

This document is downloaded from DR-NTU, Nanyang Technological University Library, Singapore.

Title	Marginal notes on development journalism and writing development stories
Author(s)	Labrador, Virgilio S.
Citation	Labrador, V. S. (1993). Marginal notes on development journalism and writing development stories. In AMIC Workshop on Editorial Management For Senior Women Journalists (Local Language Press): Lahore, Pakistan, Dec 8-15, 1993. Singapore: Asian Media Information and Communication Centre.
Date	1993
URL	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10220/1510">http://hdl.handle.net/10220/1510</a>
Rights	

**Marginal Notes On Development Journalism  
And Writing Development Stories**

**By**

**Virgilio S Labrador**

**Marginal Notes on Development Journalism  
and Writing Development Stories**

by Virgilio S. Labrador<sup>1</sup>

The concept of development journalism can be likened to the practice during the pioneering days of journalism, when all journalism was a sort of advocacy journalism. Back then, there was no question about journalism having a stance--to be a journalist means to advocate certain causes. Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack*, which advocated the overthrow of the English regime in America, was representative of the journalism of that time.

Development journalism, however, is not advocacy journalism. Development journalism is a more exacting and scientific brand of journalism which draws heavily from the findings of research and development laboratories. Like all journalism, development journalism is biased. As Studs Terkel of the New York Times so aptly put it--there can be no objectivity whenever a journalist chooses to report ten facts out of a hundred. Development journalism is biased for the social and economic upliftment of the majority of humankind.

-----

<sup>1</sup>Virgilio S. Labrador is the Head, Seminars and Institutional Development Programme of AMIC. The views expressed in this paper, however, are not necessarily that of the organization he represents.

Development journalism is characterized by its purposiveness, pragmatism, relevance, scientific outlook and technical subject orientation (Jamias, 1991).

Development journalism as discipline is deeply rooted in development communication, which believes communication can be harnessed for national development goals. Perhaps one of the most compelling definitions of development communication is from Nora Quebral (1985):

Development communication is the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfilment of the human potential.

Development journalism is no different from conventional journalism. It adheres to the same standards of fairness, accuracy, balance and journalistic ethics. The difference is in the choice of subject matter and the action orientation.

Development journalism covers subjects that do not get as much media attention ie. an arcane scientific discovery like a new high-yielding rice variety or a grassroots initiative to develop community self-reliance projects. Development reporting is as legitimate a field as political, business, entertainment or sports reporting. There are many stories with a developmental angle clamouring to be written.

Developmental reporting also differs from conventional reporting in its *action orientation*. When writing a development story, the focus is on the purpose of the writing—not just to inform or interpret but to move people to action.

Consequently, in writing a development story, we always have to ask: For whom are we writing? To whom are we writing ? for what purpose and why?

Because of the complexity of the subject matter characterizing development journalism, it is a more exacting field than any other, including scientific reporting. To be a development journalist one has to have a good grasp of sociology, politics, economics, psychology, science with some philosophy and art thrown in for good measure. This is because development stories do not merely narrate facts or rattle figures and statistics. They go deeper than the surface--giving flesh and blood to socio-economic and political problems. Development stories do not just tell the who, what where and when, but more importantly answers the question--why? Development journalism looks into the underlying causes of problems and even goes so far as to propose solution or courses of action. Because of these demands on the development journalist, a very good multi-disciplinary foundation is necessary. A little passion and commitment would not hurt either.

Since development journalism does not only aims to inform, analyze and interpret events and issues but *move* people to action, development stories must be able to captivate and arouse their target audience to act. The qualities of clarity, coherence and organization are doubly important in a development story. A development story must speak the language of its reader and must be able to translate of often complex and arcane technical information to layman's

terms. A development journalist must learn to coax in simple language, very complex problems and issues.

To bring the message home to the reader, always look into the human interest angle of every story. How does it affect the man on the street? For example, when doing a story on the textile industry-- provide a good overview and background on the subject but also look into the effect on the common man.

It would also help is the story is amply illustrated with eye-catching graphics, especially if it involves a lot of statistical data. Use action photos and do not be afraid to experiment with more creative layouts.

In writing a development story, when in doubt, think HELP- which stands for Humanize, Energize, Localize and Personalize. And simplify, simplify, simplify.

By way of a parting shot, development journalism has come a long way since its inception in the late '60s. However, development reporting has not quite yet achieved the legitimacy of other fields of reporting. For example, very few of the larger metropolitan dailies in Asia have a development section. Very few of the journalism schools also offer development journalism courses. Clearly, development journalism has still a long way to go.

These times, however, are the most exciting times to be a development journalist. Dramatic changes are underway in the global political and economic arena. The Asia-Pacific region, is at the forefront of these changes. The dragon economies of Asia are growing at a faster rate than any part of the world. All of these changes have profound effects on people's lives

and their future. Development journalism plays a very important role in shedding light on the issues arising out of these changes.

### Select Bibliography

A Manual of Development Journalism / by Alan Chalkley - New Delhi: Vikas, 1970.

Development Journalism: Report of a seminar held at the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development, Kuala Lumpur / Edited by Patrick Keith, G F Brickenden - Kuala Lumpur: AIBD. 1979.

Development Journalism: Report on a three-month course / by John Cardownie - S.L.: The Thomson Foundation, 1972, 1972.

A course guide in Development Journalism / Asian Institute of Journalism - Manila: Asian Institute of Journalism, 1983.

Multi-Media Seminar on Development Journalism, Colombo, May 24 June, 1980 - S.L.: s.n., 1980.

Development Journalism / by E P Patanne - S.L.a: s.n., n.d.

Development Journalism / Communication: The status of the concept / by Christine L Ogan. In Gazette, 29 (1/2) 1982: pp 3-14.

Development Journalism: Problems and Challenge ' by Ishadi S K. In Conference on Journalism Training in Asia, Manila, Feb 6-11, 1984.

Development Journalism: An Asian concept / by Crispin C Maslog. In Conference on Journalism Training in Asia, Manila, Feb 6-11, 1984

Training for Development Journalism / by Jose Luna Castro. In ASEAN Seminar on the Role of Mass Media in the Development of South East Asia, Manila, June 18-25, 1971.

Development Journalism - a new dimension in the information process / by Alan Chalkley. In Multi-Media Seminar on Development Journalism, Colombo, May 24 - June 4, 1980.

Development Journalism: It's nothing new, but... In Regional Course in Broadcast News Presentation, Kuala Lumpur, November 11 - December 6, 1974.

Journalism and Development - disparity or congruence / by Richard Shafer. In Philippines Communication Journal, 2(5) Dec 1987: pp 1-12.

Development Journalism: A national seminar in Malaysia, In Journal of Development Communication, 4 (1) Jun 1993: pp 57-59.

People Not Media, Communicate: An Asian Update in Media  
Development, Vol. XXII, 1985, pp. 25-27.

Writing for Development/ by Juan F. Jamias. University of the  
Philippines, Los Banos, 1991.