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Seminar on Media and Human Rights
November 24-26, 1999
Bangkok, Thailand

Group Discussion
Generate a list of specific recommendations on the following issues/concerns:

1) How can media promote human rights reporting on Asia’s rural poor?

2) How can government assist media promote human rights reporting on Asia’s rural poor?

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Seminar on Media and Human Rights
November 24-26, 1999

Agenda of Action
MEDIA & HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTING
ON ASIA'S RURAL POOR
November 24-26, 1999, Thailand

Twenty two delegates representing media, government, academe and non-governmental organizations from 11 Asian countries participated in the seminar on Media and Human Rights Reporting on Asia's Rural Poor held on November 24-26, 1999 in Bangkok, Thailand.

The three-day event looked at the state of human rights reporting on Asia's rural poor, impact of globalization on poverty and human rights issues, the opportunities and challenges that confront media in communicating human rights issues and changes that need to be addressed to improve human rights reporting on Asia's rural poor.

The seminar was organized by the Asian Media Information & Communication Centre with the cooperation and support of Thammasat University, The Mass Communication Organization of Thailand, World Christian Association for Christian Communication and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

Recognising media's responsibility and accountability to the public, and the need to respect and enhance the independence of editors and journalists;

Acknowledging that media coverage of the rural poor and their human rights in Asian media is very limited, that Asian journalists need to be more socially conscious to be able to understand and communicate human rights issues, and that reportage on rural concerns should be brought into mainstream media;

And calling on government to guarantee the right of information to media and the citizens;

The seminar participants generated a set of recommendations to address these issues/concerns:

I. HOW CAN MEDIA (industry/media practitioners) PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTING ON ASIA’S RURAL POOR?

A. Media Institutions/Industry:

1. Set aside/allocate funds to assign journalists to poor rural areas.
2. Provide space and time to highlight non-profit reports on the rural poor.
3. Consciencitize journalists by setting up awards/bureaus and introducing programmes to expose journalists to rural areas.
4. Encourage younger and idealistic journalistic to venture into rural poor reporting.
5. Hire correspondents among rural poor and provide them training.
6. Allow more space/time/funds to study and address globalization issues that obstruct media and governments from reporting on human rights issues among the rural poor.
8. Strengthen journalists' union.
9. Document rural poor's perceptions about what contributes to their situation.
10. Document what government has done, including successes and abuses, to address human rights issues.
B. Media Practitioners:

1. Pursue self-education, training and retraining, including reading the McBride Report and implementation of its recommendations.
2. Pursue greater contacts with rural poor.
3. Avoid depoliticizing poverty as it springs from deep and unequal structures.
4. Refrain from editorializing and sermonizing, instead focus on field reports that highlight links between poverty and power structure. They should be centered on poor people who should not be seen as saintly messiahs.
5. Improve news sourcing and provide more weightage to perceptions of poor people rather than government officials in reporting poverty and human rights issues.
7. Try to make journalism a bridge, a link between social sciences and research and lay readers.
8. Move beyond covering events to covering processes that cause poverty and deprivation.

II. HOW CAN GOVERNMENTS ASSIST MEDIA IN PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTING AMONG ASIA'S RURAL POOR?

A. Governments, Citizens & Society:

1. Support plurality of voices in media
2. Reduce monopoly and concentration of media power.
3. Promote/support community ownership of media
4. Set up regulations for national broadcasters to ensure a balance between accountability to the public and media autonomy.
5. Promote media literacy in educational institutions as well as media organizations.
6. Strengthen government mechanisms for accountability and transparency, as well as for public dispute and grievance redress.
7. Ensure constitutional guarantee for media autonomy
8. Introduce/strengthen media policies that promote human rights and defend media’s informational sovereignty and independence.
9. Assist in training journalists and improving their skills on communicating social issues particularly those affecting the marginalized and socially less articulate sectors of society.
10. Set up a foundation to fund programming on rural poor concerns.
B. Government:

1. Ensure that broadcasters allocate sufficient primetime programming (not less than 10%) reflecting the concerns of the rural poor, and that an independent body be set up to monitor compliance.
2. Ensure that print media which receive government support through advertisements allocate sufficient space on rural poor concerns.
3. Unshackle from wider economic system of exploitation.
4. Set up commissions of inquiry into the state of media.
5. Set up independent press/broadcasting councils to oversee media operations and structures. Members should come from a wide spectrum of society, including rural poor.
6. Ensure greater transparency by providing more up-to-date information on poverty.
7. Legislate penalties against bribe takers and bribe givers in media.
8. Conduct more affairs of state by top leaders in rural poor areas.
9. Ensure a more pluralistic policy-making board covering media by appointing rural poor representatives.
10. Enforce the law on human rights violations.
11. Incorporate cultural and economic rights as fundamental rights in constitutions.
12. Encourage/initiate schemes on micro-credit among rural communities.
13. Refrain from making use of emergency legislation enacted for specific purposes to suppress human rights.