discussions with publics and within organizations, as well as promote diversity, individuality and freedom of expression. According to different scholars, social media promote and humanize two-way communication as they enable organizations to talk with their stakeholders and allow stakeholders to talk back (Kelleher & Miller, 2006; Scoble & Israel, 2006).

PR practitioners in NGOs should also recognize that social media are based on consumer-generated content (Owyang & Toll, 2007). Organizational members and public co-create the content. Wright and Hinson have suggested for PR practitioners to incorporate social media in their communication strategies. Scholars have argued that “the potential impact of blogs on public relations and corporate communications is phenomenal” (Wright & Hinson, 2008, p. 4).

#### New Internet Communication Tools

Relatively inexpensive communication media, such as email, blogs and social media, make it easier for women to connect, train, research and share thoughts and information. The use of social networking and social media in the NGO sector “has exploded in the past few years, spurred by successful, widely profiled social media initiatives by organizations like Save Darfur and charity: water” [*sic*] (Ogden & Starita,

2009, p. 12). U. S. President Obama's campaign that effectively used social technologies was another push for the third sector to take social technologies seriously and start using it for their campaigns (Ogden & Starita, 2009). Since their introduction, social media such as LinkedIn, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and the like have engaged millions of users, many of whom have started to use the services on a daily bases. Social networks are increasingly attracting the attention of academic and marketing researchers who are captivated by their affordances and scale (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). A growing body of scholars addresses different issues about using social networks in different aspects of life. There are studies on the ways in which self-identity is shaped in social media in regard to gender (Geidner, Flook, & Bell, 2007; Hjorth & Kim, 2005), ethnicity (Gajjala, 2007) and religion (Nyland & Near, 2007). Drawing on content analysis, Byrne (2010) looked at civic engagement in forums on one of the social media websites and found that online communication is affected by the issues offline activists are facing. Humphreys (2007) used observation data and interviews to examine early adopters of one of the mobile social network services. She investigated the ways in which networked communication is changing offline social geography. Collectively, these works show how important the role of social media is in altering everyday practices of people in 2000s. It blends the online and offline environments and is used permanently in both personal and professional lives (Ogden & Starita, 2009).

Social networks have become a powerful tool for marketing activities, first in for-profit organizations and then in NGOs (Ogden & Starita, 2009). The rapid evolution of the web and digital media in recent years opens new communication channels and forces

marketers to take their messages to the social media. An interesting research study is presented by Danah Boyd and Nicole Ellison (2007), who describe features of social technologies for NGOs, offer definitions for SNSs (social network sites), describe the history of such sites and discuss key changes and developments in social media for NGOs. There is not much research on the social media in the NGO field among academics, however. The most relevant information about social networking, media and technologies for NGOs can be found in famous NGO blogs such as those of Beth Kanter (<http://beth.typepad.com>), Katya Andresen (<http://www.nonprofitmarketingblog.com>), Nancy Schwartz (<http://gettingattention.org>), Kivi Leroux Miller (<http://www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com>) and others. They provide the constantly updated information about NGO marketing research, theory and practice, and share interesting news and links.

In 2010, there were two studies about the adoption of social media in NGOs, which seem to provide contradictory conclusions. One of them shows a lack of effectiveness of NGOs using social media, and the other concludes that NGOs they had studied were effective (Ogden & Starita, 2009) and that social media are useful and provide some strategic ways for NGOs to move forward. Weber Shandwick (2010), in his survey of 200 NGO executives, examines how organizations use social media and what value they derive from it. Eighty three percent of the executives say they understand that social media makes it easier for supporters to organize independently (Shandwick, 2010). Most executives also agree that social media affects the way they communicate with the general public, but not narrower categories of stakeholders (Shandwick, 2010).

Philanthropy Action concluded from its survey that social media is not very effective and that midsize organizations should not waste time or effort trying to pursue the social media efforts (Ogden & Starita, 2009). Such differences in the results of two studies can be explained by the fact that it is crucial for the NGO not only to use social media but to know how to do it effectively. The researchers in both studies surveyed similar types of NGOs – mid-sized advocacy organizations. However, the very fact of using the social media does not imply the organization will be successful. It is likely that the success of NGOs in one of the studies can be attributed to the efficient communication strategy that was in place.

In his article, “The DigiActive Guide to Facebook for Social Activism,” author Dan Schultz (2008) argues that services such as Facebook have also become a forum to share interesting projects, ideas and tools, promote social causes, identify allies, and search through grassroots organizations to find inspiration. He outlines the advantages of using social media, Facebook in particular, to attain communication goals in the NGO campaigns. Schultz (2008) states that there are no costs involved for creating a group and it takes only several minutes. It does not take long to spread the information on the new group either – within minutes, the information can reach thousands of people who are subscribed to one’s “newsfeed” and who decide to send the message further to their networks. The tools on Facebook are user-friendly and allow anyone to quickly upload texts, photos and videos instantaneously as well as trace friends’ actions in real time. Every member of the group can start a new discussion as well as add to the existing one. The content is lively and interactive allowing everybody to contribute to it. Facebook is

- popular enough to ensure that if the creator of the group regularly takes actions to update the group with interesting and relevant content, the group can attract thousands of people at every given moment.

Schultz (2008) also outlines some disadvantages of using Facebook. The information on the website is said to be disorganized, which makes it very difficult for users to follow every organization or project they are interested in. The size of the group on Facebook does not necessarily indicate genuine interest. Another disadvantage is that the portal was not designed specifically for activists or NGO workers; hence there are no specific functions for campaigning and recruiting new activists. Social media is not popular everywhere in the world. It is hardly used in the developing countries. Also, there are some generational issues – younger generations tend to be more comfortable using the technology. Overall, Schultz (2008) concludes that despite minor drawbacks, Facebook activism is a powerful tool for NGO activists and provides comprehensive guidelines to organize campaigns and promote social causes.

The same report can be found on the DigiActive website regarding Twitter activism. Twitter is a microblogging service that allows users to publish short messages on a personalized news feed (Jungherr, 2009). In the age of smart phones and information overload, this immediate distribution of personalized news is very powerful. Jungherr (2009) shows the benefits that Twitter can provide for NGOs and/or digital activists. The report begins with the introduction to the platform and useful terminology and then demonstrates five uses of Twitter for activists, each illustrated by a case study. Among the great benefits for NGOs, the authors of the report list attracting the attention of

traditional media outlets. When media ignores the stories and causes of NGOs, a good way to put pressure on companies and governments is to use Twitter. The platform helps coordinate collective actions as it shows real-time updates and is accessible by the mobile phone. The authors also emphasize the crowdsourcing potential of the social media.

Crowdsourcing means actively engaging interested volunteers who offer their expertise and opinions in the social issues and problems (Jungherr, 2009). Jungherr (2009) concludes that Twitter can strengthen the communication strategies of NGO activists, be they individuals or groups. Twitter is more than a mere “marketing soapbox” (Jungherr, 2009, p. 20). Twitter represents a tool for information distribution that can be used for social change. Jungherr (2009) is also convinced that behind Twitter lies the larger phenomenon, “microblogging,” which is a web service that allows the subscriber to broadcast short messages to other subscribers of the service (Junherr, 2009) and that it will remain an important part of online communication for years to come. He also believes that different social media platforms should be used together to achieve the best communication results for NGOs and political activists. Jungherr (2009) states that Twitter should not be used as an isolated channel. Its real power lies in the combination of this service with more established social media channels like YouTube, Facebook or blogs.

Bloggging is another recent source of curiosity among academics. Reports on how many people read blogs are different (Comscore, 2005; Rainie 2005), but scholars emphasize its growing importance for businesses to promote their products, services and brands (Comscore, 2005). Definitions of blogs vary, but most commonly they are defined

as frequently updated webpages with archived posts in reverse-chronological order (Nardi, Schiano & Gumbrecht, 2004), and modified webpages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004). Blogs have become tremendously popular over the last few years. Wright (2006) notes that blogs are now, “so hot that some mainstream TV news reporters are quoting from the more popular blogs on the air” (p. 2). It is also noted by Wright and Horton that blogging can be successfully used in marketing. Horton (2003) argues that successful marketing through blogs creates a community of interested readers who become involved in the lifestyle of a product or service and that blogging initiates interactive communication using low-cost self-publishing. Other scholars also examine how businesses use blogs as tools to improve customer engagement in the creation and delivery of their marketing messages (Hsu & Lin, 2007; Singh, Veron-Jackson & Cullinane, 2008).

### Challenges for Women

#### In Developing Countries to Use the Internet as a Communication Tool

Despite the significant progress in information and communication technologies (ICTs), women in advancing countries still experience obstacles to online networking such as the cost of equipment and a lack of training (Harcourt, 1999). The cost of getting connected is believed to be a main barrier to the adoption of communication technologies in these countries (Aitkin, 2005). Due to women's overall lower social, economic and political status in the developing countries, the barrier of cost appears to be more pronounced (Harcourt, 1999). Language could also be an obstacle as most training



materials, conferences, journals and magazines, and software are in the English language (Aitkin, 2005).

Although there has been progress as cited above, women's rights organizations in developing countries are overall information-poor (Harcourt, 1999). Even though the situation is starting to get better, there is very often a lack of basic understanding of ICTs, as well as a lack of telephone lines, proper training, and a lack of money. The main argument against investment in ICTs is that the funding is withdrawn from the satisfaction of the basic human needs such as primary health care, education, family planning and water sanitation (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009). Dolnicar and Lazarevski (2009) argue that investments in telecommunication improvements should always take place as they are necessary to the effectiveness of those very projects that strive to satisfy women's fundamental needs. Harcourt (1999) also agrees that once women's organizations in developing countries are provided with new communication tools, they will start to deliver better services to the local communities (Harcourt, 1999). This is especially true when travel to destinations where women need help is cumbersome and hazardous.

Another obstacle for improving access of women's NGOs in developing countries to the ICTs is the attitude of governments and businesses in the developing countries. These agencies have permanently ignored the communication needs of women in their communities (Aitkin, 2005). The opinion-leaders and decision-makers who are responsible for those women must be confronted about their belief that the Internet, phone lines, community telecenters and other ways of connectivity are a luxury or a

waste of deficient resources. In order for women to get what they need in the first place, the development of the new technologies must be enhanced in every country (Aitkin, 2005). Considering the cost-effectiveness of the Internet and its unprecedented power as an advocacy and networking tool, broad-band connections will allow women worldwide to connect and discuss issues that affect them directly, as well as be involved in decision-making regarding further development of the new technologies (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009). Aitkin (2005) also emphasizes the power that connectivity gives women. Many “connected” women in developing countries today act as “bridges” to their “unconnected” neighbors by sharing on-line information through various communication channels. Not only can the Internet serve as such a channel – in many communities, women communicate through telephone, fax, print, radio and theatre (Aitkin, 2005).

To confront the challenges that many communities still face in terms of the connectedness of women and women’s organizations, scholars (Aitkin, 2005; Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009; Harcourt, 1999) suggest mentoring programs, training programs for women's rights organizations, plain language materials and guidelines, a technical support network, and funding to enable access and use of the new technologies.

The existing research clearly shows that there is a strong need for implementation of business-like marketing and communication techniques by the third sector, and there is an infinite variety of communication and integrated marketing tools and techniques to be used that are affordable and tremendously efficient. In a growing number of studies, researchers discuss the overall necessity of implementing communication strategies, and many of them also provide examples of effective campaigning. The researchers

emphasize the importance of the world of social media that has opened up to the third sector and provide success stories to illustrate their assumptions. However, there exists no research that focuses purely on various communication strategies that are used and should be used by non-governmental organizations in order to raise their impact. In the world of modern technologies, there appear to be many new ways to create publicity and raise awareness, as well as distribute information about organizational activities online. What are these new ways? What exactly can NGOs undertake to make their voices heard globally? Knowing the answers to these questions will be especially helpful to women's rights NGOs as they are often dismissed and not taken seriously in their communities, and internationally. As the global women's movements have grown and matured, the best communication practices should be identified and used to attain further development.

As a communication manager in a women's rights NGO and a student of communication studies, I feel that the examination of the communication practices in women's rights NGOs presents a unique opportunity to satisfy my professional understanding and fill in the gap in the current literature in this area. In order to describe these best practices, I pose the following research questions:

RQ1: What communication goals do women's rights NGO practitioners want to achieve?

RQ2: What marketing, communication strategies and other possible tools do they utilize to achieve their goals?

RQ3: What online tools do they use to get publicity and raise awareness?

RQ4: What obstacles do they face in delivering their communication strategies?

### CHAPTER 3

#### METHODOLOGY

In this study, I sought to explore what communication goals women's rights organizations want to achieve, what marketing and communication strategies they utilize, and what obstacles they face in delivering their communication strategies. The methods used were approved by the UNI Institutional Review Board for social science research. For the purposes of this study, I used convenience and snowball sampling techniques, where acquaintances helped me to locate potential interviewees. I already knew five of the participants through work and then asked them to suggest other interviewees. Before I asked the interviewees to participate, I did not know about the social media activity of their organization. I was also not aware whether their communication techniques were effective or not. The snowball sampling method is said to be useful for identifying groups or occupations within communities (Patton, 1990), as it is the case in my study where I am looking for women's rights NGOs inside the whole body of NGOs. This method helped me build up a picture of a particular group of people under study, which are communication managers and directors of women's rights NGOs. The method is criticized for being potentially biased because of the particular networks chosen (Patton, 1990). However, as the goal of my research is to study a particular group of people with their special characteristic and traits, the threat of bias does not seem serious.

I recognized that in-depth interviews would be the most appropriate method of obtaining detailed information on effective communication techniques of women's

NGOs. I then conducted thematic analysis of the data to address the research questions posed from the review of literature.

### Participants

Out of 20 NGOs that I contacted via email, 15 practitioners responded and agreed to participate. In all, I conducted 12 interviews with women who represented NGOs that protect women's rights around the globe and one interview with a woman who didn't represent any NGO but worked for the social media projects for several NGOs, with her most recent project being the famous Flickr (image hosting and video hosting website) series called "Camera Rwanda." As stated above, five of the participants I knew personally through work, and another eight were recommended by my acquaintances as women's rights NGOs. I had personal email addresses for all the participants as I asked my acquaintances to share those with the potential participants' permission. I stopped soliciting interviewees when I reached a saturation of data, i.e., I saw no new themes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The participants were from organizations that varied in terms of size, location, and their missions, to make the research more diverse.

Six participants were from big organizations with over 100 employees, four of them were from middle-size NGOs (more than 50 but less than 100 employees), and two of them represented small organizations (less than 50 employees). Among the participants, there were nine women and four men. The interviewees represented the following countries: Bangladesh, Congo, India, Kenya, Russia (2 participants), Rwanda, South Africa, Switzerland, United Kingdom (2 participants), and United States (3 participants).

All NGOs focused on the issues of women's rights (e.g., health, reproductive rights, education, literacy, violence prevention and protection, business development, etc.). They were also involved in humanitarian activities to relieve suffering, protect human rights, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, and/or undertake community development. Separate descriptions for each NGO are provided at the beginning of the results discussion (Chapter 4).

The participants played key parts in their organizations – either they were heads of the organizations, or held senior managerial positions in the departments of communication. This ensured their deep understanding of the mission, structure and communication events in the organization, as well as the knowledge in the field of NGOs, charities, and social movements.

### Procedures

The prospective participants were sent an invitation email (see Appendix A for the text of the recruitment email.) When I did not hear from them within a week, I sent a follow-up email (see Appendix B for the text of the follow-up email.) If I still did not receive any response in another week, I made a follow-up phone call directly to the person to be interviewed (see Appendix C for the script of the telephone conversation.) The electronic informed consent was included in the recruitment email instructing the participants that if they responded to me by email, then they were agreeing to participate. As the participants were located all over the world, it was impractical and time-consuming to seek written consent via a form mailed to them. Even though I used

electronic consent, I asked them again orally, before beginning the interview, to confirm their consent (see Appendix D for the oral consent script).

To protect participants' privacy during recruitment, I contacted people at their individual email addresses. I did not contact them through general organizational addresses. The participants were able to choose without any coercion whether to participate in the study or not. I stated in the invitation that participation was purely voluntary. Even though I knew several of the participants, I did not force them into participation because they knew me. Our professional relationships did not depend on their willingness/unwillingness to take part in the study. I believe my job at an NGO did not make them feel obliged to comply because it had nothing to do with this study. I kept the interview transcripts and tapes in a lockable filing cabinet. I offered to use pseudo-names. Three people chose to have pseudo-names assigned to them. One person asked me to use a pseudo-name for her organization. The NGOs are described by their size, country, and general mission.

The interview times were set up at the participants' convenience. All were conducted via Skype (provides visual and audio live-time connection on the Internet). I let the participants direct the conversation in any way they felt comfortable. I told them we could turn off the recorder at any time. Every participant was able to look through the transcriptions of their interviews upon request before I started analyzing the data. Six participants used this opportunity to edit the transcripts while the others said they were content with how the interviews turned out and they did not want to add anything. I did not ask about their personal life. Thus, no discoveries of participants' personal medical,

psychological, and/or psycho-social conditions were made. I tried to be a good listener, and did not encourage this type of disclosure.

I asked for permission to audio-record the Skype interview. The detailed recording is a necessary component of interviews since it forms the basis for analyzing the data. No one but me had access to these audio recordings, and I kept them only until I transcribed them for paper writing purposes. They were kept in a lockable filing cabinet while I was still using them, and were destroyed upon completion of the thesis. No one besides me had access to the research data.

The interviews were set for an hour but often lasted as long as three hours when the participants wanted to talk more about the particular topics. All the interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. Given the goal of the study, I did not feel it was necessary to record the visual component. At the beginning of an interview, I asked for permission to audio-record. Everybody gave their permission. I also asked them if they had a video option on their computers and if they wanted to turn on the video.

For 10 out of 13 interviews, we used the video component. My task as an interviewer was to provide comfortable conditions for our talk, make the participants feel relaxed and focused on their current project and the communication strategies they were using. Remembering that my appearance may have affected them, I tried to reach a maximum neutrality for my visual. As a background, I used a neutral and calm setting of my living room in beige colors, and I also wore pale and pastel, not irritating colors. I tried to make them feel comfortable, smiled at them and told them to let me know if they felt uncomfortable at any point. At the end of the interview, I asked them whether they



felt any inconveniences, and each of them said they felt very comfortable. Nine of the 13 participants were at home during the interview, and three of them were in public places such as cafes and libraries. They were not at their workplace.

After the interviews were conducted, I transcribed the data. Transcription of the raw data included word-for-word quotations of participants' responses as well as my descriptions of the participants' body languages, enthusiasm, overall mood and personal characteristics during the interview. The main advantages of the transcription method are its completeness and the opportunity it gave me to remain attentive and focused during the interview. Among the major disadvantages are the amount of time and resources needed to produce complete transcriptions. It took me approximately three to eight hours to transcribe each interview.

All the interviews were conducted in English. I chose to do so for consistency. For nine participants, English was a second language, but given the field of their work where a lot of international communication takes place, they did not report experiencing any language difficulties. Before the interview, I sent the participants an interview guide (see Appendix E) that included a list of questions or issues that were to be explored and suggested probes for following up on key topics. This guide helped me pace the interview and made interviewing more systematic and comprehensive. It also allowed the interviewees to prepare for the conversation.

At the beginning of the guide, I asked each participant about the organization they currently worked for in terms of its size, the scope of its activities, its history, mission, and main goals. This allowed me to better assure I had some diversity of experiences

represented in the sample of participants. Also, talking about the person and her or his responsibilities in an NGO was an initial ice-breaker in our conversation. Then I moved on to ask if there was a special department or communication officer/director overseeing communication. This was essential to see how important the communication strategies were for different organizations and how much effort was put into maintaining its activities. I then worked on investigating more deeply what the communication specialist does, and if there was no such person, how the communication activities are implemented.

The next step was to ask participants to identify their NGO's main communication goals. During the interview, I emphasized the importance of this question as it introduced the main themes and underlined the ultimate purpose of everything we discussed later during the conversation. We talked about the priorities of the communication plan as well as the main target groups. I asked if the participants were satisfied with the current communication strategies being used and if they deemed these strategies effective in attaining the goals they have set. When constructing the interview guide, I tried to be as consistent as possible and carefully worked through the topics as they appeared in my mind. I think I managed to preserve the inner logic in my questions and ensure that all the necessary topics were covered in a timely manner.

From the main communication goals, we moved on to the tools that the organizations use to achieve their goals. Here I wanted to see if the participants were taking advantage of the newer communication tools such as social media and mobile technology or if they gravitated towards the traditional ways such as relationships with

the journalists, event-management, newsletters and the like. After that, we moved to the challenges and frustrations participants faced while implementing communication strategies for the NGO. Closer to the end of the conversation, the participants usually felt comfortable enough to talk about negative aspects of their communication programs, commenting on what went wrong and what needed to be improved. These questions were a critical part of the study as they showed the drawbacks of the existing system and opened the way for suggestions and recommendations on improvement of the strategies. At the end of the interview, I asked the participants if they wanted to add anything they had not covered. I also told them that they could send any additional comments, and I would send a summary of their comments for review.

During the conversation, I tried to be flexible, assuming the more topics we covered, the more complete data would be available for analysis. I carefully steered the conversation in the direction of interesting issues related to the goals of this study. At the same time, I let the interviewees direct the conversation in how they felt comfortable, to better assure the experience was positive for them.

The in-depth interviews provided several strengths. First of all, they allowed me to understand the work and communication strategies of NGOs in the prism of the witness's view, capturing the perspective of people involved in the communication activities. Most of the time, the participants themselves were deeply engaged in a particular project and affected its success, which made it easy to talk to them about their strategies. The interviewees' perspectives were meaningful and clear, as they provided explanations behind their actions, motivation and plans. I asked the interviewees if they

were satisfied with the outcomes of their work, what they viewed as obstacles and challenges, what they deemed the most important in their duties, and so on. This kind of information could only be received during in-depth interviews. Also, in-depth interviews helped capture respondents' perceptions in their own words, which turned out to be very important in analyzing data.

Second, in-depth interviews imply that the interviewer does not follow a rigid form. It gave me and the participants the chance to be flexible and talk about different topics that related to the main subject that resulted in the comprehensive coverage of the selected topic. The atmosphere of free and open responses encouraged the participants to share the most interesting experiences and random insights and investigate deeper into the subject, as well as feel at ease during the conversation.

Third, as Patton (1990) stated in his research, "the quality of the information obtained is largely dependent on the interviewer's skills and personality" (Patton, 1990, p. 119). Because I personally knew many of the interviewees, I believe they felt free to openly share their thoughts and perspectives with me. We shared the knowledge of the subject and the understanding of key communication concepts. We often engaged in discussions about communication strategies and NGOs before, and it had previously been a rewarding experience for all of us. These experiences certainly influenced how I interpreted the participants' comments. I think this influence was positive and useful.

Fourth, in-depth interviews afford a researcher to experience the affective as well as cognitive aspects of responses. Seeing the interviewees by using Skype definitely helped me explore the nature of the studied subject more deeply as I was able to trace

participants' motions, gestures and facial expressions. Talking on Skype is generally more interpersonally immediate than writing email messages or talking on the phone. It implies more of the personal feelings and the sense of connectedness. By talking one on one, I was able to understand not only the communication activities of the participants but also the overall context in which their projects operate.

The interviews allowed me to learn about things that the participants did not plan to say. By this I mean that some random thoughts were voiced during the Skype interview that the interviewees did not get to think through – something intuitive and unconscious, which was very helpful for understanding the mood and the attitudes of the interviewees, and their feelings in regards to the project. I did not take advantage of some unconscious thoughts, or make any unnecessary conclusions, but instead I used all the information for a better understanding of the interviewees.

As for the disadvantages of the Skype call, at times we had to contend with disruptions and other problems that inhibited the flow of information, such as channel noise and bad quality of connection. However, it did not happen often, and all the information was transcribed successfully.

Finally, in-depth interviews allowed me to be flexible in administering questionnaires. We set up the interviews when it was convenient for the participants. I sent the transcription of the interviews for feedback to those who requested it, and six participants emailed me back with additional comments. In-depth interviews helped me explain or clarify questions that were not clear or ambiguous and opened the opportunity for follow up of interesting comments.

Regarding the limitations of the method, it is hard to ensure total sincerity as the people who were interviewed represent their organizations whether I asked them to do so or not. Because they knew the results would be available to the public, they might have been more careful about what they said to make their organizations look good. It is especially true when it comes to the higher positions within organizations. People tend to be more protective of and loyal to the organization when they have high status (Buchanan, 1974; Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979), and the people I spoke with have high statuses within their organizations and/or have worked there for a long time. I felt that the participants sometimes acted as they represented the organization and tried to promote it, but when they felt more relaxed and comfortable, they sounded less guarded. Their more guarded behavior may have been tied to granting permission for me to use the NGO's real name. If the names were not revealed, the participants may have felt more secure to speak their minds without constantly trying – consciously or unconsciously – to promote positive images of their organization. On the other hand, my decision to keep the real names of the NGOs was driven by an intention to show the work of real existing NGOs that can be identified, and investigated deeper. Finally, the participants made this decision to use the real name of the NGO, I did not.

#### Generation of Themes and Categories

Once I had the information gathered, I did a thematic analysis of the data. The focus of the analysis was to understand the meaning of texts by identifying the themes and patterns of communication behavior in the participants' responses. Thematic analysis is a search for themes that appear to be important to the description of the phenomenon

(Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman, 1997). The process helps identify the themes through “careful reading and re-reading of the data” (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258). Boyatzis defined a theme as “a pattern in the information that at a minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at a maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 161).

Using template analysis (King, 2004), I coded the transcripts into broad themes based on the research questions and objectives to create an initial template. The second step was to identify all data that related to the classified themes (Aronson, 1994). The pieces of text were labeled as falling into certain categories, which led to the formation of more specific categories within each theme. Such hierarchical coding helped me analyze texts at different levels of specificity. The broader codes allowed me to provide a general overview of the direction of the interviews, while the more detailed sub-themes (Aronson, 1994) enabled me to make fine distinctions, both within and between cases (King, 2004). I then attempted to link the sub-themes with the topics from the literature review. Both manifest and latent themes were used (King, 2004). They helped depict the categories’ relationships with each other, which was important in showing the overall picture of the communication strategies (Dey, 1993). In his research, Dey (1993) underlines that codes must be meaningful with regards to the data but also meaningful in relation to other categories. Boyatzis critiques thematic analysis saying that it evaluates the material according to the researcher’s sense of how the themes connect, rather than the relation of the themes in the participants’ minds (Boyatzis, 1998). However, the goal of the study was to identify the patterns that seem apparent across many participants, and

at the end it was the researcher who has all the data and was capable of leading the study and generalizing the data.

As I was evaluating the experiences of the participants, template analysis helped me read and interpret the transcripts in a structured way. Some of the themes were defined a priori, but I modified and added themes as I was going through the transcripts. This kind of analysis was particularly helpful as it allowed me trace the relationships between the themes. For example, I was able to link the objectives of some participants with particular communication strategies or observe the relationship between public relations and social media. Because template analysis allows organizing the text into categories, I managed to structure my work in a clearer and more concise way. This type of analysis allowed for reflexivity and approaching topics from different perspectives as well as richness of the produced descriptions.

In my analysis, I did not seek to make grand claims but focused more on identifying issues of interest. Instead of drawing conclusions about the strength or generalizability of participants' views, I aimed to both stimulate discussion and debate about the communication patterns in the NGO field and provide ways for improvement of the existing communication strategies in the third sector.

In the following chapter, I review the implications of the presented analysis in relation to the hypothesis of this study and its objectives, and present recommendations for improving communication strategies in NGOs.



## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Description of the Participants

Before I present the results of the research, I will familiarize the readers with the persons that took part in the study and the organizations they were currently working for. I do so because it might be important for the readers to be able to visualize the range of NGOs involved in the study and the context of their work. In the several following paragraphs, I will present the managers I have spoken to and NGOs they are involved with. I would like to note, however, that one of the objectives of my research was to ask the participants to speak from their personal and/or professional experience; I did not ask them to represent their NGO employer. Thus, in reporting data for the theme analysis I identify the interviewee, but not the NGO name.

*Alisa, Doctors to Children, Head of PR department, Russia*

Employing around 120 people, the St. Petersburg-based non-profit organization Doctors to Children works to protect the rights of women and children in difficult life situations. The Doctors to Children project on domestic violence helped to negotiate the flaws in the legislation with the authorities and managed to change particular chapters of the legislation to provide protection to violence victims.

*Daria, Daria's Foundation, Founder and Director, Russia (name of the organization changed upon the request of the interviewee)*

Being an independent community-based foundation, the organization has 50 employees and aims to achieve equity for women and girls in Russian Federation. Through a combination of coalition building and public advocacy Daria's Foundation strengthens women's and girls' efforts to achieve social and economic justice in Russia. The organization aims to achieve equal political representation, economic and civic participation and leadership development for women in all arenas.

*Teresa, Women's Aid, Communication Coordinator, UK*

The organization has over 100 employees and represents the national domestic violence charity that helps up to 250,000 women and children every year. Women's Aid works to end violence against women and children, and support over 500 domestic and sexual violence services across the country.

*Elisabeth, Positively Women, Director, United Kingdom*

Employing 34 people, Positively Women is the only UK charity providing peer support for women living with HIV. The organization provides specialist support by women living with HIV, enables women to make informed choices and challenges stigma and discrimination.

*Rabi, Arid Lands Information Network (ALIN), Communications Manager, Kenya (name of the person changed upon the request of the interviewee)*

ALIN employs 110 people, and is a network of over 200 grassroots Community Development Workers (CDWs) drawn from NGOs, community-based organizations as well as government departments, all offering services in their fields of expertise. The organization sees its goal as enabling female change agents to learn from one another,

through capacity-building and innovative use of information and communication technology. ALIN facilitates information exchange among women in communities in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia.

*Flora, Aids Rights Congo, Communications Officer, Congo (name of the person changed upon the request of the interviewee)*

Aids Rights Congo has 50 employees and trains women in local AIDS organizations in digital story-telling, podcasting, and the creation of blogs to document the stigma and discrimination of women living with HIV/AIDS in the Congo in order to use them as a tool for advocacy, education, and the promotion of the rights of people infected with HIV.

*George, ActAlive, Director, United States, South Africa (name of the person changed upon the request of the interviewee)*

ActAlive has 54 employees and is an arts coalition composed of women who use the arts and media to address HIV/AIDS and other human-development challenges. The coalition has several hundred members in more than 30 countries and works to create a worldwide network where women share information, and collaborate and build a powerful advocacy tool for change, education, disease prevention, human development and growth, health and healing.

*Liora, Peace X Peace, Marketing and Outreach Manager, United States*

Employing around 120 people, Peace X Peace is a global network of women with women-focused e-media, fresh analysis, and from-the-frontlines perspectives. The organization engages, connects, and amplifies women's voices as the most direct and

powerful ways to create cultures of peace around the world. Through e-media and Peace X Peace Community, this NGO provides perspectives, analysis, tools, and commentary on women's lives and women's power to build peace.

*Bjorn, International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), Director, Switzerland*

Employing 73 people, ISHR is an international non-governmental organization that works to effectively promote and protect the women's rights and support the engagement of women's rights defenders with the UN and regional human rights systems. ISHR also aims to make these systems more effective, more accessible to human rights defenders, and more responsive to their concerns.

*Dafroza, WomensNet, Director, South Africa*

WomensNet employs 48 people and works to advance gender equality and justice in South Africa through the use of information and communication technologies. WomensNet provides training and facilitates content dissemination and creation that supports women, girls, and women's and gender organizations and networks to take control of their own content and ICT use.

*Kresta, Camera Rwanda, social media consultant and photographer, United States, Rwanda*

Kresta is a freelance social media consultant who works with NGOs to enhance their social media strategies and attract attention to their issues through extensive sharing of information on video-blogs and in Facebook groups. Her recent campaign Camera Rwanda used Flickr as a story-telling tool to picture the life of Rwandan men and women. The campaign attracted a lot of attention of the international community and

accumulated interest towards developing countries. Even though she does not represent any particular NGO, Kresta greatly contributed to the present study, especially when it came to the social media. That is why I included her in a list of participants.

*Raji, Mobile for Development (M4D), Director, India*

Mobile for Development has 19 employees and represents a NGO technology initiative designed to help women's organizations leverage the ubiquity of mobile phones to increase the effectiveness of their social change work. M4D's goal is to guide women's rights organizations in effectively reaching the groups their work is designed for, thereby empowering them with information and enabling them to access the world.

*Lina, Communication for Change (C4C), Communication Specialist, Bangladesh*

Employing 25 people, Communication for Change works closely with women's rights NGOs, community groups and governmental agencies, in developing communication capabilities to realize their goals for economic development and social justice. C4C provides technical assistance to NGOs on communication strategies in support of training, organizing, advocacy, and development efforts. C4C advises organizations on new approaches to media, helps design equipment packages, writes strategy papers, and facilitates exchange among different groups. Having formed participatory partnerships around the world, C4C offers a perspective informed by diversity and particularly focused towards women's empowerment.

### Theme Findings

In the modern world of the Internet, the importance of communication practices in NGOs, especially those dealing with human rights issues, is unquestionable. As one of

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### Theme Findings

In the modern world of the Internet, the importance of communication practices in NGOs, especially those dealing with human rights issues, is unquestionable. As one of

the respondents noted, "Communication is key to operations of the organization and an integral part of the strategic planning" (Liora, Marketing and outreach manager). Another one added, "All you have to do is go through one or two communication challenges as a senior executive to realize the importance of communications" (Daria, Founder and Director). What has also been noted is that "Communication has to be integrated in the overall strategy of the organization to be optimally effective. Communication is the core part of what you have to offer to your stakeholders" (Bjorn, Director). The communication manager of Women's Aid noticed that "There is no such thing as over communicating. It is nonexistent. Every time you communicate is a good time" (Teresa, Communication Coordinator).

This study illustrates a range of experiences and perceptions concerning the strategic communication in women's rights NGOs as well as the variety of processes aimed to improve their communication techniques. Thirteen directors and communication managers of various women's rights NGOs, who I interviewed on Skype, addressed numerous areas of strategic communication in their organization to offer their insights in what an ideal communication program should look like. First, the interviewees outlined what their communication goals are and what they strive to achieve with their communication programs. Second, the participants talked about who should implement communication programs in NGOs and in what manner. Third, the respondents estimated the level of their satisfaction with the current state of communication in their organizations and spoke about what they generally perceive as good communication practice.

The thematic analysis revealed several major themes related to communication strategies in women's rights NGOs. Most of the major themes came directly from the questions I asked, but most of the sub-themes emerged from the data. At the end of each theme, I summarize the sub-themes and explain their relation to my initial research questions.

The analysis of themes and sub-themes included whether they were common or rare, how the themes and ideas fit together, and what meaning I could draw from the themes. I examined the differences and similarities in terms of size, status and the location of the NGO, disconfirming as well as confirming instances, and then formed conclusions on best communication practices based on the interview data.

#### Theme 1. Communication Goals and Priorities:

##### What communication goals do women's rights NGO practitioners want to achieve?

The data indicated that practitioners have different priorities and styles in delivering communication strategies. Out of 13 participating organizations, four said they never have a clear communication strategy. However, all the interviewees reported having communication activities taking place on a regular basis. Although there was overall acceptance of the need to develop communication strategies in NGOs, there were different perspectives about the primary goals of organizations' communication strategies and programs. While some participants mainly named promotional achievements as their main goals, others wanted to engage with more constituents and learn to work with different groups of stakeholders as well as engage local communities to attract more supporters among the public. Among the main communication goals for NGOs of all



sizes, the following were named: increasing awareness, visibility and credibility, influencing attitudes, engaging communities, and working with multiple constituents. The data also shows that the communication goals change as NGOs grow in size.

#### Sub-Theme 1.1. More Effectively Raise Awareness and Influence Attitudes on Issues

There was agreement, without any exceptions, that the quality of communication programs to raise awareness and influence the way people perceive certain issues needs improvement. "There is a strong need," one participant noticed, "to move from a 'want to' approach to communication to a 'have to' approach" (Bjorn, Director). Another one noted that "To influence people's attitudes... one should communicate with passion, face-to-face, all the time with the same message" (Teresa, Communication Coordinator).

#### Sub-Theme 1.2. Engage Communities

Most of the participants, both working in the developing and developed countries, noted that engaging local communities is essential to spreading the word about the organization and attracting devoted members, volunteers, donors, and staff. George told me the story of how the community involvement, even on the small scale, helped his coalition expand in less than half a year. Engaging women around Africa helped build a coalition of more than 100 organizations that gathered together because local people have invited them.

Nothing but the network of community-based volunteers gave our coalition more advantage in recruiting new members and expanding the scope of our activities. ... If people like what they do and find it important, they will tell another group... and those will get engaged. ... At the end of the day we will have members around the country... and beyond. (George, Director)

Communication officer Flora said that her organization provides training for other communication officers of local AIDS organizations and interested volunteers in Congo in podcasting, digital story-telling, and the creation of blogs to document the cases of discrimination and stigma of HIV-positive women. Thus, members of the community serve as a tool for education, advocacy, and the promotion of rights of women affected by HIV. Each trainee describes how HIV/AIDS is affecting his or her local community and how HIV-positive women live.

In the last few years, we have recognized that crucial to our success is the development of communications strategies that ensure an audience and a voice for women directly affected by HIV/AIDS. As we shared a particular interest in women's health and because other NGOs in the field failed to emphasize the need for a gender-specific approach to stigmatization of HIV-positive people, we worked out a collaborative project to assist a small group of HIV-positive women to share their stories. That is how we ... got the communities involved, which is very important. (Flora, Communication Officer)

Communication specialist Lina has also used the participatory methods to involve the community and produce videos with real women speaking about their own experience in the issues that local women are concerned about.

The project had two goals. ... Firstly, we wanted to use participatory communication to create a collection of videos and short radio programs that could be viewed in various local and international settings... to promote success and positive change. Secondly, we wanted to offer a mechanism for addressing the issues of the women's concern around the world... through the distribution of the digital stories first in Africa, and then worldwide. (Lina, Communication Specialist)

Many participants noted that such testimonials and personal experience of people from the community can help to raise awareness among all the targeted groups on current issues of women. Hearing stories similar to their own helps other women who are suffering around the world.

NGOs working in developed countries also view community engagement as one of their primary goals. One of the participants Bjorn works for the organization that supports the engagement of women's rights defenders with the UN and regional human rights systems. When asked about their main communication goal for the near future, Bjorn answered:

What we are working on right now is modifying our methods to accommodate languages and technologies in different settings and for different people... focusing on bringing various personal narratives into the public sphere. Engaging... simple people... people who live next door... is essential. ... After the careful informed consent processes, we are sharing such stories locally and globally to achieve... community mobilization, policy advocacy and gender equality. (Bjorn, Director)

Such testimonials mean that organizations tend to adopt their messages to cater the needs of people around the world, trying to translate material in different languages and share stories that are relevant to people in different communities. This approach helps engage more supporters as everybody feels their needs are being addressed.

### Sub-Theme 1.3. Increase Visibility

Most of the interviewees mentioned "visibility" when talking about their communication priorities. The participants noted that visibility "is important to enhance corporate identity reputation and image" (Liora, Marketing and Outreach Manager), and that it "reflects... organization's commitment and ability to fulfill its mission" (Bjorn, Director). One of the participants mentioned that his organization is going to "work harder to make [itself] and [its] services visible" (Raji, Director).

Head of a PR department Alisa said:

If we are talking about the ultimate goal of the communication specialists in our NGO, it is definitely increasing the visibility. We need to make sure people are

aware of the organization and know what is going on in the city in terms of the social issues... and they know where to turn to in case of need. We never know who our target groups are until they appear from the general public. ... Above all, the visibility leads to the credibility, which is another important communication goal that we have. (Alisa, Head of PR department)

#### Sub-Theme 1.4. Increase Credibility with General Public

Credibility as a communication goal was also often mentioned by the interviewees. The high level of trust in NGOs is essentially a measure of its communication strength. On the one hand, non-governmental organizations are more trusted than other groups such as government, business structures, or the media (Padanyi & Gainer, 2004). On the other hand, if NGOs fail to appear reliable to their publics, the trust is hardly ever regained. Robert Hayden showed in his essay in the Harvard International Review ("Dictatorships of Virtue," 2002) that self-sufficiency of NGOs is a chimera that covers the interests of states, oligarchs, national elites and businesses. The wrongdoing of NGOs that can happen catch public attention in no time, causing mistrust to the whole sector. I think this is a reason why many interviewees cared about the accountability in their NGOs and felt their organizations needed more trust from the stakeholders and general public.

For us to be able to protect women's rights and human rights overall, we need to be trusted and respected locally, nationally, and internationally. Without such respect and trust our activities may lead to nothing. (Bjorn, Director)

As there are few mechanisms to monitor NGOs' activities, people create their own perception of how ethical and reliable the NGO is. Thus, it was said to be important to maintain the highest level of accountability with the public:

Everybody expects extra honesty and good faith from the non-governmental organizations. There are special commissions who watch all aspects of our

operations. If there is anything that people view as “wrong” there are very few things that can be done to restore the reputation. The key is to maintain the highest level of responsibility and absolute transparency so that the credibility is never at stake. (Daria, Founder and Director)

Another participant added that trust and credibility are so crucial they can affect the organizational funding and overall functioning:

NGOs find funding on the base of donor trust. This trust can disappear in a moment because of any revelations of improprieties. It can also result in a loss of board members who want to dissociate and save their individual reputation. Difficulties in raising money can lead to ... the closing of the organization. (Rabi, Communication Manager)

When I asked the participants for strategies to improve NGO credibility many of them mentioned visibility and transparency of all the organization's actions, defining transparency as “making [their] policies public, stating [their] plans publicly, presenting regular financial reports and communicating with the public about [their] future plans” (Bjoern, Director). The supervision from the controlling bodies was also mentioned:

There is no single way to raise accountability in NGOs because in different nations the level of NGO development is different. To me, the best way to manage credibility and avoid mistrust towards NGOs is using a combination of watchdog agencies, governmental supervision, and internal NGO procedures to heighten accountability. (Dafroza, Director)

This means that NGOs support the idea of monitoring mechanisms that should be put into practice to observe NGOs' activities and assess their standing in terms of accountability.

#### Sub-Theme 1.5. Work with Multiple Constituents

The value of being able to work with various constituents was often mentioned during our conversations about the main communication goals of NGOs:

Communication specialists have to always think about an organization's objectives for each specific communication. There should be different recipients for different messages, and this I can call our communication goal – to determine which constituencies need to be targeted with which messages... and what the most effective channel is. (Alisa, Head of PR department)

Teresa, a Communication Coordinator, and her team, regularly work with over 100 national media and use social media to reach an even greater community of online users:

The number and complexity of choices of communication channels available to us today is enormous. The goal is to learn to choose the right ones. We can choose on the basis of the preferences of our constituents... who are more sophisticated than ever before. ... At the same time we try to be consistent and speak in harmony... as all communications to all constituents through all channels must be customized to a given objective. (Teresa, Communication Coordinator)

Several interviewees shared their perceptions of how to handle the situation with multiple constituents. "We break messages into pieces and try to give the right piece to the right audience," said Elisabeth, Director of an NGO. Another participant stated that "...the best way to see if this communication goal has been met is [a] feedback from the public. ... It determines the success of every communication act and the success of implementation of [the] communication strategy in general" (George, Director). Daria, Founder and Director, added that "the feedback isn't determinative, but it's valuable in picking out what troubles our clients."

#### Sub-Theme 1.6. Change Goals as Organization Grows

Oftentimes it was mentioned by the participants that their communication goals have changed as the organizations grew. In the small organizations with 50 and fewer employees, the main goals are generally to recruit new members, acquire communication skills, and learn to differentiate between different constituents:

We are now just growing and need to catch the attention to open people's minds. Our main goal is pretty much just to spread the word to involve more women, to invite more families to join and to let people know we exist and we are available. (Raji, Director)

The mid-size organizations (50-100 employees) focused more on engaging community members, connecting people and influencing attitudes:

We are already known as an organization that connects and engages women to promote cultures of peace around the world. Through our e-media and social network, we try to multiply the impact of individual experience and expertise. Our goal is to connect people and organizations with each other, with real-world knowledge, and with an international audience in the growing global community of peacebuilders. We aim to contribute to cultures of harmony and cross-cultural understanding through promoting gender equality and female empowerment. (Liora, Marketing and Outreach Manager)

For the participants from organizations with over 100 employees, they said it is important to enhance credibility and make sure the communication strategy is aligned with the organization's overall strategy:

As our organization matured, we had to focus on integrating marketing efforts with general organization's strategy. We have done a better job in the last couple of years, but there were times when communication wasn't well integrated. ... As a big influential organization, it is essential that we have a clear, consistent strategy. (Alisa, Head of PR department)

In sum, the theme regarding communication goals and priorities directly answered the first research question, regarding the NGO practitioners' goals. In this theme, I listed all the major goals that were listed by NGO practitioners. The sub-themes emerged from the course of the conversations, which suggests these are important issues for the participants. Talking about their strategic priorities, the participants spoke both about the main goals they wanted to achieve (e.g., increased recognition, better visibility, higher credibility, etc.) and about the groups of people they wanted to engage (communities,

multiple constituents, etc.) The participants also indicated that their communication goals tended to change as the organizations grew. Those working in smaller NGOs, mentioned goals generally tied to recruiting new members and differentiating between constituents. Participants from mid-size organizations focused more on engaging community members, connecting people and influencing attitudes. And, participants from bigger organizations said it is important to enhance credibility and align communication strategies with the organization's overall strategy.

Theme 2. Staff Responsible for Delivering Communication Strategies:

What marketing and communication strategies and tools do they utilize to achieve their goals?

This theme helped answer the research question about marketing and communication strategies and tools NGOs can use to achieve their communication goals. The theme suggests who of the staff should play a major part in delivering communication strategies of the organization. There were contrasting views about the role of the staff of women's rights NGOs in terms of communication, but overall the participants agreed that everybody in the organization must play its part in communication activities. It was noted by the participants that there should be a special person or department to deal solely with communication matters. Many interviewees also argued that top-level managers must also be involved in any communication moves. Some participants said that heads of the organizations should be the main players in delivering communication strategies.



### Sub-Theme 2.1. Senior Managers

Two participants claimed that senior managers and directors might be the only ones responsible for all the communication process for the organization. Daria, the Founder and Director of one of the NGOs, stated:

We don't have any communication manager, and I am walking public relations. Most of my job is communication and at the moment I don't see any need for a communication specialist as I want to be the one responsible for such a delicate thing. (Daria, Founder and Director)

Elisabeth, the head of another organization, said she thought about hiring a person who would be responsible for communication, but until this happens she is willing to take all the functions of the communication manager. When asked about how much time she spends communicating, Elisabeth said, "Can you go above 100%?"

The majority of the interviewees agreed that the top leaders should be actively involved in implementing communication strategies, even if there is a communication specialist or department in the organization:

Communications aren't owned by the communication department. The top leaders must understand the importance of communication because wherever they go they bring their communication with them. You have to have good executives who can and will communicate. (Bjorn, Director)

The participants argued that the senior staff represents the face of the organization and influences the public: "The leader should be the face and the voice of the company. ... This person sets the tone for the communication team and the organization as a whole" (Teresa, Communication Coordinator).

It was also mentioned that NGOs should follow the example of businesses where the leaders of the company are shaping the image of their organizations:

Those senior executives who think that communications can be delegated to the head of the corporate communication are mistaken. In fact, in many businesses, the CEO acts as the senior communication officer of the company. ... The same should be practiced in NGOs. (George, Director)

Directors tended to regard themselves as the communication drivers of the organizations, and they admitted to spending a great deal of their time achieving the organization's communication goals: "Communication takes a lot of my time. I'm either communicating or thinking about it. I'm getting information about our issues or I am communicating about our issues" (Daria, Founder and Director).

### Sub-Theme 2.2. Communication Personnel

Even though having the director who is actively engaged in communication activities was regarded as a positive trend, most participants also claimed that in the organization there also should be staff responsible for communication. Dafroza, Director of one of NGOs, shared her story:

There was always an emphasis placed on communications in our organization. Communication was at the center of everything. ... All the executives adhered to intense communication practices. ... But I could not manage it on my own. These days communication tools and choices are vast, and it became really hard to handle communication tasks on my own. It turned out to be a bad practice for our NGO. Soon we hired a new communication specialist; she is now responsible for everything from speech-writing... to social media. ... Now all [communication activity] is clearly communicated both internally and externally. We use a multifaceted approach across a variety of platforms to maintain employees' loyalty and communal trust. (Dafroza, Director)

Another executive also noticed how introducing a position of communication manager has made a difference for the organization: "Hiring a communication person was like changing a tire because an entirely new organization structure appeared which allowed for further development and growth" (George, Director).

Communication specialists are needed in the organizations because they "...have a very strong personal network, excellent people skills, access to information and understanding of how their work is connected to the overall mission of the NGO" (Teresa, Communication Coordinator). Executives at NGOs that I studied were quick to point out such qualities of communication managers as possessing a strong leadership position in the company, personal credibility and broad perspective, speaking the same language as senior executives, and having a wide organizational reach and a deep understanding of how NGOs function. It was also a commonly shared opinion that communication managers should get involved in every aspect of the organizational structure. When Alisa, the Head of the PR department, first joined the organization, she attended all operational and strategic meetings so that she could see organizational functions inside and out. "For the communication manager to be proactive and effective," Alisa said, "she needs to understand what happens in the company."

It is also commonly agreed that the communication specialists need to have a seat in the strategy-making table. The communication professionals that I have spoken with said that their job was not only to communicate with key constituents but also to interpret constituents' responses in ways that move organizational strategy forward. "The communication function supports the overall strategy of the NGO," said Elisabeth, Director of one of the NGOs, "It moves the organization. The messages articulate the strategic direction of the organization."

The opinions on the staff responsible for delivering communication strategies were different. There were directors who claimed they could handle the communication

tasks by themselves and said they did not need any special employee such as communication manager or could not afford having one. However, the majority of participants emphasized that such a person should be present in women's rights NGOs to create and implement excellent communication strategies for the organizations. The findings suggest that the communication director plays an increasing role in the formulation of corporate strategy. Also, everyone agreed that although having a communication specialist is important, executives must also be involved in delivering effective communication strategies. As outcome-based measures of communication continue to develop, all the senior executives were encouraged to see the value that good communication strategies can bring and recognize the critical role they must play in this effort.

### Theme 3. Working with Target Groups:

What marketing and communication strategies do they utilize to achieve their goals?

What obstacles do they face in delivering their communication strategies?

As noted above, representatives of various NGOs find it important to work with multiple constituents to help organizations attain their communication goals. Non-governmental organizations have to deal with numerous groups of influential publics. The quality of interaction with them defines the overall strategic communication. In this theme participants addressed the issues of dealing with three groups of stakeholders – employees, donors and governments. They described different aspects of dealing with these groups, which helped answer the research questions about the obstacles NGOs face

in delivering their communication strategies and the tools NGOs can use to overcome these obstacles.

### Sub-Theme 3.1. Employees

All the participants tended to value informal communication between the members of the staff. In addition to such communication that can take place both inside and outside of the working place, there were many comments about the importance of having an official employee-relations strategy. Seven out of thirteen participants noted they had special programs in place to work with the employees. Several of the participants explained how they managed the internal communication:

It is important for us in the department of communication to keep the hearts and minds of employees. We created a number of two-way communication channels to address employee issues. Among such tools are the website where we collect and answer employees' questions and the special newsletter where we post organizational news. (Alisa, Head of PR department)

Some argued that having an internal communication strategy in place helps improve external communication. Retention of staff is a part of this:

In our organization the turnover is really small. We try to make people like this place and like their job. Because if the employees are happy, then they do a good job, and it is a great atmosphere. ... Also, we promote an understanding of women's rights and women's issues in the workplace so that the employees get to know the subject and its various nuances... . (Daria, Founder and Director)

Others claimed, however, that they only use formal internal communication once in two or three months, or when there is big new or emergency situation in the organization:

We hold a monthly Internet teleconference to ensure understanding of common goals. At the moment we are having more conference meetings as we want to disseminate the new vision and strategy in the organization. (Raji, Director)

Even though the frequency of internal communication within the organization was different among the participants' NGOs, everyone in the study claimed that internal communication is important for them.

### Sub-Theme 3.2. Donors

The interviewees recognized that donor-relations are of special importance to the women's rights organizations regardless of where the NGO is situated. The dependency on the donors in terms of funding varied in different countries since some countries have more governmental support than other countries. Still, the overall reliance on donors was explicitly pronounced by all. Some participants said their organizations are particularly dependent on the donors' funding:

About eighty percent of our funds come from the donors, especially from the business sector and private donations. We need to make sure the donors are satisfied with how they are treated and how the money is spent. (Daria, Founder and Director)

Many interviewees also noted that finding donors is becoming a challenge, provided that corporations nowadays clearly express a preference for working with larger NGOs with solid reputations and operational infrastructures. In the situation of current financial instability caused by the recession, "donors have the tendency to extricate themselves from failure" (Teresa, Communication Coordinator). Donor relations appear to be the reason for many participants' anxiety:

It is very difficult and challenging to find funding now, and the prediction is there will be even fewer opportunities for new partnerships with donors in the coming years. This means we should cherish the relationships with the existing partners and promote ourselves in the right way to attract corporations seeking to raise their philanthropic profile. (Rabi, Communication Manager)

Among the communication practices for working with donors that were mentioned by participants more than once were the following strategies. First, it was noted by many interviewees that relationship with donors are heavily influenced by personal relationships. It is especially true for non-Western countries such as India and Russia (Raji, Director; Daria, Founder and Director; Alisa, Head of PR Department). The quality of personal relationship forms the longevity and fruitfulness of donor-NGO cooperation. On the other hand, three participants noted that only formal interaction between the organization and the donor should take place. "In our organization, only the director speaks with the donor and there is no personal relationship between them. ... Interaction happens ad hoc," said Flora, the Communication Officer.

The interviewees underlined the need to present timely reports as well as inform the donors about the project activity more often than the formal guidelines require. "This keeps donors engaged and satisfied," said Liora, Marketing and Outreach Manager. This was reiterated by another participant:

Building relations with the donors mainly boils down to keeping those that you already have. Donors need to feel like they are the part of the process... You have to show them the quality of work even if they do not seem to need it. Yes, even like that! The donors tend to overlook many aspects of the grant... they show greater concern for efficient disbursement of funds than social impact. ... Still, you have to keep them engaged. [Don't] only show them the numbers, but ... show them the stories. (Daria, Founder and Director)

All in all, the participants noted the importance of donor-relations and the need to work on the improvement of these relations.

### Sub-Theme 3.3. Government

Ten participants reported that their organizations worked with governments on a regular basis. Larger women's rights NGOs reported they could not operate at their current level without funding from the government and cooperation with it. One organization in Russia and one in the UK receive close to half of their funding through governmental programs (Alisa, Head of PR Department; Teresa, Communication Coordinator). The participant from a smaller organization also stated, "The private funding raised by my organization would not be sufficient to support our programs if the state funding were to disappear" (Elisabeth, Director).

For developing countries, the picture appears very different. One NGO in India is three quarters privately funded, and one organization in the Congo takes less than a quarter of its funding from the non-private funding. However, the participants from developing countries found it very difficult to work with governments. Relations between NGOs in the developing countries and the states are often competitive, as they are "fighting for control over development resources" (Flora, Communication Officer). Flora shared her view of why it is so:

The relationship between NGOs and states has never been easy, especially in Africa. Most of the time governments are suspicious of NGOs. A common perception of international NGOs from an African perspective is pretty bad. They view NGOs as some sort of... secret, non-transparent, complex entities... very difficult for Africa to understand. (Flora, Communication Officer)

The interviewees agreed, however, that cooperation can offer benefits to both NGOs and states, by strengthening the effectiveness of NGO projects and increasing the capacity of local governments:



I believe we should try by all means to avoid unnecessary political tension and promote coherent national development strategies. In every case where successful collaboration between NGOs and the states took place, it led to positive changes in the community. (Rabi, Communication Manager)

The majority of participants said they felt the support of NGOs by the government will help strengthen their organizational capacities and organizational development. The respondents said their attempts to work with the government started with “providing information and introducing the organization and its topics of interest to the government” (Raji, Director). In Western countries, “it is easier to secure government openness and transparency” (Elisabeth, Director). Out of ten participants who claimed they have worked with the government, only four said they felt their organizations influenced government decisions:

In Russia, people always say that NGOs must be stupid or naive to waste time in the political attempts. But we were always open to the possibility of cooperation. We started with just showing our respect and belief in mutually beneficial relationship and then slowly engaged in the conversation. ... When they saw... we were not evil... we ended up having governmentally supported programs, and they are still running. (Daria, Founder and Director)

Alisa, Head of PR department, gave the same advice on engaging in a relationship with governmental structures:

Start with asking what interests them and show that you are independent and do not represent the interest of any businesses. We were successful in engaging City Administration, and at the moment, we are considered to be the most efficient organization in working with the government. State and municipal governments also provided us with the intensive support with our AIDS programs because they considered us reliable and relevant partners. (Alisa, Head of PR department)

Flora, Communication Officer, talked about the situation in her country in terms of NGO-government relations:

Fortunately, today many NGOs and women's rights NGOs maintain close partnerships with the state. In our AIDS programs, we work with local government. At the beginning, we intensively lobbied local authorities, and our demands were gradually met. ... AIDS program leaders often criticize NGO activists for their lack of lobbying efforts. ... You have to be active... to [ensure] their support. ... There are platforms where governments and NGOs can work together, like state AIDS NGO forums, where NGOs representatives meet... with state AIDS program personnel. ... Public support is essential. Because of the public assistance, many of our AIDS programs received political support. (Flora, Communication Officer)

Overall, the importance of relations with the target groups was noted by all the participants. This theme emerged partly from research questions two and four, which asked what marketing and communication strategies organizations implement to achieve their communication goals and what obstacles stand in their way. I asked about what the participants' target groups were, and how they worked with governments, donors and employees. The participants concluded that every NGO should have internal relations in place, as well as improve relations with the governments and the donors regardless of where the most funding is coming from.

#### Theme 4. Current Level of Satisfaction

##### With Existing Communication Strategies:

What communication goals do women's rights NGOs want to achieve?

What obstacles do they face in delivering their communication strategies?

This theme addresses research questions on the goals women's rights NGOs set for themselves and the obstacles they encounter. The level of satisfaction with existing strategies can be described in a way by how many goals are met and how many challenges can be neutralized. The level of satisfaction can also indicate how effectively the goals are being met and the obstacles resisted. Some starkly contrasting views

emerged about the level of satisfaction with current communication strategies. Two participants replied neutrally, expressing neither satisfaction, nor dissatisfaction with communication practices. Four expressed their overall satisfaction with the way communication was happening within their organization. Three showed a high level of satisfaction with their communication strategies. Four showed low satisfaction with their communication activities. All in all, the opinions were mostly positive.

This conclusion is based not only on participants' answers, but more on the overall feeling that appeared during the interviews. The results of other themes can also help to explain such variance. The participants showed a very high level of interest in communication as well as professionalism and knowledge in the field. They were optimistic talking about the challenges that organizations faced and claimed that these challenges were nothing but ways to realize how the situation could be improved (Bjorn, Director; Daria, Founder and Director). Many participants also expressed their happiness with the variety of modern communication tools available today. They praised the Internet and ICTs as the instruments that allow NGOs to easily control and improve their communication strategies.

There was not much skepticism and a lot of hope in the words of each participant that I interviewed. Rabi, Communication Manager, shared his happiness with his organization's recent communication strategy:

Although one cannot ever reach perfection and there is so much to do ahead of us, still I feel that what we have been doing recently in terms of communication is very different... from what it used to be. Our main communication goal is to make the beneficiaries aware of our activities. In the last year we have established several communication centers in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda to increase access to information in rural communities. Each centre is equipped with basic ICT tools

(computers and internet access) to enable information generation, access, and dissemination. We have newspapers, journals, books, research reports, electronically stored information (CD-ROMs), audiovisual materials (DVDs), compendiums, and all types of web-based resources. In our centers, women can access and share information on how to improve their lives through new technologies for farming, livestock keeping, coping with environment and climate change, and current marketing information. The centers also offer information related to health, gender, and HIV and AIDS. I am very pleased that women know about the centers and come there often. I am very optimistic at this point, even though we need to work on making it better with time. (Rabi, Communication Manager)

George, Director of one of NGOs, is also highly satisfied with the current strategy:

I think we have just found a perfect communication channel. ... The arts are a unique way to address HIV/AIDS and gender problems, because anyone can be creative and share that with others, even in settings of low-to-zero literacy, and also because the arts can convey messages which all can comprehend and understand, in a form that seeks to inspire as well as to entertain and educate. The artists, advocates, and organizations in our coalition use or advocate use of the arts to address women's issues and other issues like HIV/AIDS, poverty, hunger, youth concerns, environmental sustainability, treatment access... and others. We use the best channel of communication – dance, drama, song, painting, photography, film, video and multimedia. This is an intuitive communication that we use – the best strategy of all. (George, Director)

Dafroza, Director of another NGO, showed overall contentment with her NGO's communication strategy and explained why:

I am very optimistic at this point. We use accessible communication, that's the point. ... Information is edited and presented in a format for community radio stations, the most accessible medium of communication in South Africa. To minimize the gap between those who already have the knowledge of basic computer-skills, a critical component of my organization is to empower women through skills training. ... That's how later on they will be able to communicate with us [via] these new ways. (Dafroza, Director)

There were some opinions of people who were displeased with the current state of communication in the organization. They said that even though communication plays a

significant part in their daily activities, they still wished it was better, faster and more efficient. “We try to use every mechanism and every tool that is available for the communication but there are far too many regions beyond our reach,” said Flora, the Communication Officer. Some of the participants were challenged by the lack of technology and/or lack of interest among the public. Raji, confessed “...if only we had better technological resources then we wouldn’t even need to exist. ... I mean... in a good way. We are the result of the lack of communication. I really wish it was better” (Raji, Director). Alisa, Head of PR department, also shared her concerns, “The level of public interest in domestic violence, women’s issue, social problems, foster families... and the like... is low. This makes me think that either we fail to communicate well, or there is no feedback from the people who don’t seem to care. Either way, it is not a two-way communication” (Alisa, Head of PR department).

Still, there was an overall optimism among interviewees regarding how their NGOs are developing. Many stated that they feel women’s rights in general, and their organizations in particular, are facing a bright future if the appropriate communication strategies are implemented. One of the participants felt that his NGO “is becoming much less amateurish and more professional than ever before in its history. ... We’re now thinking about ... maximizing our independence as much as possible, as well as the neutrality and impartiality of an organization. All we need is maintaining the right communication strategy” (Bjorn, Director). Another person claimed that in her NGO “...flexibility and changeability have facilitated the organizational longevity. However, the scope of its activity makes it challenging to brand and promote the organization

effectively. That is why a more complex communication strategy is needed” (Liora, Marketing and Outreach Manager).

This fourth theme appeared as I asked the participants if they were content with their current communication strategies. The theme was one of the leading topics during the conversations as, intentionally or not, the participants tended to express their emotions when they said how they felt about this or that phenomenon. These emotions were either positive or negative, with most being positive, from which the conclusion could be drawn about the levels of their satisfaction. Understanding of the level of contentment is essential to realizing how the communication strategies can be improved in women’s rights NGOs. All the interviewees talked about that it is only recently that NGOs have understood the importance of communication and that it is now critical to develop the communication potential to its fullest.

#### Theme 5. Good Communication Practices:

What communication goals do women’s rights NGOs want to achieve?

What marketing and communication strategies do they utilize to achieve their goals?

What online tools do they use to get publicity and raise awareness?

As the participants showed different levels of satisfaction with their current communication strategies, it seemed reasonable to me to make them try to define what good communication practices are. From this attempt, several sub-themes shared by many interviewees appeared. Striving for truth and welcoming new and original ways to involve community reflected the need of NGOs to attain communication goals of raising credibility and engaging with stakeholders. Mention of production, multimedia,

distribution and maintenance of informative website helped answer the research question about the strategies women's rights NGOs can implement to enhance their communication strategies. Viewing networking as a useful communication tool helped identify what tools, including online tools, NGOs can use for successful communication programs.

#### Sub-Theme 5.1. Striving for Truth

Several participants noted that the key to transparency and credibility is telling the truth and being straightforward and honest with the stakeholders, especially when it comes to such delicate questions as women's rights. In many organizations, the truth is complicated and subtle and needs explaining. The public needs and has to know what is going on in the field of NGOs, and in the particular field of women's issues, how the money is spent, what the challenges are and how one can help to solve existing problems.

And, what is most important, the public should know what issues NGOs deal with and what societal disgracefulness they want to challenge. The reality must be shocking in some way, to attract attention and bring clarity. An example of such an instance is the case of one of the participants who ran a campaign to raise awareness for domestic violence. The campaign featured photo-shopped pictures of UK celebrities that have been altered to appear as though they have been beaten. The shocking campaign was created to ask everyone to act until women and children are safe - that is - "...admit domestic abuse is a problem, call it by its name and talk to someone about it. ... The campaign [acknowledged] the problem of domestic violence... and there certainly is a trend in the media now to go for the 'real' stories" (Teresa, Communication Coordinator). Even

though it was a disguise in a way, as the faces were photo-shopped, still the celebrities were so well known in the UK that the viewers would realize it was done to make a point, not to falsely represent a cause.

The opinion that the public needs to know the truth, which is sometimes harsh, was shared by the majority of respondents:

The organizations that have contempt for truth, have contempt for the public in a way. These companies get bad public relations. The community should feel included, feel like partners, feel "empowered" with information – that makes them get involved and act. ... People hunger for honesty and inclusion. If you're open, they'll help you, and open their worlds for your organization. ... Not knowing feels... so helpless. (Flora, Communication Officer)

Involving people by telling them the truth is the new way of good practice proposed by the participants:

If, for any reason, a practitioner is not able or willing to do that, that practitioner must ask seriously why he or she is making any effort to communicate at all. It is ethical to try to affect voluntary change in the attitudes of... the receivers. (Bjorn, Director)

One of the participants, George, supported this argument with a very strong and positive comment:

What people do you trust? I personally trust the people who communicate externally the way they believe internally. When this sort of people [tell] you they will do something, they really will do everything they can to do it. And when they don't believe in a certain policy or activity, they will let you know. (George, Director)

Generally, women's rights NGOs' representatives considered that effective communication is built on trust and honesty, and telling the truth should be among the core values in each NGO to make the whole sector more reliable.



### Sub-Theme 5.2. Welcoming New, Original Ways of Community Involvement through Technology

Several participants named ICTs and new approaches associated with it the best communication practices one can perform in the field of international development. Good example of such innovation was given by one of the participants, Rabi, who told the story of how his organization has started to use iPods and podcasting as devices for marginalized communities to access content relevant to their communities. His organization aims to, through multi-media tools, facilitate the exchange of ideas, experiences, and knowledge among communities to enhance learning for improved socio-economic empowerment. Recently the organization has been focusing on women as their main beneficiaries, as in Kenya where women are not taken seriously as farmers and private business-owners. The NGO introduced ICTs to promote information exchange between women farmers who market their products and the buyers who are in need of those products. Introducing iPods and similar devices, and using the podcasting platform, showed great results during the first month of operation, helping individual farmers and associations engage in mutually beneficial market activities:

We are constantly receiving the positive feedback, and we are going to expand the scope of the project if it goes well and probably introduce newer devices and use mobile technology. Without this innovative approach we would be stuck with the unsolvable problem our beneficiaries face. (Rabi, Communication Manager)

Another positive example of helpful innovation was provided by Lina, Communication Specialist. Her organization introduced the participatory video as a new form of raising awareness about women's issues in Bangladeshi communities:

We were exploring the roads less traveled. We played with alternative kinds of communication. We created videos with real people talking about their own experience of controversial issues. We challenged the norm, where experts or journalists reported on a situation. This approach questioned the whole concept of communication. We consider communication a process, whereas the traditional approach sees it as a product. Our work has developed from experiments and turned into what is now a participatory communication. (Lina, Communication Specialist)

In her NGO, Lina came up with the new concept and the new tools of communication that they call participatory communication, and it has turned out the most efficient and relevant approach to communicate with the public. This process allows people to speak for themselves. Lina added that “such communication can mobilize the community members and provoke a change at many levels of society.”

Overall, seven participants suggested that using innovative technologies to involve communities is a good step towards an efficient communication strategy and recommended that new original ways to look at the traditional issues must be practiced in more NGOs to increase their communication efficiency. This partly touches on the research question about the online tools that can be used by women's rights NGOs as most of the innovative tools participants associate with ICTs.

### Sub-Theme 5.3. Production, Multimedia, and Distribution

The interviewees mentioned that “the old ways didn’t go away,” as Bjorn, Director of one of NGOs, put it. The “old ways” here means such practice as production, multimedia and distribution that most of the participants named among what they perceive as good organizational practices in terms of communication. The production and multimedia projects help to enhance awareness of organizational operations and programs:

During the last year in my organization we have produced over thirty print and audiovisual products and distributed more than 10 000 publications in Russia and internationally. For many people and organizations receiving a booklet, a journal or a video on a CD is the best communication “gift” they can ask for as it is something you can touch, use, hide and then use again. (Alisa, Head of PR department)

Several participants reported that production, multimedia and distribution are the constant part of their day-to-day activities, and the overall communication strategy is often associated with them:

One of our most recent developments in our organization is a series of films, which give an insight for what it is like for women to be living with HIV. The films were shot by the women themselves with the help from our team. Our current goal is to spread the films nationally. (George, Director)

Distribution is also an important part of the good communication practice.

Organizations try to distinguish themselves providing fast delivery of publications. One of the interviewees, Liora, said, “As a part of our communication strategy, we aim to distribute institutional publications and videos effectively and ensure that products reach target audiences within 5-6 days.” To enhance the professionalism of publications and films, organizations hire writers and specialists in the field of production. Daria, the Founder and Director, said she would always outsource these types of projects to make sure the video or the publication to be distributed is done professionally. “Plus, charities always get a discount,” she added.

To enhance accessibility to a wider audience, many organizations use Internet to post their books and videos. A lot of videos produced by women’s rights NGOs are accessible at [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) (to be discussed further in a following section of the

results). Some examples of the YouTube videos of the organizations I have interviewed can be found at the following addresses:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0Z7ICqklDA> (Positively Women)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odVQ\\_IJvR\\_A&feature=PlayList&p=AC78FCD3B3371BED&playnext\\_from=PL&playnext=1&index=38](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odVQ_IJvR_A&feature=PlayList&p=AC78FCD3B3371BED&playnext_from=PL&playnext=1&index=38) (Women's Aid)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5n31oGRsuM> (International Service for Human Rights)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8dLvgnC1Sk> (WomensNet)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQ2pXa4xIu4&feature=PlayList&p=B6F07B9BD449A046&playnext\\_from=PL&index=0&playnext=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQ2pXa4xIu4&feature=PlayList&p=B6F07B9BD449A046&playnext_from=PL&index=0&playnext=1) (Peace X Peace)

Overall, production, multimedia and distribution were named among the most efficient communication tools, which have not been replaced by the newest technology but continue to give NGOs necessary exposure to the stakeholders. Production and multimedia can help influence different groups of the public while distribution allows NGOs to reach beneficiaries who do not use computers and/or the Internet.

#### Sub-Theme 5.4. Informative Website

Every single respondent mentioned a quality information website as among the essential tools for maintaining a proper communication scheme. In response to operational needs and public communication requirements, organizations continue to add new functions to their websites, such as the RSS feed (a system that makes it possible to deliver newly published press releases and other documents directly to people's desktops), forums where people can open discussions on various projects, online

consultation modules, Skype calling options and the like. At the same time, considerable efforts were made to improve websites' editorial content and increase the number of useful articles, presentations and materials. Organizations also tend to make people follow their activities through newsletters, updated publications, and training packages.

When asked about new insights about the ways to make the websites stand out, participants proposed different options:

What makes a website innovative... it's not the technology, not even the design... but the original content. ... Ask people what they want to see there and what is important for them – and make sure you have updated information all the time. (George, Director)

Liora, Marketing and Outreach Manager, added:

I once have seen a website that counted down to a million voices in support of peace – people called in to a toll-free hotline from any mobile or landline to answer, what does peace mean to them and how they would work to achieve it – in three minutes or less. This was really memorable. I guess the websites should be... memorable. (Liora, Marketing and Outreach Manager)

Teresa, Communication Coordinator, suggested another innovation:

Using Web 2.0 on your website can help you tell the narratives of those involved in peace building through the use of Flickr photos, podcasts, Google Maps, blogs, mobile video, MMS or SMS. There are also projects such as [www.witness.org](http://www.witness.org) that use digital media to record human rights violations. (Teresa, Communication Coordinator)

Thematic websites with forums for registered users also provide various opportunities for the public to take advantage of simple and accessible technology. The website of one of the participant's NGO is not fancy. However, it contains a lot of relevant information for women and the supporters of women's rights:

Our website is a hub for information by women, about women and gender, and has a focus on South African and African content. We help women to find the

people, issues, resources and tools they need for social activism, and this proves to be very helpful. (Dafroza, Director)

Marketing and Outreach Manager, Liora, provided another example of the organization that uses the website as a main platform for its activities:

Through the website we engage individuals in creative and critical thinking as they share diverse perspectives and act together for peace. We inform policymakers and the public about women's distinctive experiences and peace building accomplishments. We inspire women by amplifying the voices of other women who have been historically disregarded to shift decisions about war, peace, and the allocation of resources. Our website includes four blogs, an online documentary film ... and an online book. (Liora, Marketing and Outreach Manager)

Overall, the participants agreed that the absence of a solid website nowadays can be an obstacle for achieving effective communication strategies in women's rights NGOs.

#### Sub-Theme 5.5. Networking

The power of networking was praised by eight participants when they were asked about best possible communication practices. Among the positive traits of this phenomenon, the interviewees mentioned relative simplicity, long-term impact, low cost of maintenance, and good opportunities that networking opens. Women were said to be especially well connected through networks. "Women are more social, if you will. ... Women tend to get together in groups and have the power of community," said Lina, Communication Specialist. As mentioned in the review of literature, women have started to actively take advantage of electronic networking during the Fourth World Conference on Women and NGO Forum in 1995. Since then electronic communication has opened a lot of new opportunities for women's rights organizations:

Women are taking new steps and increasingly moving in new directions by networking electronically. ... Today we see more women's networks and women's

rights organizations making the most of new information and communication tools to get their message out and make their voices heard. (Liora, Marketing and Outreach Manager)

Similarly, Flora, Communication Officer, added, "With access to ICT resources, women's groups tend to bridge the information gap among themselves and share their knowledge with those who don't have such access" (Flora, Communication Officer).

Elisabeth, Director, explained:

When linked through relevant networks, NGOs have the potential to play a crucial two-way role of strengthening in the work and organizational skills... and articulating grassroots concerns at the policy level. Thousands of women's groups are now online, which allows them to successfully connect and share information, advice and experiences. (Elisabeth, Director)

The participants felt networking helps women to develop confidence and experience in expressing their viewpoints publicly by providing room for experimentation and enabling women to find like-minded partners across communities, nations and regions. Under the initiative of one of the participant's NGO, a special networking body was created, that planned to strengthen the work of individual women's rights organizations by disseminating information and lobbying for the equal access to ICTs. The alliance brought together over fifty organizations with a history of activism on the issues of women's rights and health. It has raised funds to connect many of its members to the Internet through buying modems, providing software, and introducing e-mail. This successful initiative showed how valuable a networking experience could be. One of the participant's NGO started as a smaller NGO and organization and grew into coalitions because of intense networking opportunities that they have timely pursued:

We are not an exclusive network. Anyone working in Eastern Africa can join our network... we left it pretty open. ... We also consider people and organizations

with interest in social issues and networking. We provide information services to its members free of charge. (Rabi, Communication Manager)

Despite some obvious advantages that were discussed by the majority of participants, there were contrasting opinions stressing the negative side of networking. Representatives of the two organizations claimed that electronic networking is not efficient. Their argument was that many “networking tools” are used by too few people. Thus, it is not a two-way communication stream from the NGO to its members and vice versa: “... for example the listservs are actively used by only 20-25 members of those who are signed-up. The forums tend to fade with time. People can talk to each other but it doesn’t mean they will do something together” (Raji, Director).

These critics, however, were only referring to electronic networking services such as newsletters. When it came to the networking as developing platforms where people, having common interests, share their ideas and start working together, all the participants unanimously supported this phenomenon.

This theme emerged from the data and from the course of the conversations. The appearance of this theme seems logical and clear, as in order to create the best communication strategies, one should understand what is considered to be good communication practice. The participants often referred to what they think of as good communication manners and what they deemed efficient from their own experiences or the experiences of other NGOs. I felt like talking about what they perceived as good communication practice helped them shape their understanding of what they wanted to become. It helped answer research questions one, two and three by shedding light on what goals women's rights NGOs set (truth for raising credibility, community



involvement for raising stakeholders' participation), what strategies they use to attain these goals (maintaining informative website, distributing publications and multimedia) and what tools, including online tools, they use to reach communication goals (networking, including electronic networking).

Theme 6. Challenges, Frustrations  
and Opportunities for Communication Specialists:

What obstacles do they face in delivering their communication strategies?

This theme appeared directly from research question four that asked what women's rights NGOs struggled with and what the main sources of frustration were that prevented them from delivering the best communication strategies. While answering these questions, the participants suggested several sub-themes that developed from the conversations: complicated relationships with media, use of wrong communication tools and lack of resources for communication.

Sub-Theme 6.1. Complicated Relationship with Media

A somewhat suspicious attitude towards the media was common for many respondents. The participants from the United States or the United Kingdom were the only ones who did not raise the issue of intolerant or indifferent media. The rest of the interviewees expressed their frustration that they cannot fully use the media as their communication tool. More than that, the media was said to often inhibit the information flow and misinform the community. "For the better of the organization, it should have a very low profile with the media and quite a high profile with their direct beneficiaries,"

said Raji, the Director of one of the organizations. The situation with media in Russia is the cause of frustration for many Russian NGOs:

The media is not interested in working with the third sector. They need commercial information, or the scandal. There is no point for them in covering social issues. ... I mean they *would* cover them but in the last place. ... Such a good communication channel goes to waste. ... People read newspapers but it is not much about NGOs there. Or when it is we all wish it wasn't there as they would absolutely misquote and misinterpret everything! (Alisa, Head of PR department)

There are different explanations why journalists are sometimes reluctant to work with NGOs. NGOs focus on many interesting news issues that just pass unnoticed by the journalists. "Both the problem of NGOs, and their virtue, is that they can reveal what no one wants to hear. Media is not a big fan of that," claimed Flora, Communication Officer.

However, NGOs still make attempts to involve media and maintain relationships with them. The participants expressed hope that the more they are trying to reach journalists, the more eager the media will be to cover their stories:

We still try to talk to them, interest them and engage them. We invite journalists over to our office, show them our Women's Center, and make them talk to women. They would write about us but not too often. It is not even the guilt of journalists; the whole system is just not... encouraging this. (Daria, Founder and Director)

It was often mentioned by the interviewees that good relations with the media must be negotiated, even though it takes time and effort to maintain them:

We all face challenges. What is really important is to remain relevant no matter what by responding to the shifting environment in a flexible and creative manner. For all NGOs out there, communication efforts have become increasingly important. We should try to engage with the press anyway. (Rabi, Communication Manager)

The conclusion that can be drawn from this sub-theme is that in many states and for different women's rights NGOs it is still a challenge to successfully engage with media as the latter are often indifferent or disturbing. However, as a majority of participants noted, NGOs should keep on trying to improve the relationship with media by teaching journalists and being flexible and creative.

#### Sub-Theme 6.2. Use of Wrong Communication Tools

Some NGO representatives complained that they have often misused communication tools or chosen the wrong communication tools for the setting. Daria, the Founder and Director of one of the NGOs, told the story about the anti-violence campaign they held last year. In order to promote their Center for Victims of Violence, they made an agreement with the tram services in the city to print advertising on the back of tram tickets. They felt that doing this would help reduce suspicion from the male partners of the victims of violence who suspect that their wives might be using social services and can put them in jail. At first, the strategy worked great, but after about a month the Center for Victims of Violence started to receive calls from the citizens with questions regarding tram parks, traffic jams, tram professional unions and the like. The number of calls was so overwhelming that NGOs had to stop printing the ad on the back of the tickets. This is just one example of how the communication tools can be misused. Another one that was mentioned was the social advertising that cannot reach the people:

The social ad should be as appealing and interesting as the commercial ad... maybe even more appealing. ... Plus... it has to pose the question and raise the issue. Oftentimes our ads are either too neutral or too provocative, I have noticed. (Alisa, Head of PR department)

Among other aspects that the participants mentioned were targeting the wrong audiences, wasting efforts on social media, not receiving feedback through the feedback forms. For example, Marketing and Outreach Manager, Liora, confessed in her organization they tried to use social media but it did not turn out effective so they went back to their traditional communication – through e-media and website forum. However, she admitted wasting a lot of time trying to push the strategy that was not right for them. “You don’t have to... be scared to admit difficulties or frustration. The key is to find what was wrong, what should have been better... [and] fix it” (Liora, Marketing and Outreach Manager). Fortunately, many of the communication mistakes were said to be detected right after the misuse happened, the participants reported.

#### Sub-Theme 6.3. Lack of Resources for Communication

The decline of foreign aid was said to influence the way communication strategies are implemented. NGOs are laying off staff and cutting back aid programs, and very often there are no sufficient funds for communication activities.

The impact of the financial crisis on NGOs is deepening. ... And if NGOs want to survive, they need to cut down the cost of operations. Very often the department of communication is the one that suffers first. Many people still view communication as an extra bonus with the touch of unnecessary luxuriousness. In hundreds of NGOs, communication departments were shut down. (Alisa, Head of PR department)

Seven participants reported cutting down the budget for communication because of the recent financial recession. For example, Bjorn, Director, reported, “Unfortunately, we have done what most organizations have done – after reviewing all budgets we reduced the expenses that were considered non-essential, such as travel... and communications” (Bjorn, Director).

What was also stressed by many interviewees is the reluctance of donors to fund non project-related or overhead expenses, such as salaries, rents, and research or communication activities. In fact, the greatest financial difficulty of NGOs I interviewed was finding donors who would fund their core or overhead expenses.

Some participants noted that the lack of funding might be caused by poor credibility of the third sector. "There are NGOs that lack credibility or visibility. That is the reason donors simply do not trust them and give them their money. So the money goes to the government instead," explained Dafroza, the Director of one of the NGOs. George, the head of another organization, who has been engaged with NGO sector for over 6 years, strongly opposed such role mix-up. "The government should perform the role of referee, not the competitor," he added.

Several interviewees noted that some NGOs themselves bear responsibility for the lack of strategic engagement with funding mechanisms. Many NGOs find it difficult to adapt to donor agendas and often lack knowledge, confidence and ability to deal with potential donors. To foster more strategic NGO engagement with the donors, some participants suggested creating special forums, where NGOs would learn about their options and acquire skills to strategically engage with funding mechanisms. Strong and consistent leadership of forum representatives, coupled with the ongoing assistance to fundraising campaigns of NGOs, can improve relationships between the actors concerned.

Many women's rights NGOs are seeking new ways to raise money for communication. Several organizations are looking to raise money from donors overseas

in places like India or China, but apparently the recession has had an impact too on donors all over the world. "The other potential source is governmental money; we are continuing to pursue government grants," added Elisabeth, Director.

To make a significant contribution to communication in women's rights NGOs, donors must expand the support they offer. First, they must increase the length of their funding contracts. Second, donor funds must encourage NGOs to build on their comparative advantages and increase their expertise in order to develop creative and efficient communication strategies. Last, donors must allow NGOs to divert their funding from its stated objectives to aims that arise suddenly but are of primary importance. Moving from short-term project-based funding for NGOs to longer-term program-based funding can be one possible approach for donors to pursue. By helping to increase the security of NGOs, donors will help NGOs to improve their communication strategies.

The development of this theme was unexpectedly provoked by other questions that I posed during the interviews. For example, the sub-theme about media developed from the question I have asked about working with target groups. Many participants said they saw working with media as a huge challenge and developed this sub-theme further. Also, the interviewees spoke about the misuse of the communication tools when they answered the question about marketing and communication strategies. For a majority of participants, lack of resources was said to be the biggest challenge. All in all, the theme was very important as its development helped answer the research question about the obstacles women's rights organizations face in delivering their communication strategies.

Theme 7. New Technologies as a Breakthrough in NGO Communication:

What marketing and communication strategies do they utilize to achieve their goals?

What online tools do they use to get publicity and raise awareness?

The most popular, controversial and fruitful discussions that happened during the interviews involved new technologies and social media tools. The participants became more emotional when they spoke about the newest technologies. They were more animated in voice as well as more argumentative and insightful. They also were more inclined to supporting their arguments with illustrative examples and stories from their experiences. The participants were generally more eager to talk.

There were different opinions around the issue, but overall the participants expressed their belief that ICTs present a helpful tool and can change the communication strategy in any organization for better, being cost-effective, easy to use and recognized around the world. For example, Rabi, Communication Manager, said:

Personally I think Web 2.0 brings a huge potential as a development tool, because in every part of the world people use the web as a space to express themselves, share and interact. Everyday on the Internet I see what is possible with free tools. The tools can be useful for in-country connections, in local languages, or north-south connections. (Rabi, Communication Manager)

The main online communities that were listed by the participants, such as Facebook (personal pages), Twitter (microblogs), YouTube (videos), Flickr, Picasa (photos), BlogSpot (blogs), and Del.icio.us (social bookmarking) allow NGOs to come to the stakeholders. “We do not wait to be luckily found by a query in a search engine,” said Liora, Marketing and Outreach Manager.

Web 2.0 sites offer several already made technical tools which do not require highly complex technical knowledge and IT experience. YouTube, for example, has forums around its videos. “This is a good strategy to ensure NGO’s can have a better control on their ICT infrastructure,” said Dafroza, Director of one of NGOs. Her organization is a Web 2.0 site that uses crowd sourcing (Wikipedia, Howtopedia), social networking (Facebook, Xing), and self-organizing (Change.org, Pledgebank) to give communities an access to a large pool of like-minded people and volunteers. With the help of a website, which is a main component of organization’s communication strategy, women can find information on how to write a business plan, build a website, translate a document, or find examples of how a problem was solved by others. The website has different elements of social networking – forums, online consultation, informational boards, links to Facebook groups, Twitter, and other useful links.

In developing countries, people grow more and more interested in new tools, because they want to see what they can apply in their practices. However, although many participants praised technology as the most efficient communication tool of today, some interviewees argued one should never forget that technology is just technology. Lina, Marketing and Outreach Manager, explained:

In my organization we view digital media tools and multimedia tools just as helpful instruments, and nothing else...tools to assist people in sharing stories that are important to them and that can help other people. We do not glorify these tools or see as the main instruments for bringing about change. ... I believe what is much more important is what content it helps produce. (Lina, Communication Specialist)



Websites often tell lots of stories about the topic of oppression, but stories by themselves are not as useful, as is how they are used with other material on the website.

George reiterated:

I am not interested in collecting stories just for the sake of collecting them. I don't need a stack of stories on my shelves. What I am interested in is critically examining the ways in which sharing and listening can lead to specific changes in human perceptions and influence human behavior. (George, Director)

Liora, Communication Specialist, said:

Certainly, the user friendly digital editing and production tools are essential to developing the stories in media formats. But teaching people technology skills for no particular reason seems misguided. Without a coherent plan and analysis dumping equipment into people's communities is a waste of resource. I believe that technology should be... an enhancement to a process of learning and empowerment. (Liora, Marketing and Outreach Manager)

Several particular new technologies were mentioned by most of the interviewees. They were categorized in the following sub-themes: mobile technologies, social media, blogging and other ICTs.

#### Sub-Theme 7.1. Mobile Technologies

The interviewees noted that mobile initiatives provide better opportunities for social impact than any other ICTs. The reason behind this argument was that the physical access to mobile phones is much greater around the world compared to computers and other kinds of technologies. People get connected in different countries thanks to the rapid mobile phone penetration in different areas of the globe. Millions of people that never had regular access to computers or fixed-line telephones now use mobile devices as daily tools for communication and data transfer. Today, there are 3.5 billion mobile

phone users in the world; more than 65% of them are in the developing world (Hjorth & Kim, 2005).

Mobile access is generally more affordable than any other type of connection. However, the costs of developing and deploying mobile technologies are sometimes too high for organizations, especially small NGOs. Participants said that many projects rely on subsidized technology or donations by technology companies and mobile operators. Some companies are willing to give their services for smaller projects for free, but those are not numerous. Several interviewees suggested that the costs will decrease after more organizations start using mobile technologies. "The more mobile technology work takes place, the more costs will start to come down," said Lina, Communication Specialist.

In some of the developing countries, mobile phones are the main means of communication for affected members of the public. Information that is not produced by public authorities or broadcasting agencies is more reliable for people. Through their mobile phones, local people get to know what is happening and what help is needed:

In Africa where broadcast technology is controlled by a dictatorial government, mobile phones have enabled women to communicate with the others on the topic of their concerns. Women's NGOs can run their projects without drawing unnecessary attention. Through their mobile devices, women and women's rights organizations can access information on such issues as domestic violence, emergency alerts, health care info requests, mobile education programs, human rights monitoring and much more. (Flora, Communication Officer)

Text messages create the news in the community by word of mouth:

Women can send messages to the special numbers to receive updates on actions they can take and events related to women's issues. The main quality of texting is its immediacy. I believe nearly all text messages get read. (Raji, Director)

Compared to the developed countries, such a rate is impressive, especially in comparison to other technology such as e-mail. "In the UK, emails sent by charities and commercial players have an open rate of not more than 20 percent," said Teresa, Communication Coordinator. There are no statistics on how many emails get read from NGOs, but I can assume this number is even less than 20 percent.

Besides reaching the people immediately and being a great awareness-building tool, mobile technology also helps create and expand the target audience:

With every campaign we collect the names and phone numbers to be used in future campaigns. For example, after the white band campaign against domestic violence... we kept sending text message alerts about public demonstrations to several thousand responders who agreed to receive future announcements. (Raji, Director)

Mobile technology can also be used for advocacy and fundraising activities but these phenomena have not been studied well enough yet:

As text message-based advocacy is relatively new, experience is limited and there exists few successful case studies. As for the fundraising via SMS, those NGOs that have had successes in it tend to be big and well known and present causes that provoke an emotional response from people... that drives them to take action immediately. (George, Director)

What was also noted is using mobile devices to spread good news and support people with positive causes:

I am finding the program to be very successful and efficient. We sent good news to people on their mobiles. People reported that they felt happy when they received such messages from us, and told us that they felt that someone cares about them. (Raji, Director)

While text messaging and voice remain the most common applications of mobile phones among NGO workers, the interviewees also report using mobile technology for

shooting photos and videos, collecting and analyzing data, multi-media messaging and mapping.

In spite of the huge penetration of mobile networks, Director of one of the NGOs, Raji, is still not totally satisfied with the existing development programs:

Ok, so they have us... but how about the rest of the world? Communities frequently suffer from inadequate mobile access in terms of applications, content... and services. [We invite] social development organizations to partner with us to implement new programs or scale their existing programs using mobile technology. (Raji, Director)

The participants suggested that NGOs should use mobile phones in both developed and developing countries to spread their causes, raise awareness and communicate important messages to people. This is because mobile phones are more available in developing countries. Mobile technology is often the only way for affected members of a community to communicate.

### Sub-Theme 7.2. Social Media

Using social media for campaigning purposes and overall promotion of the organization was mentioned by eleven respondents. The low cost and the scope of the service allowed organizations who hardly use other channels of communication to live up to their ideal communication strategies. Many social services were discussed. The most often mentioned, as expected, were Facebook and Twitter, which were used by nine of the participants. Other popular services that were used by more than three organizations were the following: Friendster (social networking website that allows users to contact other members, maintain those contacts, and share online content and media with those

contacts), YouTube (video hosting website), MySpace (social networking website) and Flickr.

What makes Friendster good for a charity that tries to promote its causes is that... every time a woman in your group posts a new entry in the blog you see it right away on your Friendster page. This helps spread the ideas and enjoy richness of the information. (Rabi, Communication Manager)

Participants claimed that best social services provided quickness of managing the account:

Friendster is surprisingly popular [in] India. Almost everyone I know has a Friendster account. It makes it ... so easy to find people... we also have celebrities and influential people on Friendster. When I created an account there, in less than two weeks, we had over 100 people who signed up. (Raji, Director)

The easiness of adding and managing friends was said to be important as the process of communication that social media implies should be quick and comfortable:

Unlike Friendster... inviting people in MySpace is difficult and much less comfortable. You can't just click the button and invite 2000 people. MySpace tries to fight spamming so the members usually block their accounts from the unfamiliar information. People also get suspicious when someone adds them unless you know them personally. So what I had to do is send out emails one by one. (Flora, Communication Officer)

YouTube was mentioned several times as a platform that has created new viewing patterns and social interactions, empowering users to be more creative and developing new opportunities for non-commercial field. The use of YouTube by NGOs is important because it suggests a significant new distribution channel for the organization:

Informational videos of many NGOs appear similar to the professional news outlets. YouTube videos look like BBC or CNN reports, thus being a valid information source for people. ... And YouTube operates in such way that NGOs' video would have equal chances coming up on a search of the videos as other sources. (Elisabeth, Director)

I already offered some examples of how YouTube can be used by NGOs in the previous theme in the context of NGOs' multimedia distribution. YouTube videos can be downloaded by the members of the community themselves. By networking activists, sharing skills across communities, and supporting each other online community members work towards the implementation of solutions to the challenges the world faces. What is also convenient for the users is that YouTube has forums around the videos, as well as rating tools, bookmarks, statistics and embedding capabilities for blogs and personal and organizational websites.

NGO's YouTube videos often explain various international projects aiming to protect different groups of community. Several participants found these videos misleading and insincere:

These YouTube videos are produced often because there is an agenda and organizations seek to directly influence viewers. They tend to be oriented toward providing information with an underlying message that western groups are working to protect or save developing countries. (Bjorn, Director)

Another popular service that was mentioned by many interviewees was Flickr.

Flickr is an easy and free service that allows NGOs to constructively share their messages and mission through the pictures that are uploaded to the website:

Through experience, I know that a photograph supported by a well-written story really can inspire a viewer to become a donor. A Flickr account can function as a newsletter through which staff in the field can show as they go through their country-specific work. A donor can visit Flickr to see instantly what is being accomplished, and who is benefiting from an NGO's work. (Kresta, Photographer and Social Media Consultant)

Kresta has helped several NGOs with the pictures that she uploaded on Flickr raising social issues relevant to the targeted region:

Developing contacts through Flickr has really inspired me to take my photography a step further. I am passionate about using photography to help humanitarian efforts and raise awareness of AIDS, poverty and children's rights, especially in Africa. Flickr has enabled me to begin to do this. (Kresta, Photographer and Social Media Consultant)

Talking about the possible drawbacks of Flickr, Kresta added:

[There is] just one caveat. ... A photograph may have very serious content, and a viewer could make a nonsensical or inappropriate comment... although this is thankfully rare. These can always be deleted. (Kresta, Photographer and Social Media Consultant).

The variety of available social media was said to be one of the most useful tools women's rights NGOs can use nowadays to promote their activities and attract attention to the issues of importance for women. Because of its unbeatable cost-efficiency, almost all participants claimed they used social media in one way or another and achieved success in term of communication. Eleven participants recommended social media and social networks to enhance communication strategies in women's rights NGOs.

### Sub-Theme 7.3. Blogs

A growing number of bloggers around the world are now using citizen media to talk about the social issues and raise awareness. Although very accessible in different parts of the world, blogging comes with some preconditions. One has to have the equipment, stay connected and willing to communicate in an open and transparent way. Many people, especially in the developing countries, do not have the education and skills needed to convert their thoughts into prose, which is needed to be an active contributor to the conversations on the web. However, those that develop these skills usually run interesting, controversial and mind-opening blogs. The good example of such blogs is the so-called "positive blogging," the areas in the blogosphere dedicated to HIV-positive

bloggers. Communication Officer, Flora, claimed, “Speaking openly about HIV/AIDS is difficult, especially in some countries. There is a stigma towards these individuals. Still, dozens of brave people chronicle their personal stories... in blogs and Internet forums that can be read by anyone” (Flora, Communication Officer).

Women’s issues are also a popular topic to blog about. Flora told me an inspiring story of the woman inside their organization who made blogging her mission in life:

Arlette has been involved in the struggle for the empowerment of women and women’s rights for years, so she began blogging about women’s rights, with particular emphasis on violence against women and children in the Congo. Arlette is one of the few female Congolese bloggers who write about such issues. In her blog posts, she discusses sexual revolution, premarital sex, sexual politics, and other issues, which are often very controversial like, for instance, sexual harassment of girls in schools by their Professors. (Flora, Communication Officer)

Flora also shared how blogs can be used during the campaigns. She once participated in the campaign called “16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence” using blogs, cell phones, and radio broadcasts to raise awareness. Employees of her organization blogged about the rights of women affected by HIV/AIDS and shared their thoughts on violence against women. All the participants also noticed that blogs are an unusual and fast way to learn and network:

Through the blog I have met so many wonderful people who all have the passion and the drive to do something. ... We also try to... link people who have the same agenda and get them to collaborate with each other. (Bjorn, Director)

Although blogs can take time and require special abilities as good writing skills and creativity, this social media was said to be efficient component of communication strategies for women’s NGOs. It is especially true for organizations working with social issues that can be broadly discussed, such as gender violence and HIV/AIDS. The public



easily gets used to following interesting blogs where people can learn about the issues that are important for them.

#### Sub-Theme 7.4. Other New ICTs

Participants noted that through new media technologies such as digital audio and video, mobile video, SMS and MMS services, it is possible to provoke community driven production of media that addresses local issues. Community radio stations are often restricted by the governments in what they broadcast. Internet radio and websites avoid these restrictions. Literacy is also not a requirement for digital media, which gives the voice to people who cannot read and write. The recordings of their valuable experiences can be put up on a website, recorded onto CD or downloaded to devices such as iPod and then played back at community level meetings to enhance discussion.

Six participants reported using unusual technologies in their work to improve their communication strategy. Rabi, Communication Manager, said for the employees' discussions and meetings with the members of the network around the world they use a feature called Skypecasting that allows a large audience to participate. The discussion can be about any topic, and anyone around the world can join in both audio and video mode:

The best feature... is that Skype calls are free... and all we have to have is a decent ISDN connection. Thanks to the broadband Internet access such as WiMax, people in developing countries can also participate in these discussions. Skypecasts can also be recorded... for people to listen. (Rabi, Communication Manager)

Skypecasting can also facilitate unique projects like women to women contact. Through this kind of discussion between women in various cultural and social settings, the differences can be highlighted and ways to help each other explored.

Cheap digital cameras are another tool for grassroots organizations to capture their ideas and activities. Such videos can demonstrate the challenges of peace building and tell some insightful stories. Videos that are spread around cannot be captured by any other media. The content can be uploaded to websites for public discussions, or kept on private discussion boards to be used for the communities that local activists work with:

Digital media offers many ways through which voices of those who are vulnerable... but important, can be captured and promoted, so as to protect valuable ideas for social change. Simple recording devices should be given to people in communities who then would be able to capture their own stories and share them with the world. (George, Director)

Small media production houses are also becoming popular as a communication tool in the developing world. New technologies make these media houses relatively affordable and provide studio quality audio and video. Obvious challenges to these technologies are low connectivity particularly in rural areas, lack of training and media competence. Newer technologies such as social media and the mobile phones offer promising ways to achieve a more inclusive Internet and use the web to learn from each other. Organizations and projects that experiment with new approaches to use ICTs for development focus on the users, believing that it is users' engagement and creativity that makes the networking and learning effort vibrant.

Many of the participants still warned that one should never forget that technology is the tool, not the aim:

We have been talking [about] innovative technology here. ... It surely can help in a way... but that does not mean technology can solve problems by itself. Communication success comes from collaboration between NGOs and the public with the help of these tools. (Rabi, Communication Manager)

Overall the new communication technologies were recommended for the use in women's rights organizations as an efficient public relations tool. Among popular services such as social media, blogs, and mobile technologies, the participants named such original and unusual instruments as Skypecasts, participatory videos and small media production houses. Interviewees supported their arguments with illustrative stories from their experiences. This theme contributed to answering the questions on marketing and communication strategies in the women's rights organizations and, as it puts emphasis on ICTs, online tools that NGOs use to expand their communication strategies. As this theme raised the most intensive discussion and showed unanimous support of the participants, the conclusion can be drawn that digital and social media, blogging, mobile phones and other innovative ICTs present the most efficient.

#### Theme 8. Improvement of Communication Strategies:

What communication goals do women's rights NGOs want to achieve?

What marketing and communication strategies do they utilize to achieve their goals?

In the previous themes, the participants discussed what they consider good communication practice, what challenges they face, how satisfied they are with communications in their NGO is, and how they use the technology. I decided to end the interviews with drawing conclusions about what, in the opinion of NGO representatives, should be improved in strategic communication in women's rights NGOs. All the discussions were very consistent, and the conclusions developed smoothly from the course of previous topics addressed. Several paths of improving communication strategies were offered: clarity and consistency of messages, evaluation of

communication strategies, expansion of international presence and space for each woman's voice worldwide.

### Sub-Theme 8.1. Clarity and Consistency of Messages

Communication is intangible, but it adds to organization's credibility, value and recognition of its activities. Over the last several years, the connection between NGOs' communication activities and value creation became apparent. Communication professionals and heads of women's rights NGOs I spoke with agreed that strategic communication requires clarity and consistency of messages.

"Communication specialists are those people who can talk to others inside and outside the company and communicate the same consistent messages but in different ways," suggested Alisa, Head of a PR department. Other specialists also added that having clear and consistent messages across various groups of stakeholders is something that must be achieved, although many organizations lack it:

I wish we were more consistent and more repetitive. Our communication strategy lacks coordination so far, as we do not always communicate timely and in response to different groups' needs. Our messages, although talking about meaningful issues, are often sporadic. This is to say we don't have the strategy. ... Yes, I guess it means we don't have a strategy yet. (Rabi, Communication Manager)

Repetition is also crucial. People I interviewed often associated consistency with repetition:

There must be trainings [for] all employees in what messages we should deliver in the first place. It is worth remembering that one can never repeat the good thing too often. If everybody in the organization speaks in unison, and messages are repeated enough for everybody to remember them, then the organization can be called influential. (Daria, Founder and Director)

And, perhaps above all, effective strategic communication was said to be based on truth. “Being consistent and being influential are critical,” said Elizabeth, “but the messages should be based on something real.” Overall, consistency, clarity, repetition and truth were named by many participants as keys to improvement of an NGO’s image and reputation.

### Sub-Theme 8.2. Evaluation of Communication Strategies

The question of measurement of effectiveness of communication activities was raised many times during the interviews. Evaluation was said to be a necessary component of implementing efficient communication strategies. Four participants argued that it was easier for the for-profit companies to measure their communication activities:

For-profits can do it in terms of the market value – is there an increase in sales, or do we spend too much on the ads that are not efficient? Our communication is hard to measure, but it contributes to our performance, credibility and attraction of the donors. (Daria, Founder and Director)

Interviewees also claimed that there was a direct link between a company’s intangible assets and performance:

It is not about financial outcomes. ... It is more about behavior outcomes. The indicator of the program’s efficiency is the change in minds, which you cannot measure but which you can feel. Businesses can measure communication activity in terms of the market value. ... But, for the non-profit, it is different. How can you measure the social benefits of the particular radio program? It is immeasurable! (Lina, Communication Specialist)

There were opinions in the group – seven people believed that communication activities can and should be measured. For example, Alisa, Head of PR department, said:

There are certain tools available for NGOs to assess their impact. ... For instance, we can count the number of our Twitter followers and how this quantity has increased after a particular action. Or we can see how many Facebook fans we have and how many of them are active. How many volunteers have we recruited

during our last awareness campaign? How many people signed up for the newsletter? How many clicks have we received on our last news online? How many people found us through the search engines and what were the key words for the search? There are many questions and they all should be answered in order to facilitate strategic communication. All these indicators should be evaluated each week, each month and each year. ... In my organization we publish a yearly communication report and I suggest every NGO to have it in place. (Alisa, Head of PR department)

Another good way to assess a communication strategy is asking for feedback from the public. Feedback from constituents is indicative of the overall success of a communication, and, more critically, the successful implementation of organizational strategy in general. "The feedback is valuable when you want to see what constituents like, what they find efficient, and what troubles them," said Daria, the Founder and Director of one of the NGOs.

All in all, the participant felt confident that the communication strategies used in women's rights NGOs should be assessed. There were contrasting opinions about the ways to estimate the impact of different communication programs, but the overall importance of such activities was emphasized by the majority of the interviewees.

### Sub-Theme 8.3. Expansion of International Presence

Even though the majority of organizations that the interviewees represented were active on the national level, all of them reported having international communication activities. Many respondents expressed hope that in the following years they would expand their international presence and engage more with the international community. All the respondents deemed international exposure to be one of the key components to effective communication strategy. Data has showed that in both developed and

developing countries, an international presence was considered critical for women's rights NGOs:

Rural communities in Africa need global presence just as much as people in developed countries. Recently, during the Microsoft [Government Leaders] Forum for Africa in Cape Town, the world leaders from all over the world discussed the ways of increasing Africa's global competitiveness in the area of ICTs. [Our organization] also participated. (Rabi, Communication Manager)

The participants said that international cooperation can be an efficient capacity-building tool for national NGOs:

We need to participate more in international conferences and increase our international presence. It is a great opportunity to learn what others are doing to address some of the greatest problems that face the world including gender inequalities, racism, religious differences, ethnicity, HIV/AIDS, poverty, ignorance, crime, and diseases. (Flora, Communication Officer)

Liora, Marketing and Outreach Manager, added, "Having international presence and connections, NGOs can boost their strength in building a global movement for more ethical consumption, investment and trading" (Liora, Marketing and Outreach Manager).

It was also suggested by three interviewees, that as players in the international scene, NGOs can become more strategic in their lobbying of the international financial institutions and donors. What was also mentioned by participants is that the global presence can increase NGO accountability, including accountability to beneficiaries, professional standards and leadership potential:

NGOs that are engaged internationally usually have high professional standards, expertise and human resources to play a leading role in the international arena. They... [also have] abilities to generate front-page stories in Western newspapers. (George, Director)

Among NGO representatives, there were also contrasting opinions regarding the usefulness of the international presence. It was said by three interviewees that national

NGOs are usually very knowledgeable only about their own situation, and this is their major advantage that should not be taken away by engaging too much in international activities. Kresta, Photographer and Social Media Consultant, explained:

Most of NGOs I worked with were experts in countries they worked in. I don't find it reasonable for them to move to work somewhere else or... expand their global presence as it will hurt their domestic activities... meaning that they would not be able to concentrate on their countries solely. (Kresta, Photographer and Social Media Consultant)

The common opinion of the participants, however, was that international presence should be expanded.

#### Sub-Theme 8.4. Space for Each Woman's Voice Worldwide

Several NGO representatives reported that what they would like to promote in their organizations in the future is engaging every woman in their activities:

It would be a mistake to ask, what the women's agenda is. There could not be a single agenda for the half of the world's population. Diversity must be a motto of women's movements. There will never be a unified women's front. We should try to represent every single woman around the world which might be difficult... but still achievable. (Kresta, Photographer and Social Media Consultant)

In the last decades, women have become the skilled networkers and coalition builders. Women promote diversity among them and try to raise issues common for all, especially those relevant for their communities. Thus, it is essential to make space for each woman's voice to make sure no issues are overlooked. For issues affecting women, a multitude of participatory communicators is required. Lina, Communication Specialist, explained how in their NGO they feel about diversity:

We realize that every woman is different, and we value each woman's perspective and experience. What embraces diversity is consonant with participatory communication. Participatory communication methods enhance the bottom-up strategies used by women's organizations around the world, and aid their efforts to



leverage their experience to influence the mainstream. (Lina, Communication Specialist)

Some participants expressed their opinion in regards to how Internet and ICTs can make space for women's voices that previously were bereft of the opportunity to speak about their issues:

In Africa, connecting individual rural women directly to the Internet makes no sense. However, women's rights organizations can use Internet and ICTs to let them speak through these organizations. Women's rights organizations are in a unique position as they can serve as information facilitators for women without access to ICTs. (Flora, Communication Officer)

Indeed, this was reported as a common practice for several organizations. Five participants said that their NGOs offered information to women without access to computers or to ICTs.

The vast data that was received from the participants suggested numerous ways for the improvement of communication strategies in the women's rights organization and for NGOs in general. Based on their own experiences in the field and experiences of partner organizations, NGO representatives suggested the most efficient ways to improve strategic communication in the women's rights organizations. The best communication strategies for improving capacity of NGOs will be summarized in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

In this study, I examined the crucial role that women's rights organizations play in the modern world and look at what communication goals women's rights NGOs set for themselves, what communication instruments are best for them in achieving their goals, and what obstacles they face in their efforts. Based on the 13 in-depth interviews with communication experts and directors of NGOs from nine countries, I proposed the best communication strategies and mechanisms for such groups. During the interviews, I reviewed communication practices in the NGOs and studied the impact of the Internet on the NGO field with a special focus on new communication tools such as social media and blogging. After a careful examination of existing literature on women's rights NGOs, communication, marketing, Internet, social media and public relations, I combined this knowledge with the findings of my study to provide recommendations for the NGOs to enhance their communication strategies.

In this thesis, I argue that women's rights organizations should strengthen their communication strategies so that they can enhance their presence in the global arena. The study showed the power of communication by providing examples of how wise communication mechanisms can make a difference for women around the world. Both the literature review and the interviews show the importance of using the right communication tools and the necessity to take advantage of the new technologies that are both cost-effective and available worldwide.

The study illustrates a wide range of experiences and perceptions concerning the strategic communication in women's rights NGOs. After reviewing the findings, I suggest a number of specific measures that should be taken to ensure effective strategic communication. The participants addressed numerous areas of strategic communication in their organization to offer the insights in what an ideal communication program should look like.

First, interviewees outlined what their communication goals are and what they strive to achieve with their communication programs. Second, participants talked about who should implement communication programs in women's rights NGOs. Third, they described the target groups they work with. Fourth, they defined their current level of satisfaction with the existing communication programs. Fifth, participants explained what they perceive as good communication practices. Sixth, they shared what obstacles they face in delivering their communication tasks. Seventh, they listed the online tools and ICTs their NGOs use to raise awareness and maintain relationships with the community. Finally, interviewees offered recommendations about what has to be improved in the communication strategies in women's rights NGOs.

### The Main Themes of the Study

The thematic analysis revealed eight major themes related to communication strategies in women's rights NGOs according to the practitioners studied. The first theme indicates various communication goals and priorities women's rights NGOs set for themselves. The findings suggest that the practitioners of these non-governmental organizations seek increased recognition, better visibility, and higher credibility. Helms

(2003) suggested that women's NGOs are often degraded as lacking respect and credibility and need to raise their status in the community. My findings suggest the NGO staff interviewed are very aware of this concern and have clear communication goals and priorities. Another important goal for women's rights NGOs is to engage multiple constituents in their communication activities. Bruce (1995) noted that the nature of NGOs implies having various constituents and trying to balance between different groups of stakeholders with consistent messages. Courtney (2002) also mentioned the need to work with different groups of the public whose interests are often in conflict with each other. The participants also suggested that the communication goals of the organization were dependent on its size and history.

The second theme describes the roles of staff responsible for the creation and implementation of communication strategies. The findings show that the communication specialist plays a major role in the formulation of corporate strategy and should be present in each NGO. The participants also argued that although having a communication specialist is important, executives must be engaged in delivering communication strategies.

The third theme shows that the women's rights NGOs do work with their stakeholders, and describes how they manage to do so. Relationships with employees, donors and governments were said to be the most important relationships. The participants suggested that NGO staff should improve relations with governments and donors regardless of where most funding is coming from. Courtney (2002) also noted in her research that NGOs face the permanent need to differentiate the ever-growing

community of stakeholders – donors, beneficiaries, media, governments and others. The participants in the present study seem to understand this. My findings contrast the arguments of another group of researchers, Gonzalez et al. (2002), who claim that NGOs disregard the importance of the “customer-oriented” model. The scholars argue that instead of addressing the needs of different stakeholders many women’s rights NGOs tend to engage in the “organization-centered” marketing activities. This statement is supported by Andreasen and Kotler (2003) who state that NGOs falsely believe that the market needs their products or services and never focus on the market's real needs. My findings show, however, that women's rights NGOs focus their activities on adjusting to the need of various stakeholders and agree with the idea of needing to develop the market orientation to increase their efficiency and recognition.

The fourth theme reviews the level of satisfaction of women’s rights NGOs with their current communication strategies. Most interviewees expressed positive opinions about their communication programs, and many reported that cost-effective tools available for NGOs today bring a lot of benefits to the NGO sector. While some reported being dissatisfied with current strategies, the overall mood of NGO representatives was hopeful and optimistic. I have not found any other studies looking at practitioners’ level of NGO satisfaction regarding their communication strategies or overall organizational strategies.

The fifth theme indicates what is regarded as good communication practices by the NGO workers. The participants said that effective communication is built on trust and honesty. Telling the truth should be among the core values in each NGO to make the

whole sector more reliable. This is closely connected with the need emphasized by many scholars for NGOs to raise credibility and accountability (Bruce, 1995; Helms, 2003; Illingworth et al., 2002). The participants also welcomed new and original ways of community involvement through technology such as podcasting, participatory videos and others. The positive impact of technology was also noted by Reade-Fong and Gorman (2005) and Heins (2008) who argued that NGOs should actively use ICTs to communicate among distant networks, participate in policy debates and voice new perspectives. Harcourt (1999) also noted that electronic communications facilitate women's networking and advocacy, helping to bridge gender gaps in technology and challenge stereotypes.

My findings show that production of multimedia and distribution remain among the most efficient tools to maintain good communication strategies, even though they do not necessarily use new technologies. Maintaining an informative website was said to be an efficient communication tool. Harcourt (1999) and Oehler (1998) support this sub-theme in their studies on electronic tools used by women. Efficient networking was also mentioned in the present study as among the strongest points in the communication strategies. Baker (2002) said that joining groups of women together with a common agenda and networking would enable them to organize nationally and globally and speak about the policy and rights issues of women and girls. Goetz (1991) also noted that female solidarity is important in confronting power structures that inhibit their development.

The sixth theme reveals the challenges and frustrations of the communication specialists in women's rights NGOs. While some challenges associated with media relations and misuse of communication tools were reported, the main challenge for NGOs remain a lack of resources and funding for communication goals. Lacking funding was also mentioned by various academics as a major obstacle for women's rights NGOs and NGOs in general (Chew, 2006; Gallagher & Weinberg, 1991; Knox & Gruar, 2007).

The seventh theme describes new technologies that are efficiently used by women's rights NGOs to enhance their communication strategies. What the participants found to be the most useful and cost-effective technologies, were mobile phones, social media, blogs and innovative technologies such as Internet radio, digital cameras, small media production houses and the like. Cordingley (1998) also suggested that NGOs should take advantage of new technologies like the Internet and social media as these tools are the most cost-effective of all available for NGOs. Many researchers have noted the positive link between good public relations and new communication technologies (Eyrich et al., 2008; Lariscy et al., 2009; Porter et al., 2009).

Finally, the eighth theme proposes ways to improve communication strategies in NGOs. Most of the participants named clarity, consistency and repetition of messages among the best ways to reach communication goals. The participants argued that the communication strategies in women's rights NGOs should be regularly evaluated and the assessments should be reported to the public. They also suggested that women's rights NGOs need to increase their international presence and make space for each woman's

voice worldwide as there is no single agenda that speaks for all women. Every woman should be empowered to talk about the issues that are important for her.

### Social Media and NGOs

The study shows that all the participants place the greatest emphasis on using new technology such as mobile phones, the Internet and social media. Every communication specialist I interviewed talked about how technology can help advance the communication strategies of the organization. Most participants illustrated these arguments with examples from their practice where the social media and Web 2.0 allowed their NGO to get public awareness and reach the stakeholders where all other means did not work.

Social media can be very effective particularly for targeting women, as it presents a more personalized way of transferring ideas which resemble some traditional feminine expectations of communicating, in comparison to the less personal approach expected when asserting masculinity (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). While feminists (e.g., DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007) remind us there are not just two gendered styles of communicating, women's NGOs could utilize these essentialized gendered expectations strategically, as Spivak (1996) proposed, to create more personable, less threatening interactions via the social media, as have been associated with feminine styles of interacting in many cultures.

Campbell (1998) argues that anybody can assume a so-called feminine communication style successfully by making their communication more personable. She refers to U.S. Presidents, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton who, Campbell argues, used



more feminine and open style in their communication. Ronald Reagan, known as "the great communicator," realized the value of a more informal voice using self-disclosure when he spoke on Television (Jamieson, 1988). This effort allowed Reagan to deliver motivating, empowering speeches as well as stern messages to those who had different visions. His approach was always simple, clear, direct and caring. Social media appears conducive to a similar style – they promote clarity and cogency of argument, openness, self-disclosure and connection to others.

According to the research of British author and philosopher Sadie Plant (1997), women should feel comfortable on the Internet. She argues that social media is more adjusted to women's traditional way of working in the world than to men's. In the study of digital technologies, many scholars have shown that women tend to engage in computer-mediated communication differently than men (Herring, 2001). These researchers found evidence that men tend to communicate in styles characterized by direct and confrontative language, whereas women are prone to more personalized types of communication and more politeness (Herring, 2001) - the style that can be used by NGOs to increase the impact of their communication practice. While Keller's (1986) work is somewhat dated, the scholar also suggests that feminine thinking entails understanding of the self in relation to, rather than in opposition to, others and the world (p. 114). Thus, a generalized feminine experience may tend to adhere to the expectations of a collective and collaborative understanding, rather than to the expectations of an individualistic, confrontational understanding that characterizes patriarchy (Burke, 2006). Both women and men can use the feminine style (though homophobia might make it more difficult for

men to use this style effectively if their sex is identified). Plant (1996) claims that cyberspace has the potential to be egalitarian, bringing everyone into a network arrangement. She also notes that it has the capacity to create community as well as to provide opportunities for communication, exchange, and keeping in touch.

Reviewed from different perspectives and experiences, social media prove to be cost-effective and powerful way for women's rights NGOs to influence people and make female voices heard around the globe. Both the research findings and the literature review proved my assumption that the new technologies can be efficiently used by NGOs to win the hearts and minds of various groups of stakeholders and raise public awareness of important social issues of the modern world.

#### Implications of Findings

This study was conducted to determine what communication goals women's rights NGOs want to achieve, what communication strategies and online tools they utilize, and what obstacles they face in delivering their communication strategies. This research adds to the body of knowledge related to communication, gender studies and the human rights field. Implications, based on findings of this research study, focus on those for (a) women's NGOs, (b) general NGOs, (c) PR professionals, and (d) further scholarly research.

#### Implications for Women's NGOs

The findings revealed practical solutions that can be introduced into the daily practice of women's rights NGOs that wish to raise awareness and attract more stakeholders, as well as maintain mutually beneficial relations with the existing ones. The

research presented the collective observations of the senior-level professionals of the women's NGOs in regards to the most useful communication practices and the most efficient ways to raise the impact of women's NGOs.

The particular focus on women's organizations can be regarded as an advantage as it provides solutions for a specific type of NGOs. Taking into consideration the common issues women's NGOs face globally, the research offers solutions that can be applicable to each and any of them. Such a collection of best practices and useful advice present a guideline for women's rights NGOs that wish to boost their existing communication strategies. Findings can be used by all staff in the women's rights NGOs, as strategic communication is a common effort every employee should contribute to in order for it to blossom (Cordingley, 1998). By utilizing the results of the study, women's NGOs can increase credibility and visibility of all women's organizations and exposure of women in general.

#### Implications for All NGOs

Outcomes of this study substantiate that the principles of good communication can be applied not only to women's rights NGOs, but also to all types of NGOs, as the recommendations are based on the studies undertaken for the third sector as such. The findings provide a vehicle for the adoption of new communication principles for all the NGOs. Focusing on the online tools and digital platforms, the results show how these instruments can be utilized by any NGOs regardless of its activities. Therefore, each NGO is encouraged to target different stakeholders, improve relationships with government, media and donors, involve communities, adhere to the code of truth, and

engage in other activities listed as conclusions earlier in this chapter. This study can serve as a model for evaluation of NGOs' communication strategies. Increased communication between different types of NGOs should be encouraged so that NGOs can exchange information on their best practices.

As was noted in the introduction of this study, communication from the third sector or NGOs can be seen as the voices of a counterpublic sphere in opposition to dominant public spheres, in this case patriarchal ones (Fraser, 1996; Mater, 2001). More rhetorical analysis of NGO communication as that of a counterpublic, particularly given the newer venues via the Internet, is needed to better understand how NGOs might strategically utilize their unique position in the public sphere to accomplish their goals and better the lives of women and girls. The new venue of social media and its good fit with traditional feminine communication, as discussed in the review of literature, may help level the playing field as women's NGOs compete with other NGOs and with dominant patriarchal messages of misogyny and/or that women's concerns are not legitimate.

#### Implications for Public Relations Professionals

Interviewees' responses substantiate the importance of the necessary skills and competencies the communication officers of the NGOs, and particularly women's rights NGOs, should possess. For this study, interviewees addressed issues that helped determine skills and competencies required by today's NGOs communication professionals. For example, the competences in information and communication technologies (ICTs) should be developed early in communication specialists' careers.

What is also crucial is the ability to create personalized content through social media and other online tools, as such instruments increase the level of public engagement with the organization. Communication managers must also possess media relations, donor relations and government relations skills in order to be able to engage in a dialogue with these audiences, which is crucial for the NGOs. Knowledge of the foreign languages is necessary for the engagement with international community and more exposure to the world.

All PR professionals, from both non-commercial and commercial fields, could use examples from this study as those of best practices and marketing when evaluating communication and marketing programs.

#### Implications for Further Research

Based on the findings of this study, the following implications for further research were developed:

1. This study focused solely on women's rights organizations. Additional research should be done to examine how communication strategies are implemented in other NGOs, either focusing on NGOs with other specific issues or surveying a wide range of different NGOs. Further research should be done to extract statistical information on how many NGOs use particular strategies. This research can be based on surveys and questionnaires, which would allow a more detailed analysis.

2. This research was exploratory in nature. Future research should more extensively test for differences by size, class, history, activities and other indicators. The study of NGOs, which operate in different areas and which have a different profile from

the ones studied here, may prove the assumption made in this research that the findings can be applied to any sort of NGOs. I did not have the time or the resources to choose respondents from each part of the world but this may provide important information in the future. Research that has a wider spectrum of participants may be able to provide deeper and richer understandings of topics raised here. Overall, this thesis provided insight into the issues that are important to different types of women's rights NGOs.

3. Future research might be directed at identifying how women work with new digital technologies and platforms. I propose that research focuses on the ways women can engage in human rights issues via digital movements to create a new vision and response to issues of women in different countries.

4. Future studies should include some of the aspects of communication that this study could not examine, for instance the NGOs' events and conferences, training courses to increase stakeholder's knowledge, contests and awards, creating the advisory board and so on. The inclusion of different aspects would allow more detailed picture of the functioning of NGOs and their communication strategies.

5. Related to the previous item, this exploratory study focused on practitioners' views of the NGO communication. Further research is needed to examine trends and analyze the effectiveness of NGOs actually communication, particularly via new technology.

6. The present study focused on individual practitioners' perspectives. The individual focus was difficult to maintain however, as the participants often spoke from their organizational perspective. Future work is needed to focus on organizational

perspectives. This would require permission from organizations and perhaps interviews with multiple staff members in each organization.

Women's rights NGOs are working in many areas for increased education, human rights, gender equality, a sustainable environment, freedom and economic self-sufficiency. To achieve fundamental change in these areas, organizations created by grass-roots women and men have a critical leadership role to play. These NGOs are pioneers and advocates. They must create programs that address the realities of their constituents' needs. In order to succeed, these organizations – and through them their members – need to communicate for themselves. They cannot reach their goals without communication skills and tools.

On the basis of the conclusions presented here, as the researcher, I hope this study has helped to reveal the best communication practices for the women's rights NGOs. In order for these NGOs to be heard in the modern world, it is necessary for them to be capable of adapting and altering its policies and practices in line with their communication needs. Communication should be treated as a process, a continuous search for resources, information and mobilization in order to ensure the strengthening and development of the NGOs.

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APPENDIX A  
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Anastasia Kalinina from St. Petersburg, Russia. I am completing my Master's degree from the University of Northern Iowa in the USA. I also work as the Communication Strategist/Project manager in the Saint-Petersburg nongovernmental organization "Doctors to Children" in Russia, where I now reside.

I invite you to take part in the research study called "Strategic Communication in Women's Rights NGO's: Tools, Challenges and Best Practices." The study is not related to my current job. It is to complete my graduate degree. The thesis will hopefully contribute to the understanding of both the NGOs and larger social movements in the context of new communication practices, digital activism and information technologies.

You were chosen to participate because you either head an NGO or are a head of communication department in the NGO that deals with women's and/or girls issues. If you want to take part, you will be asked to have a Skype interview that will take about an hour at your convenience. We will talk about communication strategies in your organizations and how you feel about them. You can send me additional comments by email within two weeks after our conversation. For your information, I have included the questions I would like to ask you below.

You will not receive any payments for taking part in this study. Your name and your organization will be mentioned in the study only if you choose to reveal them.

Otherwise I will use a pseudo name for your identity and the identity of your organization. You will be provided a copy of the study for your professional use.

Besides the approximate 60 minutes to talk to me on the Skype, there are no perceived risks from participating in this study. If, however, at any time you become uncomfortable answering the questions, you may discontinue your participation in my study, or you may answer submit only certain questions. Your participation is voluntary. Please note that your voice will be recorded during the interview so that I am free to listen instead of taking notes. I will later transcribe the interview for accuracy. The data will be kept in the safe place and not used by anyone but me. The audio recording will be destroyed after I am done with the study.

If you have any questions about this research or about your rights as a research participant, you may feel free to contact me directly, Anastasia Kalinina, at + 7 911 215 78 46. Agreement to proceed with the questions implies that you have read the information above and consent to take part in the research. If you agree to take part in the study, please email me at [nastasia@uni.edu](mailto:nastasia@uni.edu), or simply hit "reply" to this email. We will set up the time for the interview at your earliest convenience. Your response will be taken as agreement to proceed.

Sincerely,

Anastasia Kalinina

University of Northern Iowa

If you have any questions you can also contact my advisor, Victoria DeFrancisco, [defran@uni.edu](mailto:defran@uni.edu), or the Office of Sponsored Programs at the University of Northern

Iowa, Office of Sponsored Programs, 213 East Bartlett, mail code 0394, phone in the US is 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

APPENDIX B  
FOLLOW-UP EMAIL –  
ADMINISTERED APPROXIMATELY ONE WEEK AFTER INITIAL  
ANNOUNCEMENT

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

A week ago I sent you an invitation to take part in the research study “Strategic Communications in the Women’s Rights NGO’s: Tools, Challenges and Best Practices.” I am sending this gentle reminder to see if you would consider assisting me.

The thesis will hopefully contribute to understanding of both women’s rights NGOs and social movements in the context of new communication practices, digital activism and information technologies. You were chosen to participate because you either head an NGO or are a head of communication department in the NGO that deals with women’s issues. If you want to take part, you will be asked to have a Skype interview that will take about an hour at your convenience.

You will not receive any payments for taking part in this study. Your name and your organization will be mentioned in the study only if you choose to reveal them. You will be provided a copy of the study for your professional use.

If you have any questions about this research or about your rights as a research participant, you may feel free to contact me directly, Anastasia Kalinina, at + 7 911 215 78 46. Agreement to proceed with the questions implies that you have read the information above and consent to take part in the research. If you agree to take part in the

study, please email me at [nastasia@uni.edu](mailto:nastasia@uni.edu), or simply hit "reply" to this email. We will set up the time for the interview at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Anastasia Kalinina

University of Northern Iowa

APPENDIX C

FOLLOW-UP TELEPHONE CONTACT SCRIPT –

ADMINISTERED APPROXIMATELY ONE WEEK AFTER THE FOLLOW-UP

EMAIL

This is Anastasia Kalinina. I am calling to talk about the study I'm doing the research on the strategic communications in the women's rights NGO's. Perhaps you will recall my e-mails. I would like to briefly discuss the possibilities of your participation, if you're interested.

You were chosen to participate because you either head an NGO or are a head of communications department in the NGO that deals with women's issues. If you want to take part, you will be asked to have a Skype interview that will take about an hour at your convenience. We will talk about communication strategies in your organizations and how you feel about them.

Do you want to participate? If yes, I am going to send you the materials soon.

Thank you for agreeing to participate. This is greatly appreciated. I will talk to you soon.

APPENDIX D  
ORAL CONSENT SCRIPT

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Now you're going to take part in the study "Strategic Communications in the Women's Rights NGO's: Tools, Challenges and Best Practices." Please note that the participation is voluntary and you can stop at any time.

You will not receive any payments for taking part in this study. Your name and your organization will be mentioned in the study only if you choose to reveal them. Otherwise I will use a pseudo name for your identity and the identity of your organization. You will be provided a copy of the study for your professional use. The data will be kept in the safe place and not used by anyone but me. It will be destroyed after I am done with the study.

Do you give me permission to record the interview? Please remember that you can ask to have the recorder turned off at any time. If you agree with the conditions, let's begin the interview.



## APPENDIX E

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is your name?
2. What organization do you represent?
3. Do you give permission to use your name and the name of your organization in this research report? If not, I can assign a pseudo name or you can suggest one.
4. Tell me about your organization. How many employees does it have? What is the scope of its activity? What is its history? What does your organization do? What is its mission?
5. What is your position in the organization?
6. How long have you been working in the organization?
7. Does your organization have a specialized communication officer/director? What does that person do?
8. What are the main communication goals you set for your organization? Do you have a communications strategy?
9. Are you successful in attaining these goals? Are you content with your communication activities? Please explain.
10. What are your priorities in terms of communication? Who are your target audiences?
11. What communication tools do you use to target your audiences?
12. Do you use mostly online or offline communication tools? Which exactly? Why?
13. Do you use the social media? Which? How? Why?

14. How do you work with the media?
15. How do you work with the government?
16. How do you work with donors?
17. How do you involve the community in which you serve?
18. Tell me about employee-relations in your company.
19. What are the biggest challenges for your communication strategy?
20. What are the biggest frustrations for you in delivering your communications activities?
21. Do you plan to improve your communications strategy in the future? How?
22. Anything else to add?