# Media Information Literacy – A UNESCO Perspective

**Remarks**

**by**

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**Distinguished Guest**
**Ladies and Gentlemen**

Good Evening.

On behalf of UNESCO, I would like to welcome you to this Regional Workshop on the Draft Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teacher Education.

First let me thank the University of Pretoria (Prof. Ana Naidoo and Prof Eloff Dean of the Faculty of Education) for graciously agreeing to host and assist with the coordination of this important workshop. I am personally pleased to be visiting your beautiful country. This is my first visit to South Africa and being a Jamaican I recall your country from my various studies and of course through the media (new and old).

UNESCO is delighted to be able to partner with the University of Pretoria and indeed all the universities and teacher training institutions from here in South Africa and those from Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland to highlight this important thrust of media and information literacy for teacher education and to improve this Draft MIL Curriculum which we will be discussion over the next few days.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

To a large extent, Media Literacy and Information Literacy are treated as separate fields.

There are two schools of overarching thoughts on these ever converging fields, one has tendency to favour the term ***Information Literacy (IL)*** and the other ***Media Literacy* (ML)**. The former argues that IL is the genus (broader field) and ML is a species (subset) of IL. The latter proposes the converse. In actuality the two, information and communication (media), are inextricably linked and are sadly too often separated when applied to the development process.

Globally, many international organizations including UNESCO use the term ***Media Education (ME).*** And this is widely accepted as covering both media and information

literacy. However, as we have learnt from a recent international expert group meeting convened by UNESCO, last June, the term ME still seems to estrange those experts and academics on the side of information studies and is sometimes taken to mean advance media studies.

UNESCO more recently has chosen to use the term M and IL rather than ME as we believe this helps to clearer demarcate the field.

Though many definitions have been proposed for M and IL, I will not share any here because as this field is ever evolving so too are appropriate definitions. However, we will have the opportunity to discussion some proposed definitions during workshop sessions later today.

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

There is agreement that M and IL is not just body of knowledge but a way of thinking and doing; teaching and learning.

The rapid growth of technology and the attendant convergence of communication and information make it imperative that MIL be seen as vital to the empowerment of people and an important prerequisite for harnessing ICTs for education and fostering equitable access to information and knowledge.

The same explosions in ICTs and media, have effectively redefined Literacy. Literacy is no longer the 3 Rs (Reading, 'Riting and 'Ritmetic); it is no longer enough simply to read, write and compute. Students must also become literate in **how** to collect, assess and use information through new and traditional technologies, to interact with media for self expression and civic participation, the understanding of visual images, how to spot a stereotype, isolate a social cliché, and distinguish facts from propaganda, analysis from irony etc. Undoubtedly, there is much to be gained from the inclusion of media and information literacy in both the formal and the non-formal education systems as this can

make significant contribution to prepare students for participation in their societies and the lives they will lead beyond school.

There are two different but equally important perspectives of media and information literacy. In the case schools, one perspective is to see the students or teachers as consumers of information. As such, these "consumers" would benefit from media and information literacy insofar as they are able to use these skills to critically analyze information received from media and other information sources. This is a popular perspective. On the other hand, MIL should also spur students to become active producers of media and information and entrepreneurs of media and information products; effectively using new and traditional media for self expression, creativity and greater participation in their countries' democracy as well as the global information network.

UNESCO adopted in 1989, the Convention of Children's Rights – this includes rights to freedom of expression, access to information sources and to participate in cultural life. Taken together, the elements of this convention have paved the way to make MIL a basic human right.

Further, the appropriate enabling environment with free, pluralistic and independent media is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of any M and IL programme. Media pluralism and independence permit the expression of diverse opinions, cultures, languages and groups, in and across societies. Given the empirical influence of the media of all forms in human development, peace and democracy, managing a society that upholds diversity, tolerance of different opinions, transparency, equity and dialogue among civilizations could be advanced through M and IL. This integration of M and IL into national, regional and global development planning and implementation also requires careful and purposeful formulation of policies.

Within the context of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights these arguments should bring into sharp focus, Article 19 which states that, "Everyone has the right to freedom of

opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." UNESCO holds that M and IL is essential to empower citizenries all around the world to have the full benefits of this fundamental right and to enable sound media and social discourse.

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

Researchers trace the origins of media literacy education back to more that quarter century; information literacy even earlier with the longer existence of libraries. And that it begun, for the most part, in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, and more recently has been expanding in the United States and elsewhere in the developing an developed countries.

As part of its functions as a laboratory of ideas, standard-setter and a clearing house, UNESCO has done and continues to undertake normative and operational actions in M and IL in concert with or many national, regional and international partners.

Over the past twenty six years, UNESCO has been deeply involved in actions to enhance media literacy, founding the Grünwald Declaration[1] of 1982 which recognised the need for political and educational systems to promote citizens' critical understanding of "the phenomena of communication" and their participation in media (new and old – some have even coined the word medias albeit media is a plural term). Our main strategy in promoting media and information literacy consists of awareness-raising about the importance of this field at all levels of the education process –teacher training, primary, secondary, and lifelong education – as well as establishing guidelines and promoting policies for curricula development.

25 years after the adoption of the Grünwald Declaration that paved the way for M and IL at the international level, experts (information, communication and media), education policy-makers, teachers and researchers, NGO representatives and media professionals

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from all the regions of the world met in Paris, in 2007. The Grünwald Declaration was reaffirmed as critical particularly in light of globalisation and the explosion of ICTs. The deliberations of this two-day meeting gave birth to the UNESCO Paris Agenda - Twelve Recommendation for M and IL (Media Education[2]) which highlighted priority actions to realise the potential impact of the Grünwald guidelines. These are: development of comprehensive M and IL (media education programmes) at all education levels; teacher training and awareness raising of the other stakeholders in the social sphere; research and its dissemination networks; and international cooperation in actions.

In implementing this strategy, UNESCO considers the role of libraries, archives, new technologies/new media as well as traditional media, that is, radio and television and print.

**Mme Chairperson**
**Ladies and Gentlemen**

I would like to share briefly three of the many actions UNESCO has taken to implement the Paris Agenda.

**Teacher education**

In 2008, recognising the need to produce adequate number of media and information literate teachers, UNESCO organised an international expert group meeting to advise on the preparation of a model curriculum that joins media literacy and information literacy into one discipline and to facilitate the integration of media and information literacy in the teacher training curricula. Four interrelated working groups worked to prepare this first Draft Curriculum which we will discuss today. Let me hasten to say that the preparation of this curriculum is in its embryonic stages and that your participation in this workshop will contribute its improvement.

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It is our view that with the rapid growth of ICTs and the resultant convergence in new and traditional technology, it is necessary that media and information literacy be considered holistically and MIL education applied to all forms of media, new and traditional, regardless of their nature and the technologies used. It is unequivocal that to realize the full benefits of a holistic application of M and IL, evidenced- based policy development is a prerequisite.

**Policy**

Mindful of the need for proper policy development UNESCO has partnered with the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations to publish a comprehensive book on media education policies around the world.

This publication, **"Mapping Global Media Education Policies",** provides answers to key questions for professionals, in the fields of media, communication and education, researchers and particularly policy makers. This publication is not about what M and IL is but rather it considers media education from three inter-related dimensions: media education in the national, regional and global context, the value of media education to citizens and civic participation and how to measure and evaluate this value, and the crucial role of collaboration among governments, civil society and the private sector in the process.

**Research**

For polices to be effective and relevant they must be evidenced-based; they should be underpinned by research. Among the other research initiatives spearheaded and supported by UNESCO including the preparation of IL indicators and MDI, we are partnering with the UNAoC to establish an international network of universities that will cooperate on research in the field of M and IL and cultural dialogue. This will be implemented with the frame of the UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN initiatives.

UNITWIN is the abbreviation for the university education twinning and networking scheme. The Programme operates through the establishment of UNESCO chairs, and UNESCO networks which are also designated as UNITWIN projects. This UNESCO Programme serves as a mechanism for research and capacity building through the exchange of knowledge and sharing in a spirit of solidarity. Thus it promotes north-south and south-south cooperation as a strategy to enrich institutions and various development fields.

There are many noteworthy developments globally that are indicative of a positive trend that necessary attention is turning toward policy and regulatory framework to guide and support a systematic take-up of media and information literacy and to guarantee greater impact. Yet many countries are still far behind. The obstacles are many and vary according to cultural, economic, political and intellectual environments.

As we move forward it is crucial that all stakeholders, young people, parents, adults, schools, the media industry, governments and all others be engaged in foregrounding media and information literacy on the development agenda.

I leave you with a quotation from the former Secretary General of the United Nations – Kofi Annan, "Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family". It is UNESCO's belief that media and information literacy, applied effectively, can and will contribute to unlocking power, liberation and progress for people of the entire world.

It leaves for me to thank all present here today, including representative from the media. I look forward to our discussions over the next few days. May God Bless You!