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AMIC-ECOS Seminar on Urbanization, Sustainable
Development and the Media : Singapore, Apr 8-9,
1994 : [discussion and workshop reports]

1994

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Discussion and Workshop Reports

DISCUSSION

This seminar on Urbanisation, Sustainable Development and the Media spin off from the Escap symposium on urbanisation held in Bangkok in Oct 1993. It focused on the role of media in tackling the problems of urbanisation.

In a parallel conference the press was urged to define its role and help create greater awareness for better and more open planning, development and management of urban areas.

Problems of urbanisation cited:

1. Migration of people from rural to urban centres.
2. Shelter/housing problems.
3. Employment/wages.
4. Health/ cleanliness.

VISION that was set for the Asia-Pacific countries:

1. Type of society - socially just, minimal discrimination, more equitable distribution of wealth.
2. Economically sustainable - present resources should continue to last for future generations.
3. Politically participatory.
4. Economically productive.
5. Culturally vibrant.

Our participants discussed how the media can play their part in helping to bring about and promote greater awareness of environmental concerns and sustainable development.

Recommendations

1. Set up an environment desk with 5-6 journalists specialising in environmental issues.
2. Conduct similar studies like the 4-year study carried out by Dr Savage on the Berita Harian and Berita Minggu and how the papers focused on environmental issues over a period of 4 years.
3. Provide training and education for environmental journalists.
4. Have greater participation between government, planning agencies and journalists.

5. Conduct case studies on decision-making process of government and planning agencies on environmental issues.
6. Keep journalists informed of what goes on in other countries pertaining to environmental issues.
7. Assume regional outlook. Call to start this process by focusing first on the positive aspects of environmental issues - how countries in the region tackle their urbanisation problems.
8. Publish a regional publication on developmental journalism. Tap available resource agencies, wire services, e.g. IPS.
9. Closer co-operation between academia and journalists on environmental issues, call for more dialogue and feedback so that facts are reported accurately.
10. Media to give more coverage to environmental issues as part of service to community/readers.
11. Tap alternative non-traditional media - film, photography, literature to help promote environmental message.

AMIC, April 9 1994

RECOMMENDATIONS - WORKING GROUP 2 -

An Action Plan for Strengthening the Role of Media Institutions to Respond to Issues concerning Urbanization and Development.

1. A TWO-PRONGED APPROACH, TO THE GATE-KEEPERS, AND TO YOUNG REPORTERS:

A) "Gate-keepers" of the media - defined as owners/publishers, editors and sub-editors - to be involved in environmental issues by various means, such as a high-level roundtable discussion opened/led by a prominent person.

B) Young reporters of not more than 3-5 years' experience to be identified for training and exposure to environmental issues.

Notes:

* training to be phased from issues at a local/national level, through regional issues, to international issues, in that order - in other words, local and national issues and training to come first, before regional exposure.

* selecting the right people for training will be a major consideration - the formation of Environmental Desks, see below, may assist with this;

* broadcasting media and periodicals (e.g. leading women's or lifestyle magazines) to be involved equally with print media.

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2. THE FORMATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESKS OR BUREAUX WITHIN MEDIA:

The Asian context requires internal desks to be set up within media in order to accord environmental issues status and create a "constituency" for them inside those media. Such desks may feed other desks, such as the Political or Economic Desk, with their material, as well as printing directly in the media - as has already been done in several Thai print media.

Notes:

* It is crucial that stability be achieved on such desks - ie. a core of about 3 journalists (eg 1 editor/2 reporters) should be established and maintained on the desk without change of personnel for at least 3 years. This core should receive maximum exposure to opportunities for learning, reading, contact-making and networking etc. These journalists should not be asked to cover other "beats" while on the Environment Desk.

3. CARE SHOULD BE TAKEN TO ATTEND TO THE NEEDS OF PROMISING JOURNALISTS IN LOCAL-LANGUAGE MEDIA, APART FROM ENGLISH-LANGUAGE MEDIA.

This can be best achieved at the local level. At both the local and regional levels, it may also be more efficient here to "train the trainers" so that they may spread their knowledge across a wider base.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISTS TO BE INVOLVED IN THE PLANNING PROCESS OF GOVERNMENT AND OTHER PLANNING BODIES.

Reporters involved at an early state in the decision-making process would perform better when discussing the resulting issues.

5. DIRECTORIES OF ENVIRONMENTAL MEDIA PERSONNEL:

An Asia-Pacific directory of environmental journalists is in preparation, and this move is applauded. Similarly, each regional nation should prepare its own such directory.

6. HANDBOOKS AND SOURCEBOOKS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL MEDIA:

Handbooks to be prepared for regional environmental media, with useful information such as a glossary of key terms and acronyms, briefings on major issues etc.

7. NATIONAL DATABASES ON ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING/ISSUES:

International (AmicNet, InterNet etc) databases already exist, but efforts should be made at the national level to compile databases of past coverage of environmental issues in the media and of other useful resource data, and made accessible to environmental media throughout the region.

8. INFOTAINMENT MEDIA - THE SOAP OPERA:

The use of soap-operas and other entertainment media to get environmental messages across is a praiseworthy objective which will require careful planning and considerable country-by-country fine-tuning, according to widely differing local conditions and language considerations etc.

This may necessitate training of script-writers, and the addressing of problems such as low-pay for broadcast script-writers, shortage of actors, inadequate acting skills etc etc.

9. A CENTRALISED FUND FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM, AND RELATED RESEARCH:

Such a fund would be highly desirable, but the nitty-gritty of how to bring it about has yet to be addressed. Scholarships for promising environmental journalists to study and travel abroad would be one of the many roles such a fund could perform.