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Background Note
&
Summary Report

By

Victor Valbuena
SEMINAR-WORKSHOP
on
ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND MEDIA REPORTING
Singapore, 27-31 January 1992

BACKGROUND NOTE

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE SEMINAR-WORKSHOP

The past decade has seen the emergence of a new Green Revolution in Asia and the Pacific. However, it is no longer a Green Revolution to produce food for the teeming millions in the region; rather it is a Green Revolution to renew — or if you will, "green" the environment — to ensure a healthy and habitable place for people to live in over a long period of time. As also to ensure that the place can sustain the earlier kind of Green Revolution.

This new Green Revolution has evolved from a growing consciousness of the consequences of continuous degradation of the environment and indiscriminate destruction and exploitation of natural resources. Many of these consequences are of calamitous proportions such as widespread flooding, soil subsidence and top soil erosion, depletion of water supply, and similar phenomena. They have led to death by the thousands and lowering of living standards. Other grave consequences have resulted from the wastefulness of a pervasive culture of materialism and consumerism; e.g., the mania for new, throw-away, and non-biodegradable consumer products; the penchant for up-to-date models of motor-cars that run like a racer but guzzle up enormous amounts of non-replaceable fossil fuel; the desire for non-essential but supposedly aesthetic collectibles that have led to the dwindling of animal life like elephants and rhinoceri.

Still other forms of environmental degradation have resulted from uncontrolled population growth and/or migrations that put enormous pressure on the environment and natural resources — for housing space, for food, for energy, for the manufacture of goods that will provide man some creature comfort, and for places to bury his increasing tonnes of waste.

Sadly, all these have combined to create more worrisome problems on the environment, such as global warming, ozone depletion, toxic wastes, and even the literal sinking of homelands.

The Asia-Pacific Region has been particularly vulnerable to the consequences of environmental damage, some because of the vagaries of geography, others due to socio-economic and socio-
political pressures. Some countries just happen to be at the lower catchment areas of regions prone to monsoon rains, for instance. Without adequate funds for flood control, these countries end up water-logged for months, spreading disease and hindering productive labour. Some countries promote a raw material export-oriented economy to accumulate hard international currency fast, forever destroying their forest cover and coral reefs. Some cash-strapped countries have also allowed the richer and more powerful countries in the West to make dumping grounds of parts of their homelands, for nuclear and other toxic wastes. The resulting environmental and human health problems are awesome.

International meetings convened by the United Nations and other global organizations have called for concerted action to preserve the environment, to promote the rational exploitation of the world’s natural resources, to operationalize the concept of sustainable development. Many governments, big industries, and non-government organizations have heeded the call and have initiated moves for a cleaner, better, rationally productive environment. But efforts seem to have been uneven, particularly in the area of policy-making and legislation. More significantly, there seems to be inadequate effort to share information and experience on these policies among neighbours in the region, a move that could enhance the national as well as sub-regional efforts to preserve the environment.

The mass media have a critical role in creating awareness of environmental problems affecting the region, in disseminating information on environmental policies and programmes addressing these problems, and in mobilizing public support and participation in environmental protection and conservation. However, the lack or insufficient knowledge on environmental issues and concerns among media practitioners prevent them from making full use of the potential of the media for environmental protection and conservation work. The lack of knowledge on general as well as specific areas on the environmental problems, policies and programmes is a serious obstacle that must be overcome. It is imperative to ensure that this knowledge gap among journalists and other allied media practitioners is bridged.

In response to the above situation, the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC) proposes to organize a Seminar-Workshop on Environmental Policies and Media Reporting, to examine current and potential government policies in the region on a broad range of environmental issues, to exchange information and experience on these policies, to explore ways of upgrading and utilizing the capability of various media to influence policy and legislative action, to articulate these policies, and to generate public support for long-term environmental information-education-communication programmes.
OBJECTIVES OF THE SEMINAR-WORKSHOP

1. To review current and potential policies and legislative measures addressing serious environmental problems in the Asia-Pacific Region;

2. To determine the environmental trends and other socio-cultural factors that influence policy formulation and legislation;

3. To identify the major organizations and opinion leaders influencing environmental policy and legislation, and assess their level of influence;

4. To assess the information-education-communication support currently provided by the media to the environmental issue;

5. To explore further collaboration between environment policy-makers and legislators, environmental support organizations and influentials, and media professionals for optimum use of the various media for promoting environmental protection and conservation.

6. To develop/upgrade the skills of media practitioners in producing mass media information, education, and communication materials supportive of environmental and conservation programmes.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SEMINAR-WORKSHOP

The seminar is designed for five days of paper presentations, discussions and workshop sessions. The first day will be devoted to paper presentations and exchange of information and experience on environmental policy and legislation in various countries in the region. The topics will include the following environmental issues and concerns:

1. global climate change
2. ozone depletion
3. pollution prevention
4. energy conservation
5. waste disposal
6. water quality
7. sustainable development.

The second will look at the role of environmental support organizations and influentials - including the media - in environmental policy making and legislation, and probe into the factors that promote success in formulating/revising environment policy. The third will look at cases/programmes of environmental protection and conservation via field observation and media shows cum discussions.
The fourth and fifth days will be devoted to practical workshops aimed at developing/enhancing the capability of media practitioners to report on environmental issues, policies, and programmes.

PARTICIPANTS

There will be 30 participants to be invited from the ASEAN, South Asian, and Southwest Pacific region. From ASEAN there will be two each from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand; from South Asia, also two each from Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka; and from the Pacific, one to two each from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu. Participants are expected to come from the following sectors:

1. Government institutions engaged in environment policy-formulation and enforcement of related legislation; e.g., ministries/departments of environment and natural resources; ministries/departments of health; ministries/departments of energy; anti-pollution commissions; etc.

2. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) engaged in environmental protection and conservation; e.g., Earth Societies; Nature Societies; ECOS; World Environmentalists; Coalition for Environmental Reform; consumers organizations, etc.

3. Media institutions that support articulation of environmental issues and formulation of environmental policy and legislation; e.g., mass media; advertising and marketing organizations; folk/popular theatre groups; and associations of media practitioners.
SEMINAR-WORKSHOP ON
ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES
AND MEDIA REPORTING

Singapore
27 - 31 January 1992

Organised by
Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre

Supported by
Canada-ASEAN Centre
The Commonwealth Secretariat
The World Bank
UNEP
Participants and resource speakers at the regional Seminar-Workshop on Environmental Policies and Media Reporting stressed the need for increased media coverage and the development of alternative communication materials to promote environmental protection and conservation in the Asia-Pacific Region. They lamented the tendency of the media to report only on events-oriented news like floods, earthquakes and oil spills and to neglect in-depth coverage of the social, economic and political processes that bring about long-term environmental damage.

The seminar-workshop was held at the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC) on 27-31 January. It was supported by the Canada-ASEAN Centre, the Commonwealth Secretariat, The World Bank and the United Nations Environment Programme.

The objectives of the seminar-workshop were:

1. To review current and potential policies and legislative measure addressing serious environmental problems in the Asia-Pacific Region;

2. To determine the environmental trends and other socio-cultural factors that influence policy formulation and legislation;

3. To identify the major organizations and opinion leaders influencing environmental policy and legislation, and assess their level of influence;

4. To assess the information-education-communication support currently provided by the media to the environment issue;

5. To explore further collaboration between environment policy-makers and legislators, environmental support organizations and influencers, and media professionals for optimum use of the various media for promoting environmental protection and conservation; and

6. To develop/upgrade the skills of media practitioners in producing mass media information, education and communication materials supportive of environmental conservation programmes.

(See Appendix A for the seminar-workshop's background note and programme.)
The 28 workshop participants included print and broadcast journalists, advertising executives, consumer activists, communication and media educators, and representatives of government environmental agencies. Speakers and resource persons represented international organizations engaged in environmental promotion, industrial manufacturers with corporate programmes on environmental protection, and environmental journalists.

(See Appendix B for the list of participants and resource persons.)

Opening Session. Speakers at the opening ceremonies emphasized the need for international and institutional linkages to respond to the worldwide environmental problems.

Mr. Gunter Lehrke, Deputy Secretary-General, AMIC welcomed the guests and participants. In his address, he also cited the role of the industrialized economies in the degradation of the environment in developing countries, and called on the former to take more responsibility for supporting global and national efforts to protect and revive the remaining natural resources in these countries.

Mr. Pastor B. Sison, External Affairs Officer, The World Bank discussed the Bank's activities for promoting environmental impact assessment in development programmes, national environmental action plans, and wildlife and forest conservation and management. He also cited the Global Environment Facility, a tie-up programme with UNEP and UNDP to help developing countries tackle global environmental problems.

Mr. Goh Kiam Seng, Director and Regional Representative, UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific discussed the importance of broadening the environmental alliance between government and the private sector in order to address more adequately "these environmental problems that have resulted from rapid industrialization and economic growth without due regard for the environment and the natural resource base on which sustainable development depends." He stressed that "NGOs and the media in particular have a very important role to play in forging this alliance."

Mr. Jim Melanson, First Secretary (Development), Canadian High Commission in Singapore underscored the committment of the Canadian government to the promotion of environmental awareness and protection, exemplified among other efforts, by the support of its Canada-ASEAN Centre to environment-related projects in the region.

(See Appendix C for some of these speeches.)

Environmental Problems and Policies. Through country papers, case study presentations and workshop discussions, participants reviewed some of the major environmental problems and
policies in some South Pacific and East, South-East, and South Asian countries; examined the role of the mass media in promoting environmental awareness and mobilizing popular support for environmental causes; and recommended measures to strengthen political will in dealing with environmental issues.

Among the environmental issues discussed were deforestation, desertification, soil erosion, pollution of waterways and marine resources, global warming, the relationship between poverty and environmental degradation, and the environmental impact of development programmes in less-industrialized countries. There was consensus among the participants on the need to balance the desire of developing countries in the region to undertake massive infrastructure and economic development projects on the one hand, and the need for rational and sustainable exploitation of natural resources and the environment on the other.

The participants took note of the fact that majority of the countries represented at the meeting had formulated basic policies and enacted many laws and regulation purported to protect the environment. However, they also noted that endemic poverty, lack of awareness of environmental damage caused by unrestricted exploitation of forest, marine and other natural resources, and the lack of political will among many Asian and South Pacific governments prevent stringent enforcement of these policies, laws and regulations.

Media Coverage of Environmental Issues. Participants from the media and communication education sectors spoke of the growing awareness of environmental issues among media institutions and practitioners, and noted the increased coverage of environment-related news in the various mass media. They admitted, however, that the media tended to report more on environmental issues when disasters like floods and massive oil spills occur. They said that the media have failed to cover more adequately the critical socio-economic and political processes that cause long-term environmental damage.

They cited the activist work of international organizations like Greenpeace and World Wildlife Fund, national consumer organizations, and grassroots/peoples' organizations as being responsible for facilitating exposure of environmental issues through the mass media. These organizations either stage protests and other events, produce their own propaganda/publicity materials, or secure access to the media to draw attention to environmental issues.

They maintained that certain restrictions limit the capability of the media to report more comprehensively on environmental concerns. Among these restrictions are: inadequate training of journalists on environmental reporting; editorial policy of publishers; government censorship; advertiser influence/intervention; and limited number of newspaper pages due to newsprint quotas or high paper costs.
Industry and the Environment. Representatives of industry presented examples of corporate programmes supportive of environmental protection and conservation. They illustrated their talks with audio-visuals, printed materials, and product samples.

Ms. Patricia Lee, Personal Assistant to the Managing Director of The Body Shop, Singapore explained their company's policy of using natural ingredients and non-animal testing in their cosmetic products, recycling of packaging materials, documentation and preservation of environmental/cultural lifestyles, and consumer education on environmental issues.

Ms. Julia Ong, Senior Support Services Analyst, 3M Singapore illustrated the company's "Pollution Prevention Pays" environmental management programme, its product innovation efforts to eliminate CFCs and recycle paper into alternative products to support environmental protection efforts, and its public education campaigns on environmental conservation.

Mr. C.K. Lee, Public Affairs and Advertising Manager, ESSO Singapore, discussed the company's leadership role in developing environmentally-friendly products and plant operation processes, and in supporting and sponsoring programmes to promote the national green effort. Among others, he cited ESSO's pre-1970 environmental impact study on the air and waters around Singapore's Pulau Ayer Chawan undertaken by the then University of Singapore and Nanyang University; waste reduction and treatment in refinery operations; improved piping and tankage technology at service stations; internal environmental awareness communication programmes; and sponsorship of public education campaigns on the environment.

Shriro Paper Singapore had a small exhibit of recycled paper products. The company also distributed copies of calendars made out of recycled paper to the participants.

(See Appendix E for some public education materials presented by the industry representatives.)

Film Forum. In exploring expanded roles for the media in environmental protection and conservation, the participating journalists attended a film forum on the environment held at the Goethe Institut. The participants viewed documentary films on pollution of the North Sea in Europe; destruction of the Black Forest in Germany due to acid rain; deforestation and air pollution in Brazil resulting from massive infrastructure development efforts; and deforestation in the Himalayas. After each showing, participants discussed the relevance of the films to their own countries' environmental problems and explored approaches to reporting on environmental issues through the medium of film and cinema.
Mr. Willy Meyer, environmental journalists and member of the board at Okomedia Institut in Germany presented the films and led the forum discussions. Mr. Meyer's participation in the seminar-workshop was sponsored by the Goethe Institut.

**Presentations by the Ministry of the Environment.** The workshop participants were also given orientation briefings on Singapore's Green Plan and the Clean Rivers Project by the Ministry of the Environment. They also visited the MOE's Resource Centre and Tuas Incineration Plant in Jurong.

(Samples of MOE materials are in Appendix F.)

**Media Workshops.** The participating journalists also attended media workshops on feature writing, commentary and opinion writing, and investigative reporting on the environment. Dr. Murray Masterton, senior lecturer in Journalism at Deakin University, Australia and with 32 years' experience in print and broadcast journalism in Western and South Pacific countries, served as resource person for these workshops.

During these workshops, Dr. Masterton presented overview lectures on the topics followed by discussions with the participants. In his presentations, Dr. Masterton stressed the need for factual accuracy in environmental reporting, for clear distinctions between news and propaganda and between rational and emotional appeals in stories, and for resourcefulness in securing information from uncooperative sources.

During the feature writing and commentary/opinion writing workshops, Dr. Masterton used the film forum at the Goethe Institut and the orientation briefings by the Ministry of the Environment as bases for the practical exercises. He encouraged the participants to explore other angles of the stories presented and to ask probing questions before writing their own articles. He also cited examples of both good and bad reporting on the environment by the mass media, and led the participants in exercises on structuring/restructuring stories culled from media in the region. Outputs of the participants were discussed and subjected to constructive criticism by both resource person and peer-participants.

Several participants with experience in investigative journalism joined Dr. Masterton in a panel discussion during the session on investigative reporting on environmental issues. They discussed the problems of political and military interference in covering controversial environmental stories, conflict of interests of publishers who are also engaged in industrial manufacturing, inadequate resources of newspapers to pursue independent fact-finding, and uncooperative information sources.

(See Appendix G for the overview lectures of Dr. Masterton.)
Towards the end of the programme, participants divided into two working groups and discussed possible action plans for developing alternative communication media materials on environmental issues, and strengthening NGO-media collaboration in environmental protection.

Group A proposed a project for the development, testing and utilization of a package of alternative information-education-communication materials on the major environmental problems in the Asia-Pacific region, and the possible measures that can be taken to redress the situation. These materials will be used in

(a) orienting and conscientizing public policy makers and industrial leaders on various aspects of the environmental problem;

(b) training media practitioners and public education staff of non-government organizations involved in environmental work; and

(c) teaching students and community members about the environment in school as well as out-of-school settings. The package will include printed brochures and briefing materials, slide and tape sets, videos and other audiovisual materials.

A working committee composed of the participants from the Philippines was assigned the task of drafting a project proposal. The participants suggested that the proposal be submitted to The World Bank for funding.

Group B recommended that

(a) the participants strengthen existing national/regional networks or organizations of media practitioners involved in environmental protection, e.g., COMCON or AFEJ, by establishing linkages with them either in their own countries or in the region;

(b) the participants initiate exchange of materials on environmental problems, policies and programmes which they could use in writing articles for their own countries/publications;

(c) the media and NGO's collaborate actively in public education programmes on environmental conservation and green consumerism; and

(d) more journalists and allied media practitioners be provided training in environmental reporting to further increase the number of active environmental journalists in the region.
Closing Session. Representatives of the two working groups presented their recommendations at the closing session of the programme.

Dr. Victor Valbuena, Workshop Director, gave a brief summary of the seminar-workshop and thanked the participants and resource persons for their active involvement in the proceedings. Afterwards, he called on each of them to receive their Certificates of Participation from Mr. Vijay Menon, AMIC Secretary General.

Mr. Menon, in his closing remarks, expressed delight at the practical recommendations made by the participants and committed to assist in sourcing the necessary support to actualize the suggested projects. He went on to acknowledge the moral and material contributions of the Canada-ASEAN Centre, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the World Bank and the United Nations Environment Programme toward ensuring the success of the programme.

On behalf of the participants, Ms. Gunvanthi Balaram, Feature Writer, Times of India, expressed their thanks and appreciation to the sponsors and organizers of the programme for what she called was an enlightening and enjoyable seminar.

Evaluation. Prior to the closing, the workshop participants were asked to assess the programme with the use of an evaluation questionnaire. They rated various aspects of the programme on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 as the highest. Some gave additional comments. Following is a summary of the evaluation.

1. Quality of Programme. Majority of the participants rated the programme as very good, giving an average rating of 4.5. However, two participants commented that the programme was rather long and that it should have been well spaced out to allow more time for interaction.

2. Presentation by Participants. Most of the participants gave this item an average rating of 4. One participant commented that some presentations were very basic.

3. Participant Contribution to Workshop. The participants felt that most of them contributed substantially to the programme. Majority gave the item a rating of 4.5

4. Time Allocation for Presentations. Majority rating: 4. Five participants commented that more field trips and conducted tours of Singapore should have been organized so that they could see more of the problems/successes of the local environmental programme, instead of just seeing them through films and government officials' views.

5. Discussions. Majority were satisfied with the level of discussions and gave the item a rating of 4.5. However, one participant said that more relevant persons from the
environmental and communication fields should have been invited.

6. **Opportunities for Exchanging Ideas with Participants and Resource Persons.** Most of the participants gave this item a rating of 4.5. One participant commented that the panel discussions with both resource persons and participants generated greater participation; that issues could be debated through these sessions.

7. **Cooperation Within Groups.** Majority gave a rating of 4.5.

8. **Workshop Organization.** Majority rating: 4.5. Six of the participants said that the workshop was "good". One participant said that the organizers should have provided a more comprehensive information sheet, including where to go for alternative food, where to shop, etc. Three said that the schedule could have included sight-seeing and shopping tours.

9. **Workshop Facilities.** Majority said they were satisfied with the workshop facilities; they gave a rating of 4.5.

10. **Hotel Accommodation.** Majority said they were satisfied with the accommodation provided at Hotel Royal. They gave it a rating of 4.5.

11. **Relevance of Programme to Your Work.** Majority rating was also 4.5.

12. **Over-all Value of the Programme to You.** Majority also gave the item a 4.5 rating. One participant said that he benefitted greatly from the representatives from media and environmental bodies who spoke on a wide range of subjects.

**Concluding Remarks.** The seminar-workshop was a most fruitful exercise. For one, the number of papers generated by the programme was prodigious. Majority of these papers were of substantial quality and provided a fairly comprehensive picture of the range of environmental issues and policies in the region. They also documented efforts taken by the mass media and other institutions to promote environmental consciousness and encourage popular participation in environmental protection and conservation.

The level of participation in the discussions was high and the issues raised were thought-provoking. Workshop critiques were spirited and constructive. There was good rapport among the participants, and between them and the resource persons.

Judging by these observation and the evaluation feedback from the participants, the Seminar-Workshop on Environmental Policies and Media Reporting was a qualified success.
Future Action. The following action steps will be taken by the seminar-programme organizers to ensure that positive gains made during the programme are followed up:

1. Papers highlighting environmental problems and policies will be updated, edited, and included in a projected AMIC publication, *A Handbook of Environmental Policies in the Asia-Pacific*.

2. Papers on environmental discourses in the mass media will be edited and published in *Media Asia*, AMIC's quarterly publication.

3. Workshop participants will be linked up with other media or NGO networks to further strengthen environmental action in the region. These networks include COMCON, AFEJ, WE, etc.

4. Pursue development of participant recommendations as projects to be proposed to international donor institutions, including production of alternative IEC materials on the environment, and another workshop on environmental communications for NGOs and other mass media practitioners.

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