

some of the countries in transition. In Mongolia the production of child literature has declined sharply due to financial problems. Russia is another example:

Textbook publishing is ... facing an acute financial crisis. Production costs have recently increased on average by a factor of 10, making textbooks significantly less affordable. ... The acute shortage of children's literature reduces children's interest in learning their native tongues ...

Vietnam:

Shortages of funds have prevented satisfactory expansion in the diversity of children's material available to them in the mass media. The number of children's television programmes broadcast has fallen over the last two years, and a large number of local libraries have had to close, unable to pay for new books and periodicals.

Both Russia and Vietnam made clear that they could not meet the standards of providing literature in minority languages due to these economic problems. Spain, on the other hand, presented an impressive list of data banks made available for young people.

Two tendencies emerge from the country reports: 1) that fairly little is done to make it possible for children to *participate* actively in the media and 2) that economic restraints in a number of countries also hinder children from media *consumption*.

On *participation* the media have themselves in some states initiated a co-operation with schools in order to develop a dialogue with children. One such global project, "Newspaper in Education," was launched in 1995 by the International Federation of Newspaper Publishers (FIEJ) with the support of UNESCO and UNICEF.

Another approach is to give children and youth more access to the production of information and media material. The few experiments made in that direction have been encouraging; positive models of child television have been established, for instance, in Guatemala and El Salvador.

On access to media and child literature there seems to be a broad awareness of its importance, though minority children are in some cases not given sufficient priority. This also goes for deaf and blind children who need to be ensured information material in appropriate forms and translations.

This particular area seems to be an important one for international co-operation — in the form of economic assistance but also exchange of ideas and

experiences. The latter is especially important in view of the great gap in the quality of information material between poor countries and those with higher technological standard.

Implementation of "Positive Alternatives"

The emphasis in Article 17 on information "of social and cultural benefit to the child" relates both to the general ambition to allow children to be educated about positive values like tolerance and gender equity (these values are elaborated in Art. 29 of the convention) and to the need to counter the negative influences of some aspects of media supply.

Comparatively little has been mentioned in the country reports on this provision. In the Philippines a private group, the Philippine Board of Books for Young People, is "propagating love of reading books" among children in activities similar to the remarkable reading campaign organized by the Tamer Institute in the West Bank and Gaza.

In Mexico the General Law on Radio and Television stipulates that programmes for children should stimulate creativity, family integration and human solidarity. Further, they should promote understanding of national values and knowledge of the international community.

Similar legislation is in place in several European countries. In Sweden the Broadcasting Act instructs the programme companies to assert basic ideas of democracy, universal human equality, liberty and dignity of the individual.

The effectiveness of this general approach can, however, be questioned. In fact, it seems that the liberal societies have had difficulties to find means of asserting these good values without falling into the trap of formulating state opinions on ideological and political matters. More authoritarian states do not have that problem, though their rhetoric — even when expressing positive values — are not always taken seriously.

Protection against Harmful Influences

Only one or two generations ago, very few children had ever seen images of someone being shot, knifed, blown up or raped in front of their bare eyes. Today most children see such violence on the screen every day, often in gruesome detail. It has been estimated that an average American child now reaching the age of 18 has witnessed some 18,000 simulated murders on television.