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Workshop Report

By

Achal Mehra
ADVANCED EDITORIAL WORKSHOP FOR SENIOR WOMEN JOURNALISTS
Singapore, 8-17 February 1989

WORKSHOP REPORT

INTRODUCTION

In January 1987, AMIC organised a Seminar on Women and Media in Asia in Singapore that examined the access of women to journalism and communication education and the status of women in the media; their skills development needs and their portrayal.

The several country reports presented at the seminar, as well as seminar participants – many women – underscored the fact that although several Asian countries were making efforts to increase educational and employment opportunities for women in the Asian media, there was an acute paucity of women in senior positions.

Working groups organised at the conclusion of the seminar made several recommendations to address this inequity. Their recommendations included proposals that AMIC establish exchange programs and internships for women in the Asian region and organise workshops on newspaper management and professional skills for women journalists with the aim of equipping practising women media professionals with the skills to advance to senior positions in the media.

In response to their recommendations, AMIC is undertaking a series of projects aimed at increasing the representation of women in senior positions in the media. In October 1987, for instance, AMIC organised a workshop in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on
newspaper management for women in mid-management positions in newspapers and magazines in ten Asian countries. The two-week long workshop was designed to improve the managerial competence of these mid-management professionals in the hope that with the skills acquired from the workshop these women would be able to advance to senior positions in newspaper management.

With the objective of increasing the representation of women in senior positions in Asian newsrooms, AMIC organised the first of four sub-regional advanced editorial refresher workshops for women journalists in Asian countries. The objective of the workshops is to enhance the journalistic skills of mid-level women journalists from small and medium-sized newspapers to enable them to advance to prominent positions in the newsroom.

PARTICIPANTS

Fourteen participants from eight Asian countries participated in the workshop. They included three participants from the Philippines; two each from India, Malaysia, China and Singapore, and one each from Indonesia, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

The participants represented, for the most part, small newspapers and most of them had not had the benefit of previous journalism training. A complete list of participants is attached as Appendix 1.

WORKSHOP FACULTY

Senior journalism trainers and media practitioners constituted the core faculty of the workshop. Mr. Geoffrey Murray, Editorial Training Consultant, Straits Times Press
Foundation School of Journalism and formerly Far East Editor of Reuters handled the newswriting and reporting segment of the workshop. His colleague at the journalism school and former managing editor of a group of weekly newspapers in England, Mr. David Wynne-Jones, covered the segments on sub-editing and layout. Mr. Quek Boon Chiau, Research Executive at the Survey Research Group, covered the session on marketing research for newspaper editors while Mr. Ronald Kow and Mr. Khoo Teng Guan, systems heads at the Straits Times Press, spoke on the new technologies. Mr. Ralf Siepmann, a freelance journalist from West Germany, covered the sessions on the role of the newspaper in society. Dr. Achal Mehra, AMIC's Senior Programme Specialist, served as Workshop Director.

PROGRAMME

The workshop was held from February 8-17 at the AMIC Secretariat in Singapore (Appendix 2).

In the opening address, AMIC Secretary-General Mr. Vijay Menon noted that the media "have provided less than adequate job opportunities for women." Attributing the imbalance to "deep-seated and longstanding" causes, he said, AMIC through its training programme is striving to redress these inequities.

Advanced Newsgathering: At this session Mr. Murray discussed the vital elements that constitute news; active versus passive journalism; and identifying the reader and his needs.

Interviewing Techniques: Mr. Murray emphasised interviewing as the key skill for good journalism; the need to be well-
informed and prepared for interviewees; how to ask the right questions; body language, facial expressions and voice inflections and the signals they send to interviewees; how to deal with "dodgers" who won't respond to questions; how to cope with the issue of "off-the-record" interviews. He also showed a video of a mock interview and participants undertook an exercise.

Generating Story Ideas. The session covered techniques to ensure a constant flow of story ideas: follow-ups; the concept of "bringing home" a foreign story; tips from conversations with sources and the public; how to pull story ideas out of thin air through imagination and team brainstorming, etc. Participants undertook an exercise on reading foreign publications and listing story ideas for local follow-up.

Story Structure: Mr. Murray discussed the traditional inverted pyramid structure; need for strong intros and solid back-up, plus good ending and the vital role of quotes, background and forecast. Participants were given two exercises on rearranging paras and editing a sample story to make it read better and Writing a story from a given set of facts. The story was critiqued by the lecturer and returned to participants the following day.

Development Journalism. Mr. Murray discussed what is development journalism and what is a newspaper's role; element of crusading, but how to avoid "mouthpiece writing", skills needed to be a good development journalism writer; when to be supportive and when to be critical, etc.

Rural Journalism: Mr. Murray explained that newspapers tend to be city-based and city-oriented and discussed how newspapers
can overcome this. He covered sources needed to be a good rural journalist; need to get out into the countryside and talk to farmers and the educational role of press. Participants broke-up into teams to device a newspaper campaign on a given issue (eg: role or rural women; the environmental impact of current farming methods, etc.)

Interpretative Journalism. At this session, Mr. Murray explained how all journalism is interpretative as one cannot simply present facts and leave readers to work out meaning. He also discussed element of judgement; how to interpret in a fair, impartial way; qualities needed to be a good interpretative journalist; involvement vs detachment; problem of allowing judgement to be clouded by personal bias, anger, passion, etc.

Editorial Writing: The session covered skills needed to be a good editorial writer and the various writing styles one can adopt to produce good editorials. Participants did an exercise on writing an editorial campaigning for 1990 to be declared The Year Of Rural Women.

Investigative Journalism. Mr. Murray discussed the history, strengths and weaknesses of investigative journalism as well as whether it can work in Asia? Sources needed to produce investigative reporting and news gathering and writing skills needed were also examined.

Public Service Journalism. The session explored what public service journalism is and why, it is important for newspapers to provide this type of reportage and how ordinary news stories can be developed into service-type journalism. Participants were given a topic by the lecturer and asked to produce at least five
story ideas that would qualify as examples of public service journalism.

Role of the Sub-Editor: Mr. Wynne-Jones discussed processing copy, writing headlines, handling pictures, designing pages, co-ordinating paste-up, copytasting, subbing symbols and stone subbing, headline principles, history of headline writing 'soft' news headline writing and the differences between hard and soft news. Participants undertook subbing exercises at the end of the day.

Picture Editing: The session covered picture selection; how to crop pictures; how to scale pictures for inclusion in the papers; and picture shapes - horizontal, diagonal, vertical, etc. Participants undertook picture editing exercises and their work was critiqued by the lecturer.

Caption Writing and Subbing: Different types of captions - descriptive, teaser, cross-reference, etc. were covered at this session.

Newspapers Layout and Design: Layout principles, how to draw a layout and mark a dummy, typography shading, "weight" of type, etc. were discussed by Mr. Wynne-Jones at this session. Participants also undertook a layout exercise.

The Electronic Newsroom. Mr. Kow discussed the impact of new electronic technologies on newsroom operations. He explained the various technological options and the criteria used for their selection and the experiences of the Straits Times in implementing new technologies, with which he was intimately associated.
Electronic Layout: Mr. Khoo explained the use of desk top publishing in the newspaper industry, especially their use for computer graphics. He also explained the techniques for developing colour separations using a laser writer and a desk top system and provided a demonstration of the Macintosh system.

Ethics and Legal Responsibility: Code of conduct for journalists and how far can the reporter go in pursuing a story, ethics, freedom of press, responsibility to public, accuracy, objectivity and fair play were among the topics examined at this session.

The Newspaper and its Publics and the Role of Newspaper in Society. Mr. Siepmann outlined the European debate on the role of the newspaper, the concept of gatekeeping and agenda setting, internal and external press freedom, reporters' privilege, access to the media and the status of women.

The Use of Market Research by Newspaper Publishers. Mr. Quek discussed the market research available and how it can be utilised by newspaper editors. He also explained market research techniques and how data should be interpreted. He concluded with a discussion of some case studies of how publications have utilised market research to reposition themselves against their competition.

Women and the Media. The country reports on problems faced by women in the media were discussed at this session. The common problems were identified (Appendix 3) and the participants then split up into small groups to discuss problems in three broad categories: cultural values and traditions and structural problems; attitudes toward women journalists and specific
problems faced by women in the newsroom; and problems attributed to women themselves. They presented their reports, which were then discussed by the group as a whole.

Closing Ceremony. Mr Menon closed the workshop and distributed certificates to the participants.

WORKSHOP EVALUATION

Participants expressed satisfaction with the contents and depth of the workshop. They also felt that the concepts and skills presented would benefit them from a "fair amount" to a "great deal" in their work. With one exception, they agreed that the workshop had either met or exceeded their expectations.

The practical exercises were especially commended by the participants and they also expressed appreciation for the hands-on demonstration of desktop publishing.

There was a general desire for more visits to the local media (one such visit was organised). As can be expected in a regional workshop, there was disparity in the caliber and skills of the participants, which was commented upon by some participants. As a result, two participants found the course somewhat elementary in some areas, but another found it too advanced.

There was a feeling among some participants that fewer subjects should be handled at the workshop to allow for more exercises and hands-on training in selected areas, like lay-out and electronic technologies (the latter, of course is not feasible within the workshop budget). But this was disputed by some other participants who appreciated the broad range of
The sessions on theoretical and philosophical questions were singled out for criticism by most participants as not being particularly relevant to their work. Most participants also found the workshop far too intensive and wanted greater opportunities for field visits.

Perhaps the strongest impact of the workshop was on one Indian participant who said she had been so disheartened in the profession that she had contemplated leaving it. However, she said, the workshop had inspired her not only to remain in the profession, but to strive to become a capitol correspondent.