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<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Jagannathan, N. S</td>
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Conceptualising And Researching Economic Stories: Sources Of Information

By

N S Jagannathan
SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Much of what I’m going to say will be carrying coals to coals to newcastle. And elementary, particularly to an audience like this. Even so there is some value even in banal exchanges.

Everything is a source of information for a journalist, from Press Club gossip to stolen document. A journalist is working even when he is chatting idly.

I have made out a list of sources and documents that economic journalists of the SAARC region may find useful. It is not a complete list, but it could form the basis for a fuller list.

Experts heading these institutes and scholars working in them are acknowledged authorities. It would be an excellent idea to be in continuous contact with them not only for “hard news” and angles but also for continuing education. Economic ideas are becoming obsolescent very quickly these days and journalists are always in a hurry and have little time for serious study. (Journalism is also a profession in a sloth is an occupational hazard). Talking to these people for ten minutes will give what ten hours spent on a document won’t.

You should evolve a methodology of using the documents. Obviously you cannot read the whole of it, certainly not in the two hours you have before you shoot your mouth on, say, the budget. For some absurd reason, you get the papers at 7 pm (with the tax proposals supposedly kept a secret to prevent speculative operation making a killing by prior knowledge) and your deadline
is 9 pm, even for editorial comment. So you develop certain skills of reading the document and more important for hiding your ignorance and covering your tracks for later retraction, if necessary. Over the years, you develop a faculty for looking for the right things.

Always read the last chapter of the report (which is usually a list of conclusions and recommendations) first. Then the first, you would then get certain leads which you follow in the chapters in between where they are dealt with in some detail. (Incidentally, (the Economist of London once advised "Write the last sentence of your editorial first and the first sentence last!"

Finally, economic reporting and writing depends upon your audience and the paper you write for. If it is a "general newspaper" you cannot be too technical or detailed, unless your paper has pretensions of being as good as the "specialised" paper.

As for your audience, this is a more tricky area, because we rarely have a sellable profile of readership, despite recent attempts by some newspapers to identify this profile. Even if you have, the relative weight you attach to the different segments of readership is not always dependent on you. Your Editor and the owner of your paper may have ideas different from yours and that is that. Very often, economic journalists tend to live on each other's washings and write for one another. They also write with an eye on their "sources", the policy makers, the industrialist, the economist who helped you out over a tricky subject, and so on. This creates its own problems. If you are writing for say "Economic Times," or Financial Express, both economic dailies in India, you have to write with a greater attention to detail and some depth of understanding of the subject.
ECONOMIC RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS IN THE SAARC REGION

I  BANGLADESH

1) Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) Comilla Bangladesh
2) Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) Dhaka-2 Bangladesh
3) Bangladesh Management Development Studies (BMDS) Dhaka
4) Bureau of Economic Research University of Dhaka Bangladesh
5) Centre for Social Studies (CSS) University of Dhaka Dhaka-2
6) Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) Dhaka-2
7) Social Science Research Council, Bangladesh (SSRC) Planning Commission Dhaka

II  BHUTAN

1) Central Statistical Organisation Planning Commission Royal Government of Bhutan

III  INDIA

1) Institute of Economic Growth Delhi
2) Centre for the Study of Developing Societies Delhi
3) Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Calcutta
4) A N Sinha Institute of Social Studies Patna
5) G B Pant Social Science Institute Allahabad
6) Giri Institute of Development Studies Lucknow
7) Indian Institute of Education
   Pune
8) Institute of Public Enterprises
    Hyderabad
9) Institute of Economic & Social Change
    Bangalore
10) Madras Institute of Development Studies
    Madras
11) Institute of Development Studies
    Trivandrum
12) Gokhale Institute
    Pune
13) Sardar Patel Institute of Economic Studies
    Ahmedabad

IV MALDIVES
1) Maldives Monetary Authority
   Male

V NEPAL
1) Centre for Economic Development & Administration
   Kathmandu
2) Centre for Nepal & Asian Studies
   Kathmandu

VI PAKISTAN
1) Centre for Applied Economic Studies (CAPES)
   University of Peshawar
   Peshawar
2) Centre for South Asian Studies
   University of the Punjab
   Lahore
3) Pakistan Institute of Development Economics
   Islamabad
   Pakistan
4) Pakistan Academy for Rural Development
   Peshawar
5) Punjab Economic Research Institute
   Lahore
VII SRI LANKA

1) Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies (BCIS)  
   Colombo

2) Centre for Development Information  
   Ministry of Finance & Planning  
   Colombo-01

3) Department of Economic Research  
   Central Bank of Ceylon  
   Colombo

4) Marga Institute  
   Sri Lanka Centre for Development Studies  
   Colombo

NOTE: University Departments not listed
Regional Studies of the Committee on Studies for Co-operation & Development in South Asia (CSCI)

I. BANGLADESH

1) Five Year Plans & Associated documents
2) Statistic Pocket Book - An annual publication of the Ministry of Planning
3) Bangladesh Economic Surveys - An annual publication of the Ministry of Finance.

III. BHUTAN

Document of the Central Statistical Organisation of the Planning Commission

IV. INDIA

1) Five Year Plans and Associated Documents
2) Statistical Pocket Book of the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) Ministry of Planning
3) Report on currency and Finance (Annual) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)
4) Monthly & Weekly Bulletin & "Financial Papers" of the RBI
5) Economic Survey (Annual publication of the eve of the budget of the Finance Ministry)
6) Annual reports of the Ministries
7) Written replies to Questions in Parliament
8) Reports of the Bureau of Public Sector Undertakings
V   NEPAL
1  Five Year Plans and associated documents
2  Annual Economic Surveys of the Ministry of Finance
3  Economic Reports of the Nepal Rashtra Bank

VI   PAKISTAN
1  Five Year plans and associated documents
2  Annual Economic Surveys of the Finance Ministry
3  Annual Reports of the State Bank of Pakistan

VII  SRI LANKA
Annual reviews of the Economy by the Central Bank of Ceylon

NOTE: 1 Research studies of the institutes listed separately are available source of information.
2 Many public financial institutions produce research documents from time to time and even on a regular basis on the macro aspects of private sector performance.
3 International agencies like the UN, ESCAP, UNCTAD, ILO, UNICEF, UNESCO, FAO, WHO, IBRD, ADB, IMF, IFI, OECD, OPEC, EEC, ASEAN, SAARC, World Watch, WWLF and other environmental groups are generating accountant stream of material. The World Development Report of the World Bank is an important document for comparisons on themes of interest to SAARC.
4 Journals like South Asia Journal published by the Indian Council for South Asian Co-operation & South Asian Studies published by the University of Punjab, Lahore study SAARC problems in depth.