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<th>Views from the village</th>
</tr>
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Views From The Village

By

Kelly McParland
A TRAINING MANUAL BASED ON THE EXPERIENCES OF JOURNALISTS FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

GEMINI NEWS SERVICE
Kelly McParland wrote this manual when he was assistant editor of Gemini News Service, London. He had special responsibility for Gemini's rural reporting project. He has also worked for the Toronto Star and Edmonton Journal in Canada and for The Standard in Hong Kong. In 1984 he received a fellowship from Canada's International Development Research Centre to study press issues in Africa, a programme he carried out under the aegis of Gemini News Service.
CONTENTS

Why bother?  5
In the beginning  7
Two stories  11
The numbers game  18
Two more stories  21
Village Echo  30
Two final stories  32
Letter to the editor  43
Exercise 1  45
Exercise 2  49
Exercise 3  53
Exercise 4  57
Exercise 5  59

Gemini News Service is an independent news organisation based in London, with subscribers in 60 countries and more than 150 correspondents around the world. All material copyright Gemini News Service. Funding for the series Views from the Village was provided by the Canadian International Development Agency, the Swedish International Development Agency, and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). Gemini would like to thank Associated Press (London) for the generous use of its facilities in the preparation of this publication.
INTRODUCTION

Gemini News Service has produced this manual with two goals in mind. One is to provide a straightforward text containing tips for reporters and sub-editors. It is intended for use either in the classroom or by the individual. While the principles and practices outlined here are universal to good journalism, the examples and the situations are drawn exclusively from developing countries. All the examples are from reports submitted to Gemini News Service for publication by journalists in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, the Caribbean and elsewhere in the developing world.

The second is to encourage greater awareness of rural journalism, an area which encompasses the activities of millions of people, in all areas of life, but which is frequently overlooked, even by journalists with years of experience.

In 1985, Gemini News Service began producing a series of articles on village life and issues which eventually spread to include communities in more than a dozen developing countries. The project, also titled Views from the Village, is outlined in greater detail on pages 30-31, and is the inspiration for this guide. All the lessons included here relate in some way to the experiences gained from that series.

We hope these lessons will help more journalists recognise the value of looking beyond the city when searching for stories that reflect the realities of life in their country.

Editor: Kelly McParland
Design and production: Paddy Allen, Jenny Ridley
It's a rural world

Key
- Rural population
- Urban population

Source: World Bank

World population: 5bn.
Developing countries: 3.3bn.
Rural population of developing countries: 2.5bn.
WHY BOTHER?
WHY RURAL JOURNALISM IS IMPORTANT

When a journalism workshop was told that newspapers should carry more coverage of events in rural areas, an editor remarked that people in cities do not want to read about villages.

"They want to read about themselves," he argued. "Nobody is going to read about a small village when such a story is placed next to a big robbery story in which millions of dollars have disappeared."

He was making a point with which many editors agree. To them "rural stories" lack glamour, immediacy and relevance to the city-dwellers who buy most of the world's newspapers.

Yet the majority of the population of the developing world, a figure that encompasses millions of people, live outside the cities: a newspaper which cannot find something interesting going on among that many people is not much of a newspaper, and its editor not much of an editor.

Many - perhaps most - of the important stories in the developing world are taking place outside the cities. Newspapers often miss them because editors and reporters alike limit their interest to a narrow range of standard news events which are easy to recognise and report. Every journalist can spot a fire in progress or write down the details of a big jewel robbery. It is also easy to transcribe the words of a politician and reproduce them in print - especially when the politician's office provides you with a typed copy. These stories may be the staple diet of the news business, but they also limit the role of the journalist to that of a glorified secretary.

Most journalists would agree that a good newspaper should reflect the concerns and activities of the society it serves. By limiting itself to fires, robberies and speeches, a newspaper fails to fulfil this role. A good newspaper should also be on the lookout for changes in society, trends, discoveries, possibilities for the future. It should tell readers not just what happened, but why it happened, and whether it is likely to happen again. It should be a mirror of society as a whole, not just of that part of society which has gained political office or come to the attention of the police.
WHY BOTHER?

About two-and-a-half billion people live in the rural areas of developing countries. Their lives are eventful - anyone who claims that little goes on in a village has never looked very closely at one. The social customs and economic relationships in villages are as complex as in any city.

Because such a large percentage of the population lives in rural areas, they are often the birthplace of trends and events which will have a major impact on cities later on. To be aware of this is to be aware of news in the making.

Rural areas, for example, are where the food is grown to feed the cities, and where the droughts, diseases and infestations that can threaten crops are first felt. The countryside is where research into new crop varieties, pest control, planting methods and harvesting techniques that can affect the city's food supply is tested. Villages are where it first becomes evident whether or not national food strategies are working.

Rural areas are where environmental changes are felt that can have long-term effects on everyone's life. The stripping of trees, siltation of rivers, degradation of the soil, spoiling of water supplies - all have serious implications for any newspaper reader, rural or urban.

Rural areas are where long-term social changes can be seen in the making. The explosion of urban populations did not happen overnight - it developed over a period of years, during which rural-dwellers were relentlessly squeezed off their land and, with no livelihood left, headed for the shantytowns of the cities. Many of the urban problems of housing, sanitation, poverty and overcrowding flow directly from this. They were in the making years before city-based newspapers noticed.

Rural areas are filled with human stories, stories that reflect a country's heritage and culture, and which are often an early indication of where it is heading. People respond to people, and human stories attract an audience no matter where the events take place. The tale of a family's struggle to educate its children has far more impact than a string of statistics indicating national literacy levels.

Finally, rural areas are where the future lies. The examples above are not simply good stories in their own right: they are signals about vital national issues, such as rapid population increase, misallocation of resources and inappropriate industrialisation policies.

Similar stories exist in almost any village in the developing world. To find them requires only the willingness to look.
The intro is a crucial part of any news story, yet broad generalisations about what makes one intro suitable and another unsuitable can be dangerous. A talented writer can break every rule and still attract readers, while a clumsy writer may follow the experts' advice religiously and still put people to sleep before the third paragraph.

There are, however, a number of mistakes in intro-writing that are repeated so frequently - even by experienced journalists - that they are worth pointing out.

The style of an intro, or lead, varies according to the story it introduces. With few exceptions, a news intro should be brief and to the point, relating key facts of the story in as few words as possible. A feature about a cultural event may be more descriptive, less confined to the event itself. But whatever type of story follows, the purpose of the intro is to attract the reader's attention, and, usually, to indicate the point of the story.

Bad intros fail to perform these functions. Some are simply too long, or wordy. Too many journalists are more interested in flaunting their vocabulary and education than getting on with the task of informing the reader. Some feel every article must begin with a chronology of events leading up to the story itself. The first thing a journalist should do is think of the reader: if YOU were the reader, what part of the story would most interest you? The second task is to relate that part as clearly and succinctly as possible.

The opening paragraph is particularly important in writing about rural news. Rural stories frequently deal with events which are less immediate and evolve over time; they often require more background than usual, and readers need to be fully aware of the context. This allows more leeway in the intro than for a straightforward story about a fire or robbery, but does not excuse the writer from the basic rules of journalism: tell the readers something they don't already know, and make them want to learn more.

The way to do this is to establish a tie between the reader and the subject of the story. Rural stories are usually human stories - they deal with events that affect real people in their everyday lives. Look for this connection, and spell it out early on. Ask people questions - don't limit yourself to statements by the usual spokesmen and authorities. Find out how events will affect ordinary people, then ask those people how they react.

Here are examples of intros written for rural stories, accompanied by the edited version and an explanation of the changes.
IN THE BEGINNING

INDIA - Way back in the 1950s, when Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was launching his great administrative experiment in the North East Frontier Agency, India was the first country in the world to lay down administrative and legal guidelines for the setting up of biosphere reserves. But nothing came of these early dreams, not even after UNESCO launched its Man and Biosphere Programme in 1973-74.

INDIA - A new conservation programme in India is trying to eliminate one of the main pitfalls of environmental projects - the potential clash of interests between local people and protected plants and animals.

TANZANIA - In the middle of the East African bush there is a closed community of exiles who organise agricultural production, health and educational activities independently from those of the host country. This is an African National Congress (ANC) establishment called Mazimbu, near Morogoro in Tanzania, and it illustrates many of the qualities of the ANC as yet unappreciated by many in the West.

TANZANIA - Deep in the Tanzanian bush, the African National Congress (ANC) is training 1,000 students to prepare for the day - which they believe is inevitable - when their turn to rule South Africa arrives.

TUVALU - The aid-giving countries are mulling over the idea, not sure what to make of it. Some, like Australia and New Zealand - and the United Nations Development Programme - are in favour. For others, where giving aid means spending months burrowing through mounds of red tape, it could take a little longer to get to a positive response.

TUVALU - Tuvalu, one of the world's smallest and most isolated countries, has come up with a novel idea for escaping its chronic financial jam: establishing a trust fund.

TANZANIA - A senior official declared yesterday that people must mobilise to provide themselves with cleaner water in the precincts of Temeke District slaughterhouse.

TANZANIA - In a pond near a slaughterhouse in Temeke District, a child plays while a cow drinks the contaminated water. The slaughterhouse provides Dar es Salaam with much of its meat - but is proving a health hazard to the people who live in the village nearby.
MALAYSIA - The question of pesticide control is becoming an issue again.

MALAYSIA - On the day she was born, Abida was already poisoned. The crops surrounding the village were already poisoned. The ground beneath the crops was poisoned. Yet the authorities had assured Abida’s parents that pesticides were safe.

GHANA - The European Investment Bank (EIB) has given a loan of 17 million European Currency Units (ECU) for the extension and improvement of the high-voltage electricity transmission system to serve the central and northern parts of Ghana as far as the border with Burkina Faso.

GHANA - In Kofi Boateng’s hut in remote northern Ghana, the electricity is about to go on for the first time. As far north as the Burkina Faso border, rural villagers like him are stepping into a new age.

PHILIPPINES - One afternoon last June, a big group of Filipino businessmen gathered at Malacanang Palace to present President Corazon Aquino with a pledge to donate $160,000 for her safe drinking programme.

PHILIPPINES - Five deep-well pumps installed recently in the remote Philippine village of Barrio Perez represent an early step in an ambitious campaign to bring clean water to up to 30 million rural Filipinos.

TANZANIA - Malaria is one of the most deceptive diseases. Its symptoms may be indistinguishable from those of influenza or pneumonia, but its victims could develop mild illness and coma within the same day.

TANZANIA - Abdalla Sefu, a 48-year-old peasant from a village west of Arusha, rarely goes a month without visiting the malaria clinic four kilometres away. He has had so many injections, he says, that "every possible spot has been jabbed."
CHAD - With a $60 million grant from the Italian government, UNDP's Office for Projects Execution is helping Chad cope with its problems of desertification. On the banks of Lake Chad near the town of Bol, huge earthmoving vehicles construct a road, rigs drill for water, handpumps are being installed and farmers receive improved seeds.

CHAD - Two hundred miles north of the Chadian capital of N'Djamena, the small desert town of Bol is undergoing a transformation. At 6 a.m., bulldozers, earthmoving vehicles and compactors are already at work on a job that will change life in Bol forever.

This is another example of press release journalism. A reader of the first version will know what's going on, but may not read further. There is too much emphasis on UNDP, not enough on the town that is undergoing the transformation. Few readers are interested in development agencies - though many are interested in the effect of their work.

Acronyms like UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) should be spelled out on first reference.
MADRAS (India) - An unusual conservation programme in India is trying to eliminate one of the main pitfalls of potential environmental projects - the clash of interests between local people and the other living creatures to be protected.

The first of 12 "biosphere reserves," says official Nalini Dhar Jayal, provides unique areas of flora and fauna which "provide us with a genetic base to conserve our plants and animals." And he stresses: "The uniqueness of this effort is that it does not exclude Man from the conservation effort."

Rather than move local people out of the area, experts will try to learn from their intimate understanding of the environment. People who inhabit the region "probably know more about what needs to be done" than outside experts.

Three other reserves are to follow Nilgiris, the first project, shortly. The Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve is the first of four projects to be taken up by India. If the four succeed, they will be followed by the remaining eight. Each of the 12 is intended to protect a different type of ecological zone.
Nanda Devi, one of the next reserves, planned to be the plan, is largely composed of coniferous forest. Uttarkhand (the Valley of Flowers) in Uttar Pradesh is composed of a mountain valley.

Later reserves include the tropical Andaman Islands; the Gulf of Mannar, a southern bay rich in marine life; Kaziranga and Manas, are grassy forests, where the last rhinos roam; the Sundarbans, an estuary swamp, with the last of the Royal Bengal Tigers; the Thar, is the only desert on the subcontinent; Kanha, is ravine-ravaged forests in dry central India; and Nokrek, is hill forests in the midst of temperate plains.

Twenty different tribal groups inhabit Nilgiris. Says Jayal: "The tribals in these forest areas live a life of total balance with nature. The tribals understand the forest and live in harmony with it. They do not destroy anything. They take what they want — food, water, medicine, material for shelter — in exactly the quantity they require. Nothing is wasted and the forests are able to rejuvenate themselves."

The effort to establish a rapport between the visiting scientists and administrators and the people who inhabit the Nilgiris' mountain forests will be watched carefully to discover whether they are the right steps towards the final learning process and whether there is a willingness to learn on both sides.

Silent Valley and its surroundings, 2020 sq. km., will be the core zone of the project, the least disturbed zone that will be protected even more and studied in greater detail by the scientists. Silent Valley, the last remaining virgin forest in the Western Ghats, and which was recently saved from several projects by an outcry from conservationists, is the heart of the ecosystem, where almost every important terrestrial and freshwater life-form in India can be found.
The remainder of the region will be the "manipulation zone" and will involve greater experiments in administration, for in this zone forestry, agriculture, and restoration, and the tribal role in all of them, will be experimented with.

The central government will work closely with the southern state governments in the Nilgiris project, and the eyes of all other states will be on how they will together develop this reserve for the conservation of the biotic community. Of particular interest will be how successful they will be in "associating the local population with the formation and implementation of research projects so that the people who have been living with nature are not affected but helped to improve their economic conditions without disturbing the ecosystem."

The Nilgiris experiment, is only one of a world series of experiments to turn the tide against the wanton destruction of nature's bounty. The earth today either estimated to support anything between five and ten billion species of plants and animals, moulds and other living organisms. Of these, more than 25,000 species of plants and 1,000 species of vertebrates have become threatened in the last few decades. It is believed that if all the threatened species of smaller organisms were also taken into account, more than a million species of flora and fauna would become extinct by the end of this century. Hence the rush for biosphere reserves to protect areas which have yet to be closely studied.

The rubber tree was once a discovery dredged from a virgin forest. Many other organisms that could yield food, fuel, fibre and medicine may still be awaiting discovery. The evolution of new crop varieties and strong genetic potential benefits. The rubber tree was once a discovery dredged from a virgin forest. Many other organisms that could yield food, fuel, fibre and medicine may still be awaiting discovery.
It is with these aims in mind that environmentalists are making their last-ditch stand against the destruction of virgin natural reserves.

India’s response
of the increasing awareness of the opportunities being lost.

Additional Notes

Wordiness is a common problem in journalism. Reporters want to write “intimate understanding of the environment” instead of “expertise.” They want to write “The effort will be watched carefully to discover whether they are on the right steps towards the final learning process” rather than “the effort will act as a guide to later attempts.” Such phrases may sound impressive, but ask yourself: is their meaning clear? Will the reader understand? The same applies to phrases like “the wanton destruction of nature’s bounty,” or “a discovery dredged from a virgin forest.” Be clear in your message, and deliver it in as few words as possible.
KINGSTON (Jamaica) - Jamaicans, who find themselves already upset and angered at the uncertain state of their national economy, are looking for an answer to what has widely become known among popular feeling as the "vegetable fiasco," the sudden discovery that what was thought to be a national success has in fact become a major "flop."

More cause for animosity to the economic leaders has been given by the revelation that the high-profile, much-launched with great fanfare by the vaunted Spring Plain winter vegetable project has lost over J$70,000,000 in recent years. Until now the public had believed that not only was it a show-piece of high-technology farming, but a profit was being made. In fact it has never done so. Losses in the first year, 1982-83, was just under J$7 million, in the second it was J$11 million and in 1984/85 it was J$29.9 million. Losses in the 1985/86 year are not yet known but may be in the order of J$30 million, making a total of some J$70,000,000 in four years.

In response, the public outcry a joint statement by Dhiru Tanna and Mayer Matalon, both of whom have served as a business consultant and head of one of Jamaica's most successful business families. These are Dhiru Tanna, originally from Uganda, and Mayer Matalon, head of a Jewish family from Damascus who controls vast business interests in Jamaica.

To a stunned public the statement revealed that the rubber yielded their secrets to making it in the second million, in the third it was J$30,000,000 in 1984/85 million. In the third year of the project, the move was a surprise and the refusal to release more information kept it all the government of Prime Minister Edward Seaga hot to take the public into its confidence. The silence produced a storm of protest and many questions.

In mid-August it was announced that the project was being shifted from the parish for South Clarendon to land in the adjoining parish of St. Catherine and the acreage would be planted in bananas. There was no other information, in keeping with the policy of the government of Prime Minister to release more information.

Over means about many editors prefer more than. Write 70 million, or 70,000,000

Write 10 million, rather than, 10,000,000

Be direct. Original wording of this paragraph is confusing. Be consistent with style. Don't write 1982-83 one time, 1984/85 the next.

Write 1982-83 one time, 1984/85 the next.

Be careful with figures - $29.9 million is very different from $29.9.
"As this is taxpayers' money, the public is furious."

The joint statement did show a degree of bad luck, mainly due to a change in the rain pattern in the South Clarendon area. Statistics over a period of 91 years to 1961 had shown the area to be a "virtual desert" during the five months when vegetables would be grown for the US and UK markets. The monthly rainfall varied between just over 1 1/2 inches and 2 1/2 inches.

In the 1970s there was even less rainfall between December and April. In 1982 the government invested heavily in the project after an experimental plot developed by Eli Tisons of Israel had shown very good yields.

By January 1983 good quality vegetables were being exported to the US, making use of transportation via a cargo plane en route back to the US from Venezuela. But mistakes in spraying for diseases and the inability to make full use of the cargo space produced a loss of J$6.8 million.

Teething troubles, no doubt, though this had not been claimed in the joint statement.

Then in the next winter season a single day in February 1984 produced no less than ten inches of rain. Excess moisture in the harvested vegetables led to huge losses and the year ended with a loss of J$11 million.

In the following year there were again unseasonable rains, and also - incredible to the public - this wrong information given by reputable marketing intelligence firms in the US and UK. In the latter case the market for cherry tomatoes had been badly over-estimated. The chairman said that if they had received a 50-page document full of apologies, and added, "the project does not benefit from their apologies."

Losses rose to J$29.9 million for the year in question.
Final results of 1985/86 are not yet available but are probably some J$30 million. Hence the transfer to a different area which should, it is hoped, avoid the unseasonable rains. The joint statement emphasises that the other government projects in the area – over 200 acres of mangoes, a 30-acre experimental plot of grapes, a large fish farm and now the increased acreage of bananas should, over ten years, more than offset the losses in the vegetables grown for the US and Britain.

It stresses that the yield per acre in bananas, more than 20 tons, is now higher than that of the Eastern banana project, which is deemed a great success. But the public is not much concerned with future hopes. They see a J$70 million loss which must come out of their pockets.

Other causes of losses have been given such as a drop in the value of the pound sterling and a drop in prices in the US. These price factors have always been a problem with farmers, but the huge amounts, by Jamaican standards, have come as a shock.

Additional Notes

Be careful with phrases like "much-vaunted." Many editors would let it pass, but it is the kind of cliche that too often slips into journalism unnoticed, a sort of shorthand employed by reporters in place of a more accurate term.

Keep your opinions out of stories. It may seem obvious to the reporter that inefficiency and incompetence have plagued some project or plan, but news stories are not concerned with the opinion of the reporter. If the situation is so obvious, find an authority on the subject who can say so. Or spell out the problems and let the reader decide.
THE NUMBERS GAME
SOME WARNINGS ABOUT THE USE OF FIGURES

Misuse of figures is one of the most frequent errors in journalism. Journalists see statistics as a handy way to make a point, but too often use them without adequate care. Statistics, it is said, can be made to prove anything, and especially so when journalists use them incorrectly, without checking what information they are based on, how they have been collected or to what they refer. Too many figures are accepted at face value: a country which exports two bags of sugar this year compared with one bag last year can legitimately claim an increase of 100 per cent - but the fact remains it has sold only two bags. Don't be fooled by such manipulation and, even when you are certain the figures are valid, be careful with their use. A slip of the finger can turn million into one billion; the construction of 100 m. of railway track is radically different from 100 km., yet just one less letter is involved. Be careful to confirm the calculations of others: agronomists punching figures into an electronic calculator can make mistakes just as easily as the next person. Don't assume their addition or subtraction is correct, when often all it takes is a little simple arithmetic of your own to make sure.

Following are examples of mistakes taken from actual copy. In each case, note how a small mistake can make a big difference in the story.

"It's simplicity itself, but efficient and effective," said Mr. Wills during a recent demonstration of the water-treatment machine.

With a net weight of only 180 kg the machine can be moved easily from place to place. It has a maximum output of 1,620 litres of potable water per hour, which is enough for 800 people a day. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends 182 litres of water per person per day for cooking, washing, drinking and sanitation.
The world's population has now reached over five billion. It will be six million by the year 2000 and will double to around 10.5 billion before human numbers start to stabilise.

Six million is considerably less than six billion, the figure that was widely intended. This is a particularly sad error considering it was provided to journalists by an organisation called Population Concern.

The world's highest population growth rates are usually estimated at 3-4 per cent a year, so at 26 per cent Bangladesh would certainly have a problem. The figure previously was intended to be 2.8 per cent, but someone was careless.

More than half of Bangladesh's 105-million strong population is landless. With one of the highest population densities in the world, and a population growth rate of 28 per cent, landlessness in Bangladesh is aggravated by this delta country's flood-prone and shifting landscape.

The difference between 200 million shillings and 20,000 million is considerable. Both figures were given by the same reporter, in separate stories, about the All-Africa Games.

EXAMPLE A: Africa's sports spectacle is set for August and will cost the Kenya government about Kshs 200 million to host, bringing together about 6,000 athletes from 45 member countries of the Supreme Council of Sport in Africa.

EXAMPLE B: The Games, costing the Kenya government Kshs 20,000 million to host, are the greatest and most elaborate spectacle ever held on the continent.

Prime Minister Robinson insists that if the oil windfall of $50,000 (US) earned between 1973 and 1982 had been properly invested - there was enough to last 50 years - all the economic sectors could have been adequately developed today.

Divide $50,000 by the nine years from 1973-82 and you discover the windfall equated less than $5,000 a year. Even for a small country like Trinidad and Tobago this is hardly a fortune. Obviously there is a mistake in the figures quoted in the story.

The Swiss question whether it is worthwhile to allocate 20 per cent of the federal budget on defence spending - about $2.5 billion, twice as much as spent by Britain, a nuclear power and a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

The Kingdom of Lesotho has a population of 1.4 million and only 340,000 hectares of the country's 30,355 square metres are arable.
A recent survey of data flow by the Rome-based Intergovernmental Bureau for Informatics (IBI) found the level of computer use in communications in Africa to be only three per cent. Outside Africa the usage is 50 per cent. These figures look impressive, but their meaning is unclear. Do they refer to the percentage of the world's computers found in Africa? To the percentage of African communications that are computer-based? To the number of Africans with access to a computer? When quoting figures like this, it is essential to spell out exactly what they refer to, and what the implications are. Don't leave people to guess.
TWO MORE STORIES

FREETOWN (Sierra Leone) - After an absence of 67 years, Sierra Leone has begun promoting the use of oxen for mechanised farm labour, in place of tractors and other modern equipment.

The move was prompted by the difficulty in keeping machines and vehicles too expensive for most modern equipment running. Fuel is scarce and the cost is often beyond the reach of Sierra Leone farmers. Spare parts are also expensive, meaning tractors and other equipment that breaks down could be out of action for long periods, until money could be raised for their repair.

Although there are plenty of oxen in the country, they have not been used as draught animals in many parts of the country since the Department of Health stopped using them to haul refuse carts in the 1920s.

As a result, most farmers have little idea how to use the animals for ploughing and have to be trained. One of the aims of the project set up in cooperation with Njala University College is to train today's farmers in the methods and practices their grandparents had followed for centuries.
The decision to return to the use of oxen is an indication of the pragmatism many development authorities argue is essential if workable programmes are to be introduced to African agriculture. Many projects have failed over the years because experts tried to impose systems on communities where they were not likely to work.

Although tractors are more efficient than animals and are usually seen as work-savers, they introduce as many problems as they solve in countries not equipped to provide the care and servicing they require.

Parts of Sierra Leone have continued to rely on oxen as draught animals even while the rest of the country adopted newer systems, and these areas have recently been studied so that the methods could be passed on.

The best animal for conditions in Sierra Leone is the N'dama ox, a cross-breed of Kenyan and local stock. These are the animals which have continued to be used by the Fullah, the nomadic herdsmen who are Sierra Leone's traditional cattle-raisers.

The country has about 370,000 N'dama oxen in the country, mostly about 80 per cent of them in the northern regions where the Fullah live, allowing their cattle to roam freely over the region's grasslands. The number being used for farm labour has grown from 30 pairs in 1980 to 300 teams in 1986.

The N'dama are prized because they are strong, well adapted to local conditions, and are resistant to trypanosomiasis, the deadly disease which is spread by a parasite carried in the tse-tse fly. They have also shown an ability to resist other diseases other breeds cannot.

Transferring the cattle from the north is one of the tasks of the Sierra Leone Work Oxen project. The project is also helping to organise village associations to be involved in the reintroduction of oxen, providing assistance in the development of new demonstrations and training, and helping to develop and test equipment for farmers using the animals.
A pair of oxen costs about $300. Though expensive, they are affordable to many farmers because they hold their value and can sometimes be sold for a profit even after years of work in the fields. They also provide other income to their owners, who can often hire them out on a daily basis to farmers who do not have oxen of their own. However, farmers must be trained to use them, however. Training sessions are often hilarious for onlookers, watching farmers struggle furiously to force an oxen team to turn on command, or getting dragged away across the field by a pair that won't follow orders.

But the training is not difficult, and consists mainly of teaching farmers to make the team start and stop on demand and follow simple instructions. Initially, 500 farmers were trained, but as they in turn taught others the figure has grown to include about 2,000 families.

Training farmers' how to handle the animals has helped to break down the antagonism many crop farmers feel toward because in the past cattle have been allowed to roam freely, and crops are often damaged. Oxen owners, however, have been trained to keep the animals in paddocks. Proper management of the animals is essential: one proven effect of overworking them is that their resistance to disease begins to break down.

One of the attractions of the ox team is its versatility. Studies have shown they can be used in swampy conditions and in uplands, as well as in Sierra Leone's plain-like bollards. They can assist in the production of rice, maize, groundnuts, millet and cowpeas. In addition to ploughing, ox-teams are used in seeding, weeding and lifting groundnuts.
Apart from primary cultivation purposes, the animals can be used for pumping water, threshing, milling and grating cassava.

Additional Notes

Watch out for terms like "modern equipment," "modern communications," "modern science" etc. Depending on the age of the reader, "modern" could mean anything from the last 20 years to the last six months. Look for a more accurate term.
ARUSHA (Tanzania) - An effort to capitalise on international economic sanctions against Rhodesia in the 1960s and 70s has backfired on the Tanzanian countryside.

Material from which cigarettes are produced is even more devastating to the environment. In many of the areas in which it is grown, this has resulted in extensive deforestation.

In Tanzania, there was a barrage of complaints from environmentalists that tobacco production had not been balanced with the conservation of forests, and that its disastrous effects were now imminent.

The increase in tobacco production led to over-exploitation of woodlands to meet the demand for fuelwood and new areas for cultivation.

Since the mid-1960s, the Tanzanian government, farming 20 years ago, encouraged the expansion of tobacco production in order to fill the gap in the world market created by sanctions against Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) after its unilateral declaration of independence in 1965.

The reader may not know what sanctions against Rhodesia involved. The new wording is clearer.

Wood is the only fuel easily and cheaply available in Tanzania for curing tobacco, and each year large tracts of forests are cleared to meet the fuel demand. It is estimated that one hectare of woodland is needed for every hectare of tobacco or for curing just 450 kilogrammes of tobacco leaf.

Until about the late 1960s there was very little concern over the supply of fuelwood in the tobacco-growing region of the country because the vast dense forests seemed inexhaustible.

But with the expansion of tobacco production, problems became harder to obtain; in some areas, availability increased tremendously and it is no longer possible to cure the crop in some of the areas where bare lands have replaced woodlands.

The health hazards of smoking are old news. Stick to the latest events.

People say people, not human beings.

The main raw material from which cigarettes are produced is a very wordy way to say tobacco.
The crop, of which about 84 per cent is for export, is grown by both large scale and smallholder farmers. Since 1971 the number of smallholder tobacco growers has increased with the help of the introduction of a World Bank-sponsored programme aimed at expanding tobacco production in Tanzania.

Cultivation methods are the central cause of the damage. Farmers plant the method of growing tobacco is in itself brutal to the environment, at least as practised in the Miombo woodlands of central and western Tanzania.

It is normally planted on newly cleared and burnt areas for at least two consecutive years or seasons. Trees are cleared by clearing of the farms requires the uprooting of trees or cutting them, leaving only some naked stumps.

After the two years, the farmer shifted to another area in an attempt to avoid the risk of a devastating disease known as root-knot nematode. The shifting cultivation practice depleted woodlands as large expanses were cleared to open up new areas for the crop.

According to Dr. S.K. Mashalla, an environmentalist at the University of Dar es Salaam, for some 42,000 hectares recently earmarked for tobacco cultivation in Tabora, Mbeya, Rukwa and Iringa regions, another 42,000 hectares of woodland would be required to cure the expected crop from the area.

Dr. Mashalla, who sees a bleak future in the supply of fuelwood, said woodland depletion was exacerbated by the establishment of new villages in the tobacco growing areas. She says that population shifts have added to the problem of deforestation.

She said, "Many new villages were placed in the middle of the virgin forest which had to be cleared first. Each family needed wood for building a house and for fuel. Each family also had to clear a woodland area for growing tobacco."

As the population increased in the villages, pressure mounted on the woodlands surrounding the villages, resulting in massive deforestation.
What disturbs environmentalists, but is of little or no concern to cigarette smokers, is the fact that the deforestation spreading rapidly in the tobacco growing areas is just a prelude to environmental degradation in the form of soil erosion and desertification.

By destroying the woodlands, soils are also destroyed. As a result of erosion, soil with good potential areas for agricultural production has lost have been turned to marginal lands by soil erosion. Rainfall patterns have also been adversely affected.

A tobacco specialist with the World Bank, Mohamed A. Wahid, sees the culprit in the environmental disaster to be the rather primitive technology used in curing tobacco. He adds "A whole range of technical options are available which are relatively low cost and which can be used to improve the efficiency of wood use in the tobacco curing process," he said.

"Stemming the tide would require investment, which Wahid says estimated that the investment would be paid back within two or three years, and wood use for tobacco curing would be reduced by as much as 50 per cent."

For Tanzania this means saving 13,000 hectares of forest every year. Wahid says that barns used in the curing process, Wahid said, consume as high as 0.13 cubic metres of solid wood per kilogramme of cured leaf whereas more efficient barns termed "low profile barns" used 0.03 cubic metres per kilogramme of cured leaf suggests.

He also suggested the use of coal, where it is available, for curing tobacco. Tanzania has vast deposits of coal, which are yet to be exploited. Only slight modifications of the existing barns would be required in converting them into coal use.

Analysis on the use of solar energy indicates high technology and greater investment, and it is likely that its use would be seasonal.
The Tanzanian government has realized that foreign exchange earnings, as well as the environmental setbacks caused by the crop, are important to the hard-pressed economy. Since the investment needed to exploit alternative sources of energy is not available, efforts are being made to step up energy sources other than fuelwood in view of the economic hardships facing the nation. A barrage of complaints is expected to continue unless "serious concerted efforts" are made to increase annual planting levels to about 200,000 hectares for a period of six years. Additional Notes

An introductory sentence like "Cigarette smoking has proved a major health hazard to human beings" is like telling readers that every morning the sun comes up. Both are well-known facts and most readers do not need to be reminded of them. The first paragraph must draw readers into the story, not push them away. To do this, you need to start off with something people don't already know.

Avoid catch-all phrases like "a barrage of complaints." If there have indeed been serious complaints, quote them and outline their nature.

When introducing a quote, be careful not to give away the same information as the quote itself. For example, don't write: Prof. Forecaster predicted that tomorrow would be windy and cold. "Tomorrow will be windy and cold," he said.

Instead, write: Prof. Forecaster predicted the weather would grow worse. "Tomorrow will be windy and cold," he said.
The costs

- More than 1 million smoking deaths a year
- Lung cancer threatens 50% of men in Third World
- Millions of acres of food land lost to tobacco crops
- Environmental damage as forests stripped for tobacco farms
When a Tanzanian journalist turned up at the tiny settlement of Kigongoni and informed the villagers he intended to live with them for two months, no-one knew quite what to make of him.

The reporter, William Lobulu, told the villagers he was a print journalist and he wanted to write about the way they lived. He wanted to know what issues they were concerned about, what events affected their daily existence far from the nearest city.

To the villagers this was new. Few had ever met a journalist; certainly none had ever been asked for their opinion. The outsiders they met were usually aid workers. Newspapers were for wrapping packages or rolling tobacco. When Lobulu tried to explain, the closest they could understand was that he had something to do with the news that came over their radios. After he had been there a few weeks and they still had not heard his voice over the air, they grew suspicious.

Kigongoni is part of a settlement called Mto wa Mbu, literally "river of mosquitoes." Of 10,000 people in four villages, about 1,000 a month are down with malaria. Attacks come as often as twice a month. Schools are depopulated by the disease, and children are born with anaemia, passed on through their mothers; one anaemic infant was born so small that health officials termed it "small for dead."

Lobulu didn't know any of these things before he arrived, though he lived not far away and had been a journalist for some years. But he had come to find out. It was considered a novel thing to do.

In Tanzania's case, the tendency to stay put and ignore the outback was encouraged by severe problems of transportation and communications. There are no telephones in or near Kigongoni; the 100-kilometre bus trip from Arusha took five hours, and at the time there was a severe fuel shortage: the bus would not leave unless all the seats and the roof were full, and even then passengers had to bid against each other for space.

Such difficulties are often quoted by journalists in explaining why their newspapers pay so little attention to what is going on outside the capital. Lobulu made the trip as part of a project by Gemini News Service to promote more coverage of rural areas in developing countries. Since his visit more than 15 other reporters in almost a dozen countries ranging from Fiji to Sri Lanka and Lesotho have done likewise, with fascinating results. They found that village life, contrary to what they were told in the city, is a rich, complex society filled with a wealth of stories city readers are rarely given the opportunity to read.

They also discovered that rural journalism requires a willingness to put up with arduous physical conditions. On his first night in Kigongoni, Lobulu found himself huddled on rocky ground under a single blanket, while mosquitoes dive-bombed at will and lions roared from the nearby game reserve. While collecting stories in northern Zambia, Francis Mwanza was twice threatened with violence by angry villagers. To record how long-term security problems affect life in rural areas, Filipino journalist Benjamin Pimentel spent weeks in a village which had repeatedly been the scene of clashes between government forces and rebel guerrillas.

The reporters wrestled with malaria and typhoid, suffered shortages of food and shelter, and fought a constant battle against the suspicions of villagers. Some needed several weeks to convince local people that they were not acting as
spies for the police or tax department, and had no intention of carrying off local women.

That the effort is worthwhile is evident in the stories that go wanting because big-city journalism can't be stirred into interest. In many countries in Africa and Asia, two distinct cultures have come to exist, the sophisticated, educated elite in the cities having little to do with the traditional life that goes on just a few miles away. Journalists are often charter members of this elite.

As a result, no-one writes about Kigongoni and the effect on villagers of the malaria menace. Everyone knows there is malaria, argue journalists, so why write about it?

The reason to write about it is that good stories are being missed, and journalists are not providing an accurate picture of people in their countries. In most developing countries, urban population is only a fraction of the total; overall, the majority of the people in the developing world live in rural communities. Are the activities of the minority who live in the city the only events that matter?

Rural events carry implications beyond the confines of the village itself. One reason malaria rampages so freely through Kigongoni is the lack of drugs. A programme to supply drugs had been set up by the World Health Organisation and the Danish International Development Agency, but the packages from Copenhagen arrived with a uniform supply of 36 "essential" drugs whether they were needed in that village or not; as a result Kigongoni had a stockpile of oral rehydration salts but was still short of chloroquine.

Presented with such stories, editors have been enthusiastic. Articles like Lobulu's have been printed across Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Sometimes the most enthusiastic editors are the same ones who argued that it couldn't be done.

Often the excuses bear a familiar ring; they are the same ones Western editors use to explain away the paucity of their coverage of developing countries. Many journalists in Africa and Asia show the same prejudice against rural areas that their Western counterparts show to them, and use the same excuses they dismiss as irrelevant and uninformed when they originate from the industrialised world.

The argument goes like this: better rural coverage is not possible because readers are not interested; advertisers don't care; nothing ever happens; coverage is expensive and difficult to obtain; the available reporters are already overworked; issues are complicated and there isn't the space to explain them.

Initially, many reporters show no more enthusiasm than their editors. Rural reporting carries no glamour; the ambitious reporter still has eyes only for a political beat, preferably trailing the President or Prime Minister. Editors give such stories big play; village life is seen as something to escape, not report on.

But often attitudes change when journalists have been to a village and seen the opportunities being missed. Shyamala Nataraj, an Indian journalist who spent two months at a village in Tamil Nadu, called the assignment "one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever had. I've enjoyed myself tremendously, learned so much about my country and my people that I would have been totally blind to otherwise, and came away feeling so emotional about the whole thing that I waited to just let that first wave subside before I did any writing." Nataraj's subsequent articles provided a colourful and evocative picture of village life that could hold the interest of city-dwellers anywhere in the world.

A number of newspapers are making an effort to right past wrongs. Newspapers in Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia, India, Bangladesh and elsewhere have regularly reserved space for rural coverage. Often the coverage concentrates on agricultural issues and development projects - the kinds of things editors back in the newsroom associate with villages - and reporters show a marked dread of actually speaking to villagers themselves, preferring the usual crowd of visiting aid workers, foreign experts, local politicians designated spokesmen and other recognised "authorities.”

What is overlooked in this is that villagers are human. They have families and friends. They have homes and they work for a living. They have cares and concerns and an often sophisticated awareness of what causes the problems hampering development. The problems of villages are the problems of life in the rural areas: education, health, jobs and concern for the future. Villagers are the ones closest to the land; they are the first to recognise when damage to it could threaten the nation's food supplies. If urban newspapers show no interest, entire forests can be razed to the ground, rivers fished bare, newborn babies allowed to die unnecessarily and medical breakthroughs overlooked, all because no-one has taken the trouble to look at what is happening. It is a journalist’s job to be aware of such things, and the fact that they do not take place at convenient locations near the city is no excuse for ignoring them. The difficulties can be overcome, but until reporters and editors are willing to make the effort, major stories will continue to take them by surprise, years after the fact. ●

Kelly McParland
TWO FINAL STORIES

Dominica, population 80,000, is arguably the most beautiful island in the West Indies.

ROSEAU (Dominica) - Sun-worshipping visitors to most beautiful island in the West Indies, of the Caribbean or Windward Islands, can be counted annually. Less than 40,000 of them have holidayed this year. But Dominica, the largest island in the Windward chain and arguably the most beautiful island in the West Indies, is neglected because it has only a couple of the kind of sandy, crowd-attracting beaches usually advertised in tourist brochures. Although it does have a couple of its few good beaches these sandless, pink ones, they are relatively difficult to reach, and Dominica’s beaches are almost all of volcanic black sand.

Dominica moved Nicolo Syllaccio, who journeyed with Columbus in 1493, to enthuse in his journal, “Dominica must be seen to be believed. It is remarkable for the beauty of its mountains and the glory of its verdure.”

In this respect nothing seems to have changed in the intervening 500 years despite a population of 80,000 — now more or less stable because of emigration — and hurricanes, including two in the past eight years which killed 47 people and almost ruined the island’s economy.
The Commonwealth of Dominica, to give its official name, covers almost 300 square miles. It is the only Caribbean island whose rainforests are intact. Its tropical cover, which reaches almost to the top of its highest point, Mt. Diablotin, is so dense that, it is said, no human foot has ever stepped on parts of it. The rivers which criss-cross the country, creating a pattern of leaping cascades and majestic waterfalls, are so full because of annual rain - up to 250 inches in some areas - that Dominica exports water to some neighbouring islands during the January-July dry season. Its 300-odd miles of paved roads, financed by Britain, Canada and the US, make touring it a pleasure.

The island's government is headed by a doughty and brilliant lawyer, Ms. M. Eugenia Charles, whose Freedom Party holds 15 seats against the Labour Party's five, a majority which makes for political stability.

And according to the latest available statistics, crime is almost non-existent, with an average of 12 policemen for every criminal case heard in the magistrate's court in one year: 441 police officers, 38 criminal charges.

So why has this paradise been, if not lost, pretty much neglected by free-spending tourists who crowd other Caribbean islands?

"Most holidaymakers to the Caribbean want to spend their days by the sea, soaking up sun," says Dominician hotel-owner Mrs. M. Winstan. "We mostly attract nature-lovers, birdwatchers, adventurous outward-bound types - serious, active people who couldn't care less about going home with a deep suntan. As a result, I don't think the island and its people will be spoilt by large-scale tourism, as has happened in some other places."
STORY FIVE

Although the number of tourists may be small, Dominica is, nonetheless, benefiting from the tourist bonanza. Says Charles Maynard, Minister of Agriculture, Tourism and Industry: "Agriculture will always be our major earner." says Minister for Agriculture Charles Maynard, who also carries the portfolio of tourism and industry. "The other islands which attract mass tourism have to feed all those hundreds of thousands of extra mouths and that is where Dominica comes in, for we are diversifying both our agricultural and our fishing sectors.

"Our policy is to strive for excellence in farming - high yields of superior quality, mostly for export to our neighbours in the region who cannot provide enough food and fish in the tourist season."

I was present on World Food Day, October 16, when the Minister and the island's President and First Lady, Sir Clarence and Lady Seignoret, presented diplomas and cheques to some 12 farmers of both sexes who had made significant contributions to food production.

Farmers in the audience nodded in agreement as the Minister preached his message whose main theme, apart from Maynard preaches to farmers "excellence," was the need to embrace new ideas and - diversify, to make the island as famous for its "exotics" such as passion fruit, soursop, avocado pears, guavas and other tree crops, as for its traditional crops of bananas and coconuts.

An interesting aspect of this progressive agricultural programme is that not only is production rising, but also the number of young people attracted to farming has risen steadily, reversing the trend in most parts of the world. But recently farming has been a desperate struggle to recover from disastrous Hurricane David, with wind speeds in excess of 140 mph destroyed 70 per cent of Dominica's agricultural crop, resulting in the whole country being declared a disaster area.

It was followed a year later by Hurricane Allen, which caused massive flooding.
Instead of succumbing to these catastrophes, so traumatic that events are commonly dated with the phrase "Before David," "After David," the people fought back. "One of the most important factors in allowing small farmers to clear their ruined holdings and purchase the necessary seeds, fertiliser and other inputs was a $1.5 million loan from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)," said Minister Maynard. It may not sound a spectacular amount, but it came at the right moment, at the beginning of 1981, when farmers desperately needed help to get their land back into production. At the same time, fishermen needed loans to buy new boats, while landing sites, jetties and other infrastructure had to be restored and improved. "In the ten years since it was created, IFAD, a United Nations funding agency, has dispersed almost $1,000 million to help small farmers and fishermen in developing countries with both personal low-interest loans and improvements in services such as marketing, cooperatives, agro-processing and small stock-breeding units. Its aim is to alleviate poverty and improve rural living standards through increased food production.

And, as I was able to witness on three Caribbean islands, even a comparatively small injection of cash can work little miracles.

As the owner of only three-quarters of an acre, Henry Polydore, aged 39, can be counted among the most land-hungry smallholders anywhere, let alone on Dominica. Before a stud centre for pigs was established with IFAD money near his village, he struggled for survival by growing fruit and vegetables.
Henry Poydore, 39, borrowed $1,300 from the IFAD fund. He was able to build sties and buy piglets from the centre, he said.

"They provide lean meat, not like the local pigs which we used to try to get as fat as possible. Now we are going in for exporting pig meat."

He fattens 12 pigs a year, for which he gets an average $240, and his herd is increasing.

Poydore, a father of three, says: "The pigs haven't made me rich, but we can live better than before, and I'm hoping to buy me another small piece of land soon," he said.

Although only 28, Staphan Mason has been farming for 14 years, and has no ambition to emigrate or work at anything else. We found him at the top of a huge banana plant on his smallholding at Newfoundland, 28 miles from Roseau, the Dominican capital.

"I pick, separate, pack and transport 20,000 fingers of bananas every two weeks," he said. "It brings me in good money, about $10,000 a year, but I'm still paying back the $6,000 I borrowed from the government to buy the land."

His ambition rises higher than his banana fronds.

"I've started running chickens with a $1,000 IFAD loan, which I've paid back - and I'm planning to ask for another loan to diversify into citrus, cocoa, avocado, coffee and livestock."

On the road near Grand Fond we encountered one of the rarest beings in the human species, a full-blooded Carib Indian. This tribe of fierce fighters was so hunted down by early settlers that fewer than 300 now remain, almost all on a settlement in Dominica and many now of mixed blood.

Kent Auguis, who is 35, is the younger brother of the Carib chief, and says that his family have never intermarried. He owns four acres of land and three years ago he borrowed $800 to put them under passion fruit.
Tie says: "I have discovered that I can get yields of between 15,000 and 20,000 lb an acre, so I'm negotiating another IFAD loan to put the additional acreage under the same crop," he said. "A number of our people have benefitted from being able to raise loans in the same way. It's made a decided impact on our lives in the settlement."

A government report that is about to be published says that the funds provided by IFAD "have had a positive effect on food production in Dominica and benefitted individuals and groups both directly and indirectly." Apart from improvements to land already cultivated, more than 400 acres of additional land has been brought into production. The operations of 172 small livestock operators were either improved or re-established, while six honey-producing units and three agro-processing units were funded.

The fund also directly assisted 275 artisanal fishermen to buy boats, equipment and tackle.

The average age of borrowers among farmers was 34 years and among fishermen 44 years against an overall average age of 51 and 60 years respectively. This ability of younger people to borrow, says the report, has encouraged them to remain in rural areas and is expected to act as a stimulus to their contemporaries to engage in agricultural production.

Only one in ten borrowers have been women, but because women traditionally dominate among the island's private traders, are traditionally female, they too have benefitted from the project, says the report. Higher has doubled the number of traders because of increased food production, their numbers have increased the frequency of their trips doubled to 600 in three years and they now make weekly voyages to regional markets to sell their wares instead of going fortnightly.
STORY FIVE

A new loan agreement for $1.5 million negotiated between Dominica and IFAD is expected to provide a further boost to the country’s agriculture and benefit more than 2,000 farmers and fishermen.

Joseph Dailey, a 60-year-old farmer who had just applied for a loan to start pig-breeding, explained: “You see, for people like me on this small island, IFAD is the United Nations. They are the ones who came in with real help – hard cash for us small farmers.”

Additional Notes

There are many dangers in articles which involve international aid agencies. One is to turn the story into an advertisement for the agency itself. Another is to get so bogged down in details of the programme that the article begins to sound like an essay on international aid. A third is to sound pompous, creating the impression that only the work of outside “experts” has brought about a region’s recovery.

To avoid these dangers, concentrate on what is usually the best angle in such stories: the human angle. Who are the people receiving help? Why do they need assistance and how have their lives been affected by whatever difficulty has created the need for aid? What are they doing to fight back? It is relevant to tell readers that an international agency is helping out, and there may be an agency representative worth quoting on the condition of the community and the effect of the aid, but usually it can be left at that. Few readers are interested in the history of organisations like IFAD, their aims and motives, or their plans for the future. What does interest them is the struggle of a small island and its people to rebuild their lives after two shattering storms.

Avoid cliches like “the tourist bonanza,” which appears in this story. Journalists too often use glib terms like this without thinking. It is just as accurate, and less cloying, to write “Dominica is nonetheless benefiting from tourism” as “Dominica is nonetheless benefiting from the tourist bonanza.”
MADRAS (India) - The small Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh in northwest India is the "Apple State" of India. It is also one of the main woodlands of India. The battle between horticulture and preserving intact the state's evergreen coniferous forests has recently been joined and promises to be a bitter one.

It was the apple which put the sylvan but relatively undeveloped state of Himachal Pradesh on the Indian map. Now the apple threatens to become "a Frankenstein's monster, swallowing up the state's precious green cover".

This year's record harvest of 300,000 tonnes of apples has been gathered from 50,000 hectares of orchards. These apples will fetch the state about Rs 550 million. But to pack these apples for despatch to every corner of India, over 65,000 evergreens, most of them over one hundred years old, have had to be felled to provide the million wooden cases needed for packing during the August-October season. The cases cost Rs 270 million, but will be supplied to apple growers at the subsidised price of Rs 90

Government thus is indirectly playing a major role in the ecological crisis facing the state.

Government has gone on record as saying that it is committed to conserving the state's 8,000 sq. km. of forest, or 15 per cent of Himachal's total area. It vows that by 1990 the transition will be complete from wooden boxes to cardboard containers with pulp trays. It points out that towards this year's need of 15 million boxes - each wooden box eating up 5 kgs of conifer wood - 2 million cardboard cartons and 100,000 pine needle boxes have been supplied.

And it says that an indication of its ecological consciousness is its recent policy pronouncements to nationalise the sawmills and set up a Rs 600 million plant to manufacture corrugated board boxes.
But several progressive farmers are sceptical about the government's intentions. Most of these horticulturalists are the earliest orchard-owners. They point out that most of the larger orchards nowadays belong to the politicians and their backers. Most of the apple trade middlemen are of this ilk. And they believe that only wooden case packing will protect the fruit from the "geographical and seasonal vagaries of marketing." The over 1,000 saw mill operators are also politicians or politically connected and for them the proposed switch over is a life and death matter. The truck owners, who transport over 25,000 truck loads of apples every year and who prefer the heavier wooden boxes that bring them better revenue are also of the political world.

There are several others too who prefer the wooden boxes. The heavier wooden boxes enable porters to earn more, they are also easier to handle. Then there are several middlemen in the metropolises who buy the empty wooden crates cheap and make big profits converting them into furniture for the weaker sections of Indian society.

With all this business and political clout, led by former chief minister Ram Lai, ranged against him, Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh - himself an apple man - faces an uphill task trying to save the forests. That something will have to be done to save the forests from the voracious demands of the apple industry, seems obvious from the statistics. Serious cultivation of apples in this part of the country began in 1955 when about 1,500 hectares yielded 7,000 tonnes of fruit. By 1970 this had grown to 27,000 hectares and the present acreage is expected to grow to 75,000 by 2000 AD. By then, if timber is still being used, over 30 million boxes will be needed annually resulting in nearly 200,000 trees (600,000 cubic metres of standing timber) being felled. It has been estimated that one hectare of apple orchard needs 10 hectares of pine to meet its need of wooden crates.
One of Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh's staunchest supporters in his present battle is Mrs Vidya Stokes, Speaker of the Himachal Pradesh state legislative assembly, and a major figure in world women's hockey administration. That Mrs Stokes is one of the leaders of the conservationist movement is rather ironic, for it was her family who introduced the apple to the garden of pines and planted in it the seed for the lust for wealth and power the apples have brought.

Tall, mild, ever busy Donald Stokes was an American missionary, who, early in the 20th century, came to the Simla Hills for a holiday. He fell in love with the place and decided to establish a mission in the upper reaches, near the village of the Kotgarh in the Kulu Valley. There, in 1918, he established the then Punjab's first apple farm. Ever since, the name of Stokes has been a byword in Indian apple country, and in horticultural circles. The Stokes orchards that conducted the pioneering experiments which gave India such choice varieties of apples as Golden Delicious, Red Delicious, Royal Delicious and a host of others.

Donald Stokes married in Kotgarh and made the valley his home. His descendants have made Kotgarh tehsil the administrative area with Asia's highest per capita income. They did it with apples.

Separated from the old Punjab after Independence, Himachal Pradesh was declared a full-fledged state in 1971. Its new development meant the government, realising that the hilly terrain precluded any other kind of agriculture, began to encourage horticulture. Apple subsidies have been liberal, timber-felling allowed to be wanton, the VIP connection helping considerably year after year.

What has hockey got to do with apple orchards?

Don't judge the seed for the lust for wealth and power sounds like something from a bad novel.
Now the orchard-owners of the Simla Hills and Kulu Valley - where two-thirds of the state's fruit are also growing pears, peaches, cherries and apricots. Their neighbours in the Kangra Valley to the west have begun to establish tea plantations.

But the apple Donald Stokes planted still remains king. With a retail price of around Rs 10-12 a kilo all over India - and almost all year round due to Himachal Pradesh's government cold storage depots in all the major cities of the country - the apple, once a delicacy of the elite, has become a fruit within the reach of the common man. Himachal Pradesh is determined to make it the common man's fruit by 2000 AD.

By then, Himachal expects that apples, now responsible for 80 per cent of its Rs 1,000 million a year by the year 2000, and is testing new horticultural revenue, will earn it over Rs 1,800 million.

New high-yielding varieties being experimented with will ensure that, provided the snowfalls are good - a good snowfall presages a good apple crop in Kulu. But will this income and popularity of the apple be earned at the cost of Himachal's conifers?

Additional Notes

Avoid "scene-setting" introductory paragraphs like the one in this article, which provide little new information and are intended solely to set up the story. The information needs to be put in context, not at the start.

Try not to overload the reader with statistics. If figures are important to the story, spread them out as much as possible and eliminate any that are not essential.

Overwriting is a bad habit to get into. This author writes of matters that are "life and death", people who are "the weaker sections of Indian society", truckers who are "of the political world" and apples "that planted the seed of lust for wealth and power". There is an easier and simpler way to say these things.
LETTER TO THE EDITOR

A journalist in Malaysia sent the following letter to Gemini News Service in London, trying to interest the editor in a story:

Dear Editor,

Enclosed is a story about the plight of indigenous people robbed of their land in Sarawak. As this is something of a human interest story, I do not know if it will be of interest to your agency.

The Penan are the original inhabitants of what used to be known as the Borneo jungle. While some of them have settled down permanently in longhouses, quite a large number are still nomads. Very little is known about them due to their near-inaccessibility and quiet nature. They are rather shy and non-aggressive and are not head-hunters as some people may think.

Those who still move around the jungle have been considered "uncivilised" by some Peninsula politicians, but in actual fact this is not the case. The Penan are actually very civilised people. As for their nomadic ways, they consider this to be their natural lifestyle, just as wearing a loincloth and little else is another of their ways.

Some politicians criticise them for turning down development, but the Penan maintain that although they appreciate progress, they want it at their own pace and not "shoved down their throats," which is what has been happening.
Before their arrival in Kuala Lumpur they had been fighting a losing battle because no-one, at least not among the people who mattered, would listen to their pleas. Even their trip to Kuala Lumpur may prove fruitless, because the timber industry has been entrenched in politics too long to be separated from it.

Enclosed also are three pictures. The Penan men in two of them are wearing borrowed T-shirts on top of their loincloths because their near-nakedness caused quite a stir. Their watches and the camera (visible in the photo) were bought during their trip here. While in the jungle, they rely on the sun to tell them the time. Transportation is by foot or longboat, and they move around in groups of about 75-100. They also have their own Penan language and know little Malay. No English at all.

I hope this little bit of background will help you understand the story better.

Yours sincerely

The editor certainly was interested in the story. Who would not be, after reading this letter? Unfortunately, the journalist did not include any of its colourful details in her story. Her article was a straightforward news story, treating the meeting between the Penan representatives and the government authorities in Kuala Lumpur as if it was just another meeting of familiar politicians. The case of the Penan was spelled out, but with none of the telling background that gives the letter its human interest and feel for their plight.

Unfortunately, this is a common occurrence. Many journalists apparently assume either that their audience is fully aware of the background to their story, or will not be interested in such details. Nothing is further from the truth. The human element is what gives most stories their attraction, particularly rural stories, which are often describing processes rather than the immediate events that make up most city news. It is all the more important, therefore, to draw in the reader by establishing the human connection. Make it plain to the reader: these are PEOPLE you’re writing about, not just figures on a statistical chart.
EXERCISE 1

You are sent by your editor on a tour with the Deputy Director of Transport and Motorised Communication to a village in a remote region. He is going to inaugurate a new road. Before leaving, you receive a press release. It says:

The Deputy Director of Transport and Motorised Communication is pleased to announce the opening of the latest section of the new trans-national motorway which was promised in the third five-year plan and is to be completed as part of the President's National Modernisation Plan (Phase Three).

The section to be opened by the Deputy Director is a 20-mile stretch which was supervised by local Departmental Chairman I. M. Boss, who reports it will be available for all transportation, including heavy lorry and ox cart. It required expenditure of $5 million loaned by the International Development Board (IDB) on a 20-year no-interest basis. IDB also coordinated donors who provided tools and equipment for the project, including three graders, ten trucks and two bulldozers.

"I am very pleased to open this section of road which will be of great economic benefit to our national development and the achievement of the President's National Modernisation Plan," said the Deputy Director. "The President is pleased with this section and assures that it is for the benefit of all citizens."
EXERCISE ONE

At the village the Deputy Director opens the road by cutting a ribbon. He reads a short speech in which he emphasises again that the road is for the good of all citizens and urges all businessmen to make use of it. He is taken on a tour of the district, during which he is photographed with the head of the village, the Regional Administrator and the headmaster of the local school.

That night you are to stay in the village, and for lack of anything better to do in the afternoon you watch work begin on the next section of road. The donated trucks dump huge lumps of rock by the roadbed, which has been cleared by the graders and bulldozers. A group of boys and men with rubber protectors on their hands - like rubber gloves without fingers - break the rocks into tiny pebbles. During the day they squat under umbrellas to ward off the sun, and work four-hour shifts. You chat with one of the boys, who tells you they receive six shillings per tonne (about $1) and a good crusher can break down two tonnes of stone in a day, using small hand-held mallets with steel heads. Women load the crushed stone into wicker baskets, which they carry on their heads to dump in the road. They earn the same rate as crushers, six shillings per tonne.

A local supervisor tells you that it takes five days to build one mile of road. Local workers are employed at all stages in order to create jobs. Most have no means of transport, so must walk to and from work. They cannot walk more than four miles each way each day, so every 20-40 working days new workers are hired. Some of the stone-crushers, however, being young and single, follow the road as it progresses, sleeping outdoors in order to hold onto their job.

A woman stone carrier named Didi tells you she took this job because her husband left her three years before and she is solely responsible for raising their three children aged three, four and five. She does odd jobs when they are available, but is sometimes forced by hunger to turn to begging, which she is ashamed of. This job is good for her because it means she will not have to beg for some time.

You talk to a stone-crusher named Mohammed, who is also pleased to have work. He owns a small patch of land, which provides him with enough rice to last most of the year. But he also has a family to support, a wife and four children, and most years he runs out of rice a month or two before the next harvest is ready. Normally he borrows enough from a local moneylender to buy food for the remaining months, paying back the loan at an exorbitant rate. This stone-crushing job means he will not have to borrow this year, and may even be able to repay some of the debt he has accumulated.

Mohammed feels more such jobs should be available. He feels men like himself should receive priority, however, since they are the heads of their households. He recognises that women like Didi also need money, but with local village men out of work, he feels the women’s needs should come second and the men should be given their jobs.

The next day you leave the village for another region, where the Deputy Director is to unveil a plaque on a dam.

COMMENTS

There are several right ways of approaching this series of events, which are based on a true situation. The least interesting way would be to focus on the visit of the Deputy Director, the ribbon-cutting ceremony, the press release and the indication that the President is pleased. A story taking this approach would begin something like this:
The Deputy Director of Transportation and Motorised Communication opened the latest section of the new trans-national motorway here yesterday and gave assurance that the road would be of great economic benefit to the nation.

He said the President was very pleased with the road, which the President advised "is for the benefit of all citizens."

The 20-mile segment is part of the President's National Modernisation Plan and was supervised by the Departmental Chairman I. M. Boss. A 20-year no-interest loan for the project was provided by the International Development Board (IDB), which also coordinated donations of trucks, graders and equipment.

Although this is the least desirable approach, many journalists would opt it without a second thought. The reporter, they could point out, was on the scene only as a part of the Deputy Director's tour, and owes him full coverage of the event. The Deputy Director would be upset if ignored, and could make life uncomfortable for the publication as a result. The President and the departmental Chairman will also expect to be mentioned. Besides, they could point out, most readers are educated people who live in the city and will be more interested in a multi-million dollar road than in the lives of villagers.

In many countries this is the reality of a journalist's life. Yet it is possible to satisfy the local powers and still write a better story than the one above. For example, you could write a news story giving the essentials of the "official" event on the next day's edition, and a feature article on the other issues you came across as a special for the weekend. Or include the road-opening details in a wide-ranging article which includes all the necessary names but does not make them the sole object of interest.

The argument about city readers' narrow range of interests underestimates them: what interests people most is other people, and a story about the hardships and struggle of families trying to make ends meet in an area with low pay and little employment will attract readers in urban areas as well as in the country. For instance, look at some of the strong human interest elements in this situation:

* Workers - some of them just boys - spend their days breaking rocks in the sun, smashing the stones to bits by hand with their hammers. They earn only a dollar for a tonne of stones - enough to fill a small truck - and if they work very fast they might have $2 at the end of the day. To get such jobs they walk up to eight miles a day, but even so most will be unemployed again within a few months. A few are so desperate, however, that they make the construction their home and move along with it.
EXERCISE ONE

As hard as the stone-crushers have it, women workers have it even worse. Though their pay rate is the same, to make their dollar women like Didi must load a tonne of crushed stone into a basket a few handfuls at a time, lug the basket to the roadside and dump the stone in the appointed spot. While the crushers work under umbrellas the women are constantly exposed to the sun. Still, they value the jobs, because most women have few other opportunities to earn a living, and this saves them the indignity of begging. Their main worry is the attitude of men like Mohammed, who would take even this rare opportunity away from them.

Now consider this approach to the story, and compare it with the first version:

For women like Didi and men like Mohammed, the latest 20-mile stretch of the trans-national motorway is more than just a segment of road. It is a chance to feed their families and add some dignity to their lives.

Mohammed crushes stone for the roadway, breaking up rocks with a hammer to provide the base for the road, opened this week by the Deputy Director of Transport and Motorised Communication. When the stone is broken, Didi loads it into a basket, balances it on her head and carries it to the site nearby.

They say the road, part of the President's National Modernisation Plan, has provided hard-to-find job opportunities. Didi says it saves her from begging to feed her three small children. Mohammed says it has rescued him from the local moneylender this year.

The President says the new road "is for the benefit of all citizens." Departmental Chairman I. M. Boss, who supervised the section, says it will be available for all vehicles, including traditional transport.

Already the benefits are paying off for Didi and Mohammed. Each earns up to $2 a day. While the income is welcome, however, they agree the work is hard. Mohammed, squatting under an umbrella while pounding the unyielding rocks, points out that...
EXERCISE 2

You have a friend who has trained as a schoolteacher and has been sent for his first posting to a rural area, where he works in River Village, a community of about 5,000. He invites you out for a visit, and you spend a week or two with him.

The village is among several hundred which were identified five years earlier under a National Education Expansion Programme by the national government. Under the programme, schools are to be built in all villages lacking adequate facilities. The schools are chosen by a government-appointed committee on the basis of their population, location and distance from other educational facilities. Until it was selected, the village where your friend works had no formal school. Now it has a single-storey, cement building with one room, large enough for 100 children. The villagers helped to erect it, showing great enthusiasm as they believed a school meant progress, and would help their children become richer than they are.

Your friend's training was a direct result of this school-building programme. The government was to receive financial assistance through the UN to help with the programme, and the UN agreed to help train the additional teachers that the programme would make necessary. In this way the government saw that it would not only improve the general education level of the population, but would provide jobs for several hundred newly-trained teachers as well. Local industry would also benefit, because books, paper, pencils and other essential supplies were to be contracted out as much as possible to local manufacturers and suppliers.

When you arrive at the village, however, your friend begins to complain that local parents do not understand the educational system and have stopped sending their children to class. Instead, the children work in the fields, or help their parents at home.
EXERCISE TWO

He takes you to see the school. When it opened two years ago, he says, there were more than 100 students and the school was overflowing. Now only a few still appear for lessons, and their attendance is erratic. On some days he has no students at all. He explains that the village elders have told people that if their children become too educated they will leave the village and their parents may never see them again. Luckily, he tells you, the regional inspector of schools understands the situation, and together they have managed to keep the school open by submitting lists which indicate that there are 42 children officially attending classes. He tells you that the children are in fact registered, although few ever actually attend class. Together your friend and the inspector hope that if they keep the school open long enough, the parents will see the light and begin allowing their children to attend. The inspector tells you that dozens of schools face the same problem, and he agrees with your friend that they must do their best to keep the schools from closing until the parents recognise the error of their ways.

During your stay in the village you talk to several parents. Most tell you they like your friend and they hope he keeps his job, since he often helps them with chores in the village. Asked why they don't send their children to school, they are silent at first, but a few eventually admit that they feel it is a waste of time. Children are more valuable in the field, or at home, they say. When asked if they don't feel it is valuable to learn to read and write, they agree that it is. They admire people who can read and write. But reading and writing does not put food on their table, they say, while work in the fields does.

To make their point, the villagers point to the young boys who hang around the market in the centre of the village. There are about a dozen of them. Most have received basic training in reading and writing, and some have special skills, like book-keeping. All have been to the city to find work, but the wages were low and they had no friends, and life there was expensive. Jobs, even for the skilled, were hard to come by. One of them, Ahmed, tells you that he returned home because life is easier in the village, but that, like the others, he considers it beneath an educated man to work in the fields. What good would education be if he spent his life in the fields, just as if he could not read or write at all?

Back in the city after your visit, you investigate at the Ministry of Education and discover that the National Education Expansion Programme is considered a major success story and has brought the government much international praise and prestige. It has been called a "model programme." A spokesman tells you that more than 200 schools have been built, and hundreds more are planned. Hundreds of teachers have been trained, and enrolment figures indicate that 10,000 children are being educated each year. The government hopes to eliminate illiteracy within ten years, he says. Several major development organisations have sent representatives to study the programme and all have gone away impressed after seeing the figures and visiting two or three schools filled with children. As a direct result of the success of this programme, three other multi-million dollar development programmes are likely to receive approval from the donors. The new projects will bring similar benefits in the areas of health, sanitation and agricultural advancement. As well, the government has been asked to nominate a representative to head an important international committee on educational issues, which is to hold hearings in 23 countries and issue a report.
EXERCISE TWO

ALL THOSE WHO FEEL THE EDUCATION SYSTEM ISN'T WORKING - RAISE YOUR HANDS...

COMMENTS

This outline is based on an actual situation, and illustrates the almost endless number of stories that can come from villages. From what may appear to the casual visitor to be a straightforward situation, you could draw several good stories. For example:

* The crisis in education planning. Many new schools are under-attended.
* Potential trouble in the national literacy/education programme. Although the government hopes to eliminate illiteracy within a decade, its figures are based on falsified reports.
* The unexpected tragedy of the educated unemployed. Although education is seen as the surest route to national development, school-leavers find themselves unable to find good jobs in the city, and unwilling to return to the traditional way of life.
* The human conflict created by development efforts. The government does its best to provide schools, teachers and the opportunity to get ahead, but runs into the roadblock of tradition. The older generation is suspicious of the new approach: they want a better life for their children, but not at the expense of the customs they are proud of. The young welcome the opportunity, but do not understand that an education is just the beginning of the battle, and that they must continue to strive to put it to good use.

Dangers exist in covering these stories. The first two, for instance, might get your friend in trouble. The third could cause problems for the village boys, who might be criticised for wasting their opportunities. This would embarrass their families, while doing little to solve the problem.

These worries would be enough to make some journalists abandon their story idea without further thought. But that would be a waste, and unnecessary. It is possible to use much of the material to produce a colourful story that will interest readers in cities as well as rural areas, while pointing out some of the challenges faced by the national programme. Consider this version, for example:
EXERCISE TWO

A national education programme that has received international praise is struggling to overcome the doubts of some village elders who fear it will affect their traditional values.

The National Education Expansion Programme - described as a "model programme" by one development agency - has built more than 200 schools in rural areas and hopes to eliminate illiteracy within ten years.

A spokesman said the success of the programme could help attract millions of dollars for further educational expansion.

One challenge the programme continues to face is the uncertainty of parents who fear that education will take their children away from the village. In River Village, elders say they approve of education for their children, but are afraid that if they get jobs in the city they will not return.

A local teacher says 42 children are registered at the new school built by the programme, but that parents have begun keeping their children away because of the elders' warnings. The school remains open, although few attend classes, while the teacher and the regional inspector of schools attempt to change the minds of the elders.

The low attendance continues despite local support for the programme. The villagers helped build the classroom, and say that they hope the teacher will stay. But they also say some village children who graduated from school were unable to find jobs, yet refuse to work in the fields.

In interviews, several former students said they expected good jobs when they graduated, but faced tough competition and found city life expensive. They feel let down, and say that returning to the fields would make their education a waste.

The graduates say they were told that education was the key to success. They did not expect that they would need to continue their efforts for years...

This approach makes clear the situation in the village, while pointing out the benefits of the programme as well. It includes all the facts, but is unlikely to get your friend in trouble, as it shows that he and the inspector are doing their best to correct the situation. It presents the lack of school attendance as a problem to be solved within the national programme, not as a sign that the scheme itself is in trouble.
EXERCISE 3

An ageing relative who lives in a remote village is ill and you go there to pay your respects. It is the village your family came from originally, but you have not been there to visit since you were a child. You remember it well though, as a lush area of abundant forests, clean ponds for swimming, a river rich with a wide variety of fish and a busy daily marketplace where people gathered to gossip and buy and sell goods.

You are shocked when you arrive to discover that things are not nearly as you remember them. Most of the ponds have become stagnant and are inhabited only by frogs and mosquitoes. The river has become clogged with silt, which began to build up in a serious way soon after forests upriver began to be stripped away. No longer is the river the busy waterway you recall - rarely do any craft other than rafts or small fishing boats appear on it, and those that do are often towed by young men along the river's edge. The once-bustling market is now held only twice a week, and for only a half-day at a time. You find that little is available there, and that the only fish on offer consists of a few baskets of fingerlings, barely big enough to be called fish. In the old days, a catch of that sort would have been tossed back into the water with contempt. But the people in the market assure you that this is all the river is capable of producing, and that the days of fat catches are long past.

The most shocking surprise is the disappearance of the forest. Children used to play in it for hours, hiding in the rich vegetation; now there is almost no trace of it. It has been stripped for fuel and for building. Some wood is sold illegally to merchants who re-sell it in the city. Some of the cleared land has been used for farming, but after a year or two the soil was exhausted and the crops failed. It has been several years since the last crop, but the soil has not recovered, so now there is no forest, no soil and no crops.
Without the forest, the women who are responsible for the collection of firewood must walk farther and farther each day to find it. Many now spend three or four hours a day hunting for fuel. As a result they are always behind with their other chores, work longer days and are increasingly exhausted. Several men complain that they no longer want to live with their wives because they are so often short-tempered and irritable. A few also say that their wives have begun to have problems conceiving children - in fact, there has been an increase in problem births and infant deaths in recent years. Some people claim that witchcraft is responsible, and they tell you that they have summoned a local healer who is also skilled at dispelling witches.

You spend one morning with a fisherman, Manu. You set out early, and before you reach his preferred fishing area he shows you his net, which has specially-woven mesh to prevent even the smallest fingerlings from escaping. He confides to you that this sort of net is illegal, but that almost everyone on the river now uses them. Despite the net, however, he has little luck, pulling in just a few handfuls of fish throughout the morning. Manu says such poor catches have become normal, and blames the situation on the appearance a few years earlier of fishermen from farther upriver. He points out several boats on the river which he says belong to these men. The men began to arrive after their own fishing grounds had been clogged with silt and fished out. Having destroyed their own livelihood, says Manu, the intruders moved downriver and had now destroyed the livelihood of his village as well. It was these men, he says, who introduced the narrow-mesh nets, to which local people had previously objected as a danger to the long-term supply of fish. But once the outsiders started using them, what could local fishermen do? Manu tells you that soon he expects he too will have to move downriver in search of better fishing.

When you return home to the city, your friends point out the stupidity of the village people and mock their self-destructive practices. Not only have they destroyed their own forests, they say, but now they are destroying the river as well. Luckily there is still plenty of firewood and fish available in the city markets, and not fingerlings, either - these fish are fat and healthy-looking. The only problem is the price, which has been raised yet again and is getting to the point where they can barely afford to feed their families. Several of your friends admit that they are already being forced to skimp, eating more rice and less fish. They rage at the unfairness of this. They say it must be due to higher taxes and increased inflation, and complain about the free-spending ways of the government. They also complain about the growing number of people who are moving to the city from the countryside. Most are poor, ignorant and uneducated, they say, and with nowhere else to live they set up squalid squatter camps on the edge of town. Increased population means increased demand, and drives prices still higher. Not only that, but crime and prostitution have been skyrocketing as a result.

Since they know you are a journalist, they urge you to write a story condemning the government for wasting so much money and fuelling price increases. They also suggest you take government ministers to task for allowing the flood of rural poor to the city. The government, they argue, should forbid people from resettling in the city unless they have good reason and a job.
This series of events, which is based on an actual situation, illustrates several points:

* The number of stories that exist in rural areas, but are ignored.
* The direct way in which events in the countryside can affect the city - the degradation of forests and rivers has led directly to rising prices and urban overpopulation.
* The fact that environmental destruction is a human story, not simply a matter of disappearing resources. In this case, whole villages are being slowly squeezed to death, marriages are suffering and births affected by environmental factors.
* The failure of many city people to see beyond immediate problems. They mock the villagers and call them stupid, not recognising that the villagers are also struggling with factors they cannot control.
* The readiness to blame all problems on the government, and turn human stories into political generalisations. A journalist interviewing city residents might conclude that this is an illustration of government incompetence or corruption, and be frightened off as a result. In fact the story is much broader, and concerns the failure of society to come to grips with the essential need to conserve finite resources.

One way to begin the story, making it attractive to readers in the city as well as in the countryside, is to contrast the attitudes of people in both areas:

Bisa, a fish-seller in the capital, points to the rich catch on his stall in the marketplace and insists there is plenty of fish to go around. But 60 kilometres away, a fisherman named Manu indicates his own village's barren market and suggests that soon city shoppers too will feel the shortage.

The implications of Manu's warning are already visible. City families complain that fish prices are increasing rapidly and say they are now eating more rice than fish. As the city grows crowded with arrivals from the countryside demand is also going up, as more people chase the same amount of fish.

Manu says that the capital's new residents are fleeing the shortages of their villages. They prefer village life, but find it can no longer support them. Manu says he too may have to move his family soon - eventually they could also end up in the city.
EXERCISE THREE

Both Manu and Bisa are suffering the effects of uncontrolled exploitation of resources. Neither is certain why the river and forests have been destroyed, but both point out that little has been done to safeguard the environment in the decades that demand has been growing.

Thirty years ago the forest near Manu's village was thick and the river was teeming with fish. Now the forest has disappeared and the river is almost empty...

Squandering the soil

**Total arable land lost**

**1975-2000**

- Desertification: 25
- Poisoned soil: 50
- Erosion: 50
- Non-agricultural uses: 150

Total: 275

*millions of hectares

Source: Gaia

By 2000 we could lose 18% of world total. What about the students' parents' children's schooling? Have...
EXERCISE 4

Don't let standards slip, teachers told

TEACHERS have been urged to maintain a high standard of discipline among themselves in order to uphold the name of the profession and increase their chances of promotion.

The Ministry of General Education has also been urged to speed up the processing of teachers' promotions, appointments and confirmations so as to reduce frustrations among the teachers.

The call was made by the National Union of Teachers district chairman when he addressed members during the union's general meeting.

The chairman noted that negligence of duty, negative attitudes and excessive beer drinking among some teachers were rife and would affect their performance.

In a hard-hitting speech at the meeting, which was attended by the union's provincial secretary, he ticked off some headmasters whom he accused of heavy indulgence in beer drinking at the expense of school work.

"Some headmasters are now heads of bar rooms and not schools. They move with their favourite teachers whom they have turned into bodyguards.

"Some teachers are invited by parents on drinking sprees which last until dawn, and yet these teachers are expected to be in classes a few hours later. You can't expect such teachers to perform well," he charged.

He noted that some teachers had even taken to drinking illicit brews which were a health risk.

Such teachers would have only themselves to blame if they could not get promoted or appointed to act in senior positions.

Highlighting the problems teachers faced, the union chief said lack of proper accommodation, poor state of classroom buildings and furniture, poor staffing and delays in appointing, confirming and promoting deserving teachers were among the prominent ones.

He gave an example of two schools in the district where one was manned by four teachers against 14 classes and the other was run by one teacher against four classes.

It was also observed that some teachers had been acting in higher positions for a very long time. "About 24 head teachers, ten teachers in charge and 26 deputy head teachers in various schools had been acting, some since 1975," he added.

He appealed to the office of the district education officer to ensure that schools were well staffed and that the processing of teachers' appointments and transfers were done with minimum delay.

During the same meeting he accused the office of the district education officer of effecting verbal transfers and appointments and warned teachers not to succumb to such conduct because they would not be paid any subsistence or other allowances by the ministry.

Emphasising the importance of school production units, he said funds realised from such units would go a long way in supplementing the ministry's efforts in buying school equipment and stationery.

Addressing the same teachers later, the provincial secretary said the organisation of the union was weakened by lack of unity coupled with gossip among members.
EXERCISE FOUR

Stop illegal trade - PM

THE Prime Minister has appealed to villagers living along borders with neighbouring countries to be patriotic and protect the economy of the country from illegal traders.

Addressing a public meeting at a border village on Friday, the Prime Minister warned that national economic recovery depended on themselves to produce more food and legally sell the surplus to other countries.

He said everyone had a role to play in development "because the country is not on loan to us, but it is a permanent dwelling for the present and future generation."

He said the nation was on "economic fire" and every responsible citizen should stand up and be counted and extinguish the fire.

Earlier, the local Central Committee member informed the Prime Minister that his provincial committee decided to withdraw trading licences for essential goods from businessmen in the area because of the high rate of smuggling.

He said the committee was monitoring the situation closely because some businessmen had moved north of the region, where they continued with their illegal trade. But once caught they would be banned from trading in any commodity.

COMMENTS

Both these stories appeared on the "rural news" page of a weekend newspaper. The names of people and locations have been eliminated - not to protect anyone, but because the problems they reflect are common in many countries.

The stories share several elements. For example:

* Both depend solely on statements, speeches and warnings by recognised authority figures.
* Both consist of the authority telling ordinary people what they should or should not do.
* Neither journalist has made any attempt to investigate the issue behind the statement. The reporter has simply copied down the words of the authority and left it at that.
* Although both stories include implications for ordinary people, neither reporter seeks their reaction or explains what the effects have been or might be.

The story headlined Don't Let Standards Slip, Teachers Told does not answer any of the following questions:

* Do teachers in the district agree with the chairman's assessment? What is their version of the situation?
* What do the students' parents think? Are they satisfied with their children's schooling? Have there been complaints about the standard of teaching before now?
* What prompted the chairman's remarks? Has a particular incident brought the situation to his attention, or has trouble been brewing for some time? Why has nothing been done about it?
* If teachers are indeed acting as the chairman alleges, will they be disciplined?
* What is the reason for the teachers' behaviour? Is it caused by deeper problems in the education system? If so, what are they?

The second story also raises questions and fails to answer them. If you were covering the story, who else would you interview? What questions would you ask?
EXERCISE 5

Read the following news stories:

Helping hand for a village

MADRAS - The chirp of contented birds fills the air as a group of white leghorn chicks peck enthusiastically at their feed in a large, airy coop, watched by their proud owner, a stocky middle-aged villager.

"Before I got the chickens a month ago, I was desperate. When there was work, I worked in the fields. The rest of the year I had to borrow from a moneylender to support my family. Now, once these birds start laying, I have some hope of earning enough for my family," says Velu of Perumaleri village, eight km. from Mahabalipuram, a beneficiary of a rural development scheme launched by the Indian Overseas Bank.

Aid from TAPCO
Velu is one of the hundred-odd persons in a cluster of three villages who have started poultry farming with the help of grants from the bank and the Tamil Nadu Poultry Development Corporation (TAPCO).

TAPCO gave him the chicks after initial lectures on how to look after them and how to construct the coop. He is given feed at a subsidised rate by the Corporation, and once the birds start laying TAPCO would buy back the eggs.

"The officials say I'll be able to make Rs.100 a month after paying for the feed and the loan I took to construct the coop. It is not much, but I'll be better off than I was," he says.

Perumaleri and two adjacent villages of Vadakambadi and Nallan Pillai Petral, are located in flat, arid land punctuated with tall palmyrah trees, just a few kilometres from the sea.

The bank started the rural development project two years ago. Over Rs.10 lakhs has been pumped into the area by it and the net income per household has increased from Rs.39 a month to Rs.138, mainly due to an increase in non-farm income from dairy and poultry. "We faced many problems after we decided to adopt these three villages," said an officer of the bank.

The villagers were very suspicious of us. The Government had done some soil conservation work in the area. The villagers said they were told the work was free, but were later sent a large bill. So they were suspicious of all outsiders and the local moneylenders were against us as well.

School Built
"One of the villages had no school and the villagers wanted one, so we gave them money and helped them build it and gained their confidence, after which they started listening to us," he said.

The thrust of IOB's efforts was to remove unproductive labourers from agriculture and give them more gainful employment in cattle rearing and poultry farming. IOB is also trying to introduce new cultivation methods and new technology and, as a sign of the new technology, a windmill sticks out among the trees at Nallan Pillai Petral village.

Windmill Helps Irrigation

The windmill, which has been developed by the Murugappa Chettiar Research Centre (MCCR), is part of a system to introduce drip irrigation which makes the maximum use of water on crops, a boon in dry, arid areas.

At present, the main crops in the area are groundnut and sweet potato. If drip irrigation proves successful, the farmers will be able to grow tomatoes and bananas and other vegetables, and bank officials hope the area will develop into a feeder for the growing township at Kalpakkam.

What has the return for IOB been and what has been the level of repayment of loans? According to the Assistant General Manager, Mr. K. Natarajan, repayment averaged 62.5 per cent, but more important, there was a genuine desire on the part of farmers to repay their loans.
New approach to rural development

NEW DELHI - Around 40 officials from all the States will meet at Madurai tomorrow for a week-long national training programme in Integrated Rural Energy Planning (IREP) organised by the Planning Commission in coordination with the School of Energy Environment and Natural Resources of the Madurai Kamaraj University.

Second in a series of such programmes to be organised all over the country, this marks a new approach to rural development through removing one of the main impediments namely the energy crisis.

The IREP was initiated in the Sixth Plan following the realisation that the rural areas are worst hit by the energy crisis. Urban areas use around 80 per cent of commercial energy, though their share in the total population is about 24 per cent. Though 64 per cent of the villages are electrified, only eight per cent of rural households use electricity. Rural areas are found to suffer from poor availability of commercial sources of energy as also from inefficiency in the use of non-commercial sources.

Ninety per cent of the total energy consumed by the rural population consists of non-commercial fuels like firewood, cowdung, and farm waste, which account for more than 40 per cent of total energy consumed in the country. It has also been noted that the continued and widespread use of these non-commercial sources of energy in the rural areas have resulted in large-scale environmental destruction.

Rising cost: While rural people get non-commercial fuels at almost zero private cost, the social cost of meeting their energy needs has been increasing over the years. Moreover, their demand for a better quality of life can be provided through the use of available commercial fuels like electricity, kerosene and gas both for domestic as well as productive activities including agriculture and other activities.

It was, therefore, felt that planned energy supply including commercial, non-commercial and non-conventional sources of energy for the rural areas, was a vital input for the development of these areas.

Phased programme: According to Dr. S. K. Chopra, Adviser, Planning Commission, it was against this backdrop that integrated rural energy programmes were thought of and started as pilot projects in 1981 in four States. Later this was extended to five more States by 1984-85. The programme was developed in three phases.

The first phase involved setting up of working groups to prepare an approach paper on the rural energy problem in the State while the second phase involved selection of pilot blocks and districts for preparation of IREP project. In the third phase, implementation was taken up. By the end of Sixth Plan, 20 block-level IREP projects were in different stages of implementation.

In each of the pilot projects, a block-level integrated energy plan was prepared, and the mix of the different energy options was promoted, depending on the resource endowments and the availability of various commercial and non-commercial energy sources in that block. The options include wind mills, solar cooling and heating system, biomass, improved chulhas, bullock carts, kerosene stoves and equipment including pumps for the better use of electricity.

Institutional mechanism: The programme has been fully activated in all the States during the Seventh Plan, and efforts would be towards developing an institutional mechanism in the States for planning and implementing integrated projects in selected blocks. The number of blocks to be covered will be progressively increased so that by the end of the Plan period at least 150 to 200 blocks are covered.

Training of manpower: A major component of the programme is training of professionals to work on the planning and implementation of IREP. Besides the series of training programmes, a national training centre is also contemplated.

COMMENTS

These two stories provide a clear picture of two very different approaches to rural journalism. There is a stark contrast between the two. There is also likely to be a sharp difference in readership. Although both deal with programmes aimed at encouraging rural development, one is open, easy to read and informative. The other is complex, difficult to understand and likely to turn readers away.

Of the two, Helping Hand For A Village is more likely to attract readers, although it is loosely sub-edited. Its opening paragraphs describe an everyday human scene, which most readers of an Indian newspaper are likely to recognise. The introduction quickly puts the subject of the story on a human level. The "stocky, middle-aged" owner of the chickens relates that until recently he was "desperate." There was little work and he was forced to borrow to feed his family. The birds have given him hope of escaping this desperate situation. He has regained some pride and a degree of hope for the future.

The attraction of this approach is that the reader becomes interested in Velu and his problems before details of the rural development programme are introduced. People are more interested in other people than in the dry details of development programmes. By drawing the reader into the story with a human angle and subsequently presenting programme details in the context of their effect on Velu, the journalist holds the reader's attention and gets the message across at the same time.
There is little that is human about New Approach To Rural Development. The only person mentioned is "Dr. S. K. Chopra, Adviser, Planning Commission." Not exactly your average chicken-rancher, and even Dr. Chopra does not appear until half-way through the story, and is not quoted. Before his appearance, the story is inhabited solely by institutions, programmes and acronyms. In the first paragraph alone the reader is expected to digest the national training programme of the Integrated Rural Energy Project (IREP), the Planning Commission, and the School of Energy, Environment and Natural Resources of Madurai Kamaraj University. Hardly names to pop up in everyday conversation.

At no point in New Approach To Rural Development is the New Approach put in terms of its effect on ordinary people. The reader is expected to decipher a series of paragraphs which read like an inter-office memo from one bureaucrat to another, translate into English such sentences as, "By the end of the sixth plan, 20 block-level IREP projects were in different stages of implementation," and figure out what the author means when he writes: "The programme has been fully activated in all States during the Seventh Plan, and efforts would be toward developing an institutional mechanism in the States for planning and implementing integrated projects in selected blocks." Activised? Institutional mechanism? Integrated projects? Do readers use these terms? What is the Seventh Plan, and what does "selected blocks" refer to? None of these terms is explained in a way readers might understand.

The lesson here is that readers are human. They react to human events, and to situations which they can relate directly to the world as they know it. Most people are not bureaucrats, technocrats, academics or experts. They do not talk in acronyms and statistics, and will not be particularly interested in news stories that do. Remember: the main reason for writing about any project, programme or event is its impact on people. So tell readers about events in terms they are familiar with, not in the dry style of a bureaucrat's report.
The Telephone Interview

The telephone is an asset — and not only for love sick teenagers. As a reporter you should use it whenever you can. It may have limitations but it does save time. The main drawback of a telephone interview is of course the lack of visual contact. A pause of a few seconds hardly noticeable in a face to face interview might seem like infinity over the telephone and end up with the interviewee hanging up on you. Again, a face to face interview provides eye contact. Lacking this, a reporter may find it difficult to gauge the interviewee’s reactions, intentions or state of mind. He might end up being or feeling conned.

A telephone interview is sought when time is short. Remember the other party may be busy or otherwise occupied, so get down to brass tacks right away. First, identify yourself as fully as possible. State your name and the name of the paper you’re working for. If you’re a freelancer say so and in any event, give your telephone number in case the party wants to call back and check that you are the person you said you were. Specify the reason for calling. Apologise for taking up the other person’s time and intruding on his privacy — and promise — even if you can’t fulfill it — that you won’t take up too much of his time. Be brief, pleasant and soothing. Don’t shout! Your voice is your identity, so establish sound contact, just as in a personal interview you would establish eye contact. When the interview is over, ask the other party whether he would like to have his answers read back to him. Give him an opportunity to correct himself or improve upon his performance. And thank him once again. He will appreciate your politeness and be more willing to speak to you the next time.

If the party declines to speak to you, accept it gracefully. It won’t help to make a nuisance of yourself. He may have his reasons for not making himself available to you.

Writing Up The Interview

There are many ways of writing up news. One way is the straight question and answer technique. This does not require too much of an effort. The question is stated as it was put and is followed by the answer which can be broken up if it is too long. Such a technique may be one-dimensional but it is accurate since the answer is reproduced verbatim.

The other method is to paraphrase the answers and to begin with a proper introduction in which the most significant aspect of the interview is highlighted. The question and answer technique is published verbatim, that is, in the order in which the questions were put and answers received. It is like a conversation reproduced. If the interview is summarised and presented in the form of a report, the interviewer may intersperse it with his comments, but always making it clear that they are his.

The question and answer interview is a ‘views interview’ — the other, a ‘news interview’, in the sense that the reporter extracts the answers for news, though the difference between one and the other is thin.