Seminar on the Impact of the Changing Media Environment on Public Service Programming in Asia
Seoul, Korea, September 28-29, 1995

Organised by the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC) and the Korean Broadcasting Institute (KBI) with support from the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)

Thirty senior executives, policy makers and scholars from 12 Asian countries and Australia and Germany met in Seoul, Korea from September 28-29 to discuss issues concerning the changing media environment in Asia and its impact on public service programming. The two-day meeting resulted in the following findings and recommendations:

Public service programming provides a vital social function to inform, educate and entertain the people. As such, public service programming should continue to be developed and given the necessary support to flourish in the new media environment.

Public debate should be encouraged about this issue to stimulate the community and influential sections of it, to support public service broadcasting (PSB).

Recognizing the changing broadcast media environment in Asia characterized by globalization, influx of new communication technologies, deregulation and increasing competition from commercial broadcasting, the participants proposed the following recommendations:

INDEPENDENCE OF PSB ORGANIZATIONS:

PSB organizations, which belong to the people, should be operated independently. Options for increasing the independence of PSB include:

- the formation of impartial board of directors comprised of representatives from various sectors.
- increasing the extent of parliamentary influence or control (with a corresponding decrease in government control)
- introduction of independent lay people in an advisory role

FINANCING OF PUBLIC SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMMES:

PSB organisations should pursue innovative and creative ways of generating revenue, not inconsistent with their public service function, and should not be overdependent on government funding.

Options for diversifying funding sources include:

-corporatisation
- licence fees/advertising/sponsorships
- cross-subsidy of PSB organisations by the commercial sector
- tax incentives for PSB organisations
- charging commercial broadcasters for the use of the spectrum
- community-based funding

PUBLIC SERVICE PROGRAMMING:

Options for maintaining or improving the quality and quantity of public service programmes include:

- adoption of public service programming quotas as a licencing condition
- licence renewals be linked to performance in providing public service programmes
- adoption of specialist or mixed services
- promote the intangible benefits of public service programming to commercial broadcasting organizations
- increase concentration of news and current affairs as well as documentaries and educational programmes

RESEARCH:

PSB organizations should pay very close attention to their audiences. Public service programmes should be presented in a manner that appeals to audiences. It should entertain as well as educate in order to be more competitive with commercial programmes.

- conduct periodic audience research, target their audiences and develop appropriate programmes and promotional strategies
- the adoption of indexes that measure audience appreciation and programme quality and content

TRAINING:

The training of PSB programming personnel is essential to provide the necessary skills in order to cope with the demands of the new media environment. Training should be encouraged and supported, especially in areas where PSBs have resource limitations. Options include:

- Joint training programmes and personnel exchanges between PSB organisations
-identification of training facilities in the region and explore the possibility of resource-sharing and cooperation between broadcast training institutions

DEVELOPMENT OF RADIO:

Radio continues to be an important medium in both the developing and developed countries of Asia, as exemplified during man-made and natural crisis. It will continue to be important for local content and immediacy, even with the introduction of new communication technologies. The development of radio should be supported. Subsidy from revenues of television should be explored, if necessary.

Wherever possible, the above recommendations should be incorporated into law to ensure their adoption.

Broadcasting organizations such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), Korean Broadcasting System (KBS), Korean Broadcasting Institute (KBI), NHK, AIBD will be approached to explore the possibility of training and research support for PSB organizations. International donor agencies such as UNESCO’s International Programme for Development Communication (IPDC) and AusAid will also be approached for funding support.