



Journalism and development « Facing new challenges »

Vientiane: November 10 & 11, 2010

Venue: Lao Journalists' Association -Conference hall



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Vientiane | November 10 & 11, 2010

Journalism and Development



The idea of “development journalism” was conceived in the 1960s at the Press Foundation of Asia. This approach to journalism emerged out of dissatisfaction with the dominance of Western news and communication ideals in developing countries, these being inaccurately covering socio-economic development. There was a real need of reflection on new type of journalism specifically designed to function in the cultural and political structures.

Since then, the approach of media promotion on development issues, the question on how journalists report on development - in parallel to electronic technologies that take root or to so-called “citizen journalism” emerging in wealthy countries - placed journalism as a powerful tool that empowers individuals, builds stronger local communities and elevates global awareness on development.

Journalists have to adapt to new ways of covering development issues as being the ears and eyes of society and the voices of the voiceless through bottom-up reporting. Indeed, this acclaimed “watchdog” role, reportages on development issues that bring attention to issues that are overlooked or under-represented often only raises awareness of problems. But do they really contribute to solutions?

This was among the issues presented at the first ever conference on “Journalism and development” held in Vientiane on November 10th and 11th 2010.

Such a conference is part of the European Union’s project operated by Institut Panos Paris, Est-Ouest and the Lao Journalists’ Association, on the media coverage of vulnerable people.

May this leaflet be an opportunity to share the lessons learnt during these two days.

Pascal Berqué and Sayfonh Khamphasith
Institut Panos Paris

Case study: Vientiane Times and development issues Est-Ouest | Mr. Michel Leroy (France)

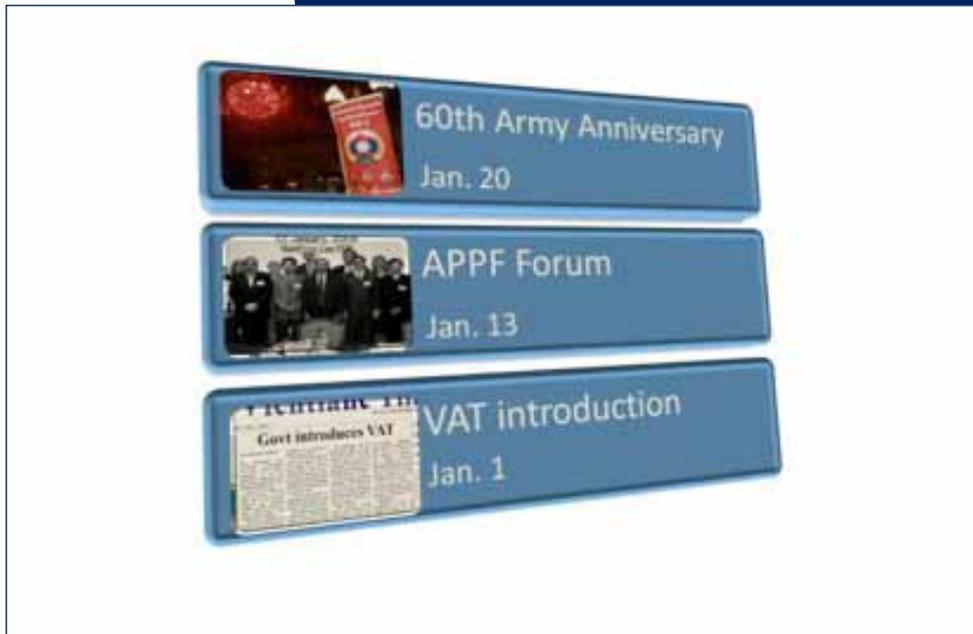
Bio: A former manager of French prominent journalism schools, Michel Leroy now works as a freelance journalist and writer. He spent two years in Laos in the late 1990s to launch the French language weekly *Le Rénovateur*. In 2011, he published an investigative book on the French Universities' Reforms.

When you have to consider development issues in the Lao PDR, an in-depth look at Lao media is needed. It is obviously impossible to monitor the whole Lao media, with the emerging private outlets in recent years. That's why we have decided to focus on one particular media, the *Vientiane Times*. We would like to precise first what this contribution will not be. Obviously, it will not be an academic paper. Even if we have an academic background, this contribution is more the one of a peer, as a professional journalist and media analyst. This study doesn't have the ambition to be scientific. It used scientific tools but rather with a pragmatic approach than with the whole rigor such an exercise would have needed. And last but definitely not least, it has no normative views. Once again, this has to be considered as a peer analysis and this is neither a judgment nor a critic. It's just a question of monitoring and facts finding.

For those who are not familiar with the Lao media landscape, let's make a quick overview: *Vientiane Times* has been established as a weekly tabloid in April 1994 by Mr. Somsanouk Mixay. By 1996 it came out twice weekly and publishes daily from 2004. As it is officially described, "the newspaper [...] provides information reflecting on government policies and socio-economic development in the Lao People's Democratic Republic." *Vientiane Times* is part of the Lao Press in Foreign Languages, which is a specialized agency of the Lao Ministry of Information and Culture. It has 60 staff members, including reporters and people from the administrative offices.

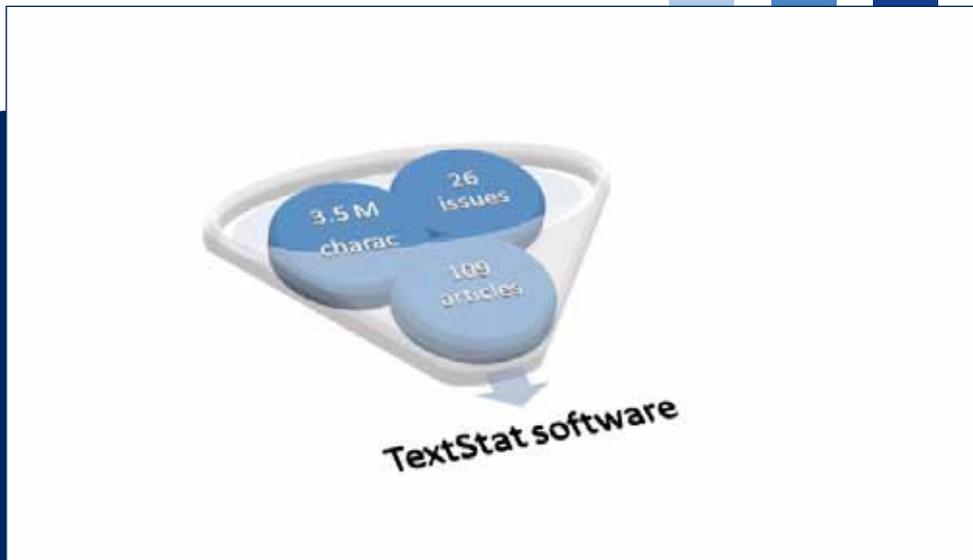


If the study has to be exhaustive, the sample needed to be shortened. Time and staff consideration lead me to reduce it to one month. The choice was made totally randomly to January 2009, covering issues from January 2nd to January 31st.

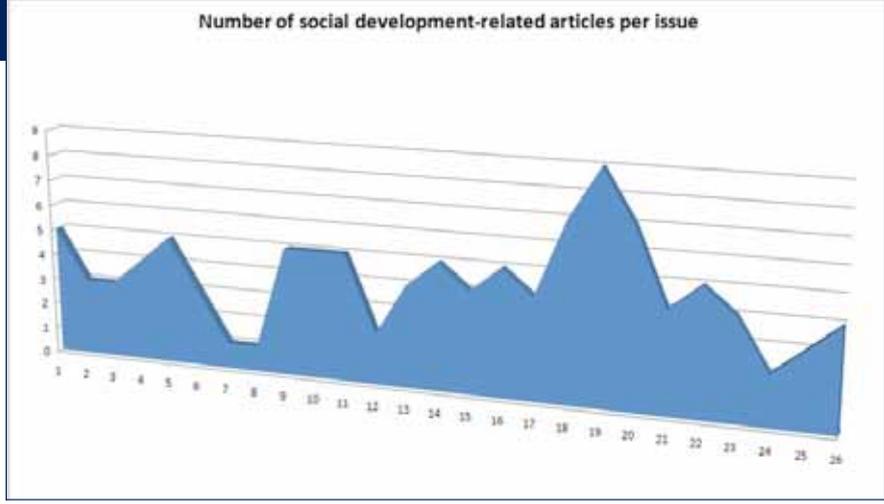


Three main events occurred in that period: the 60th Lao Army anniversary on January 20th, the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum's annual meeting in Vientiane on January 13th with not less than 300 attendants and the introduction of the Value Added Tax in the country on January 1st. All of them have been covered extensively in the paper but only had small connections with social development issues. The interactions with our topic have thus been light.

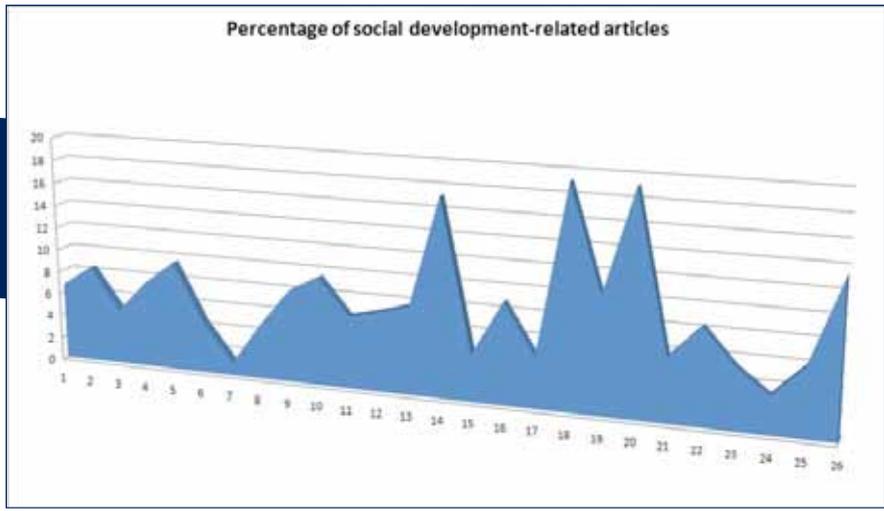
¹ The forum provides opportunities for national parliamentarians of the Asia Pacific area to "discuss matters of common concern and interest and to highlight them in a global context"



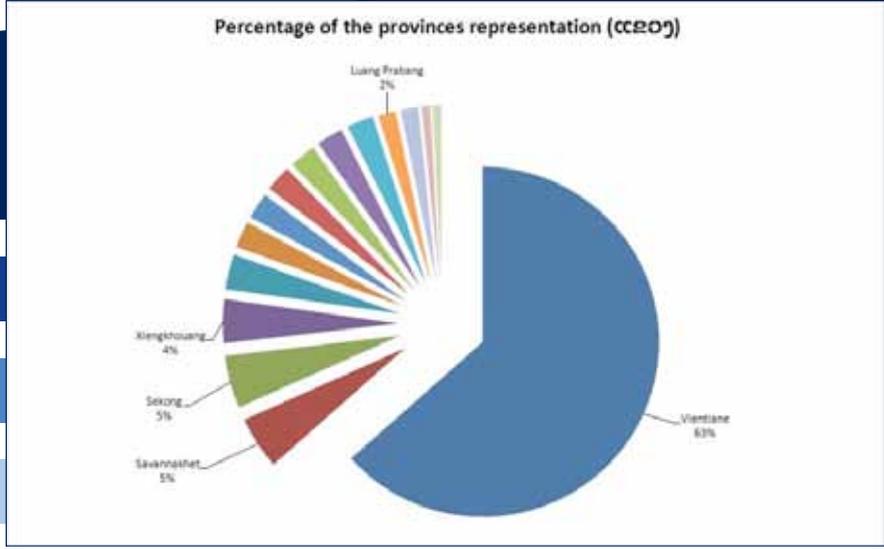
Let's move to our methodology. We've compiled the whole issues between January 2nd and January 31st, which means 26 issues. It does represent... 3.5 millions characters, which will explain why we had to reduce the sample to one month only. We have to precise these 3.5 millions characters cover the whole production including commercials and vacancy announcements. It would have been too much work to discriminate them and would not have bring anything. Out of this, we have selected 109 articles that we consider as dealing with social development issues, i.e. related to the help to vulnerable people. Let us precise that we did not include regional pages nor opinion ones, which are not directly produced by the Vientiane Times staff. For the text analysis, we used a license-free software: TEXT STAT. What can be read out of this analysis? As the aim of this conference is to focus on Development issues, we concentrated on the topic-related articles in the different issues. It is worth mentioning the high numbers, from 1 to 9 per copy.



What can be read out of this analysis? As the aim of this conference is to focus on Development issues, we concentrated on the topic-related articles in the different issues. It is worth mentioning the high numbers, from 1 to 9 per copy.



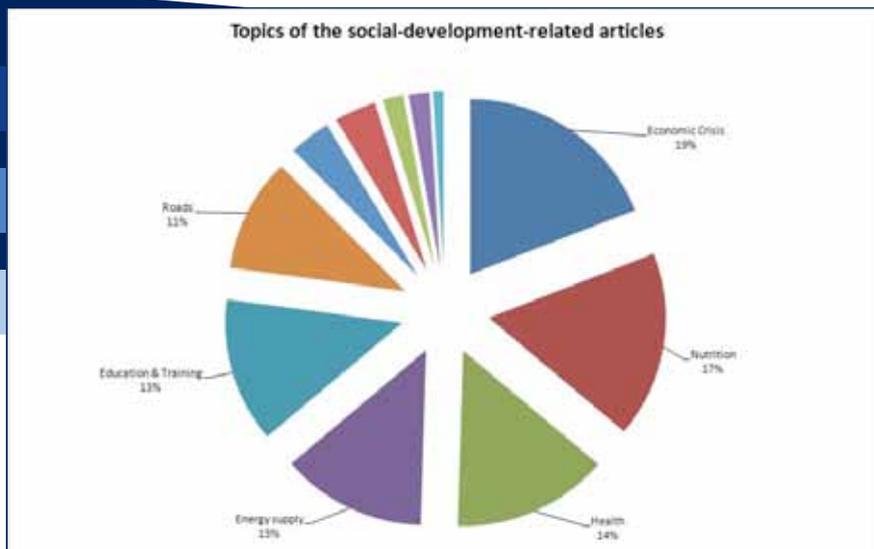
Considering the percentage of the paper dedicated to it, we have an average of 8.1 %, which is quite high, should you consider our sample includes commercials and announcements. (At several occasions, this figures exceeds 15 %).



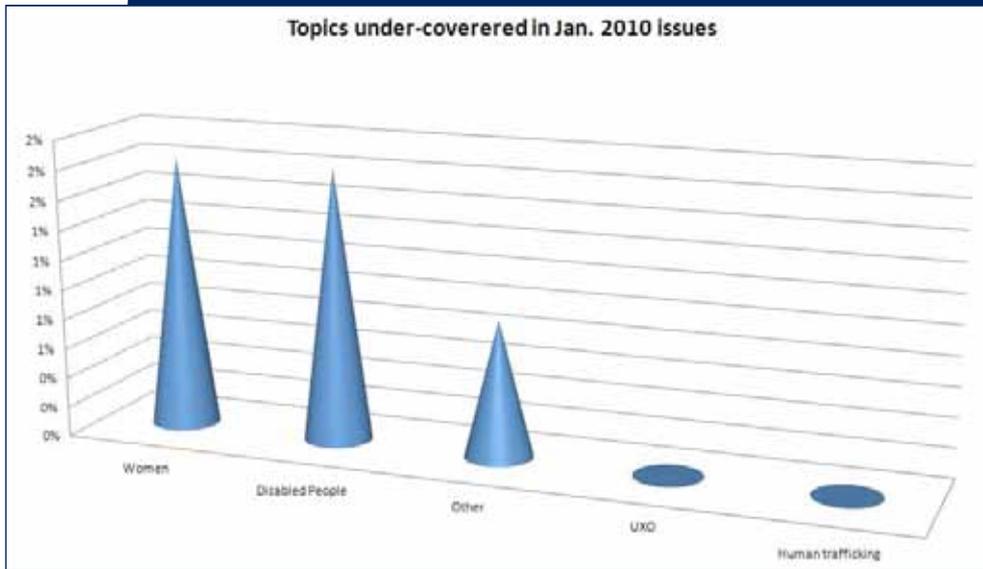
What are the provinces covered by these articles ? The capital-city, Vientiane, has an overwhelming position with almost two thirds of the total. Southern provinces of Savannakhet and Sekong are following. The third most numerous province, Champassak, and the fourth, Luang Prabang are far away with a 2% occurrence.



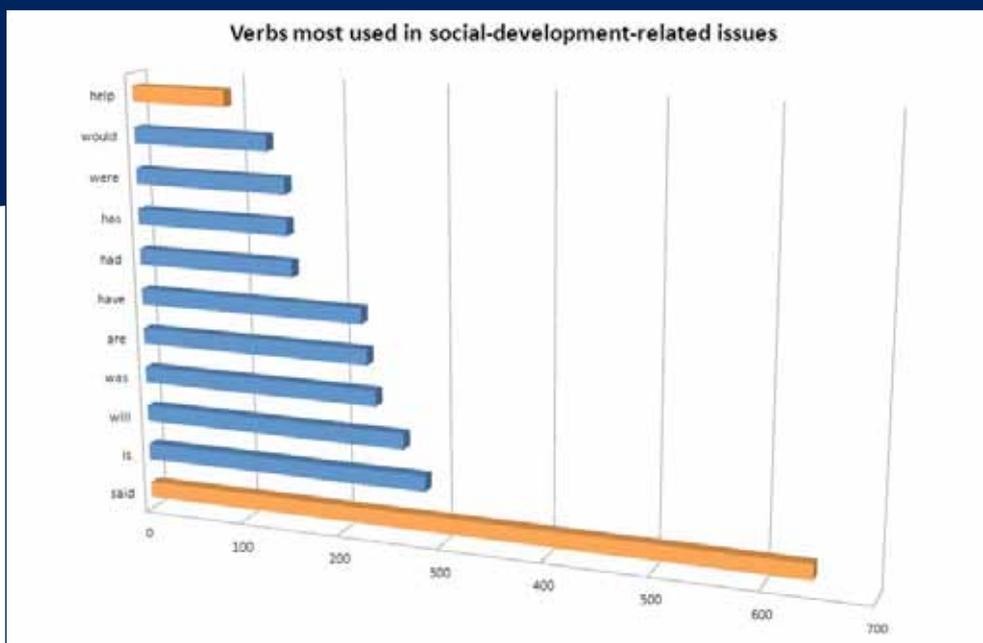
But it is worth mentioning the geographical diversity in our sample. Further studies would have to check if this is general and how recent this phenomenon is.



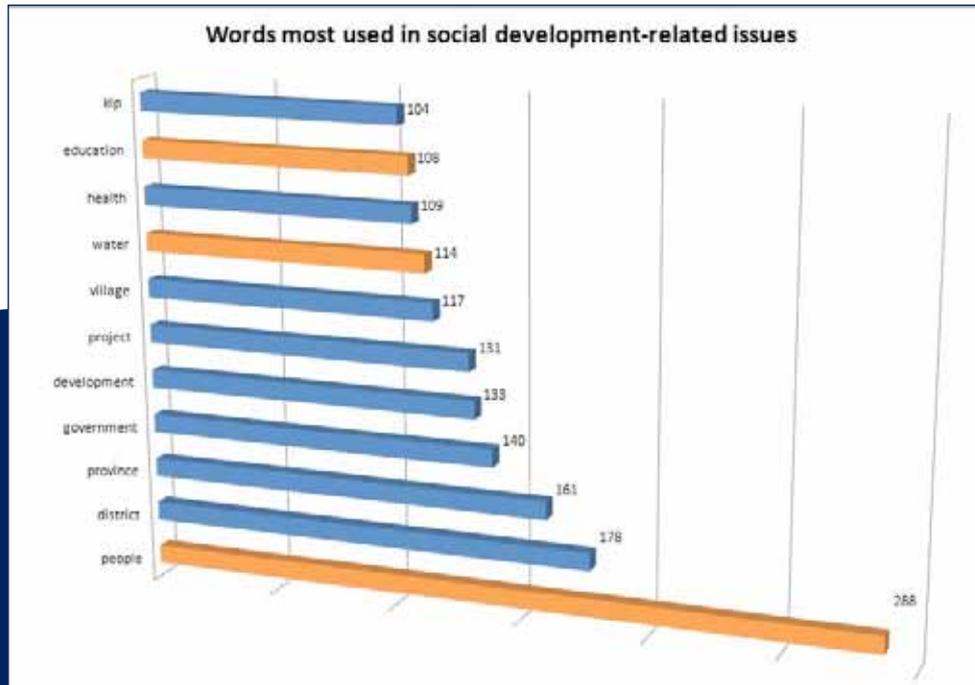
Let's move forward with the topics covered. Here we have regular categories. The most important are the economic crisis, nutrition, health, water and energy supply, education and road construction, that we have chosen to select as a land-linking development contribution. The first one is the most frequent, as we were at that time in the center of the global turmoil. The other ones are very far the ones from the others, with more than 10 %.



At the bottom of the table, are women, disabled people and – above all – UXO and Human Trafficking with a zero occurrence this month. But once again, I would suggest to move forward and check with further studies to what extent these indications are relevant.



We also focused on the lexicon, to study which words are the most frequent in social development-related articles. The three frequent verbs are said, to be at different tense and help. The verb “say” could indicate a frequent use of quotations. Social development issues are often covered from an “expert” point of view and the article is seen as a way to barely transcribe it.



Among the words themselves, the most frequent is people which could indicate a people-driven curiosity. The second and third ones are district and province which could show the level where actions are taken. We can also mention the words “project” and “kip” which could show with no surprise the importance of funding and the frequent reference to that funding in the articles.

Then, what can be concluded from this short résumé ? Let us only mention three tracks: first, this study seems to indicate a less institutional coverage than expected. Another figure we did not mention yet shows almost 12% of the articles have at least two sources. This is the case for the so-called “feature” section, with an in-depth coverage of social development issues.

I will not insist on our second bullet point we already mentioned regarding the overwhelming Vientiane-centered approach. Progress are still to be made as far as on-site reporting is concerned.

Finally, such a study can only give indications that would need to be confirmed or not by other monitoring reports. More interesting, such a study could be done through different periods of time, so that an evolution can be showed. Anyway, this study has no other intent, as we mentioned in our introduction, than to be a first sight at the project.

Case study:

The Thai media and social development Issues Thai Journalists' Association | Mr. Chavarong Limpattamapane (Thailand)

Chavarong Limpattamapane is the Vice-President of the Thai Journalists Association (TJA). He is also the Executive Director of the Isra Institute, the Thai training and research institution in journalism. He has his Bachelor degree in Law from Thammasat University and a Master in Journalism from the Ohio State University, U.S.A. He has been covering environment, civil society movement and information technology for the Thairath Daily, the largest circulation newspaper in Thailand since 1987.

The Thai Media and social development issues

Background Information on Thai Media

- Newspapers booming after 1932
- It is the only free media until now
- Radio & Televisions have been used as government propaganda tools since the beginning of TV in 1957
- There are some changes to TV & Radio news in 1985 with more professional news
- Broadcasting reform process is still going on, awaiting for NBTC

Social Development in the Thai Media

- Before 1985, TV & Radio covered only government development projects without reflecting whether they are efficient or inefficient projects
- But newspapers have long-time tradition to investigate on some skeptical government development projects
- Development journalism had been practice in most of government media
Emerging of Civic Journalism in Thailand
- After people uprising in May 1992, the idea of promoting civil society had been promoted
- Media had been asked to participate in this civic movement
- Participations are included both media as an actor or supporter in the movement
- Key issues are that media should allow more people participation and should cover more community movement

Some Interesting Case Studies

- Letter to the editors as a channel of people's participation in the media
- Traffic radio channels that allows call-in from audiences become effective community radio
- In this case, media is an actor in promoting community development with people participation
- Newspapers are doing more as an supporter of the civic movement

Recommendations on Role of Media in Social Development

- Media should be more active in covering "news that benefit the public" more than covering only "human interest news"
 - Media can be parts of the social development or help stimulating the development
 - Media should maintain the role as an watchdog to monitor the social development project done by both government and non-government organizations
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Lecture:

What do development actors think about the journalists' role? From the global organizations' point of view United Nations ESCAP | Mrs. Wanphen Sreshthaputra (Thailand)

Wanphen Sreshthaputra is a French national brought up and educated in Switzerland and France. Trained as a journalist, she has been working for about 8 years in the print mass media at increasingly senior positions in France (regional daily newspaper *Le Progrès*) and Thailand (*Bangkok Post*) before joining the United Nations system in April 2002. In Thailand since 1997, she is currently a staff member of the Social Development Division of United Nations ESCAP and has been the editor of the *Asia-Pacific Population Journal* for the past 8 years.

What do development actors think of the role of journalists?

From the outset, let me say that I am addressing you in my personal capacity – from my perhaps special perspective as a former print media journalist and current staff member of an international organization – rather than as an official spokesperson of the United Nations, which I am not by any means.

Before getting into the heart of the matter, let me also say a few words in general about the crucial role that I believe journalists, and by extension the media, play an/or can play in the development process.

There is by now a broad consensus in the international community about the contribution that the media can make to development—the transmission of information, innovative ideas, knowledge and the ensuing increased transparency being understood as vital ingredients of effective development strategies.

There are also countless examples about how the media can skillfully act as monitors, checks and balances, holding authorities accountable, keeping a check on public policies or letting people voice diverse



opinions and building consensus. Also, ample evidence exist demonstrating the fundamental role played by the media with regard human development – bringing for example HIV-related information to remote populations and informing and thereby empowering people to make better choices.

This has been widely researched and documented. From the viewpoint of international organizations for instance, one can turn to the work of the World Bank, which produced a comprehensive and widely-cited study in 2002, entitled “The Right to Tell” (on the role of Mass Media in Economic Development). There is also among many others the work of UNESCO, a specialized agency of the United Nations and the lead agency in this field. Communication and information is one of the agency’s major areas of work. It promotes communication as a means to maximize the impact of development programmes as well as supports the development of free and pluralistic media in developing countries.

Now without further ado, let me attempt to respond to the question, by dividing my response into three parts:

- I. What type of relationship do we nurture with media?*
- II. What constraints are we facing?*
- III. What are our communications objectives*



Part I. What type of relationship do we nurture with media?

As a fervent believer in the power of the media to bring about change and maximize the impact of development, I can only speak for the multiple roles that journalists play and/or can play.

The type of relationships I will describe reflects this multiplicity of roles, as over the past few years, I have been able to witness how international organizations tend to crave for media attention – and rightly so, for the most part.

Without pretending to be exhaustive or describe the complete spectrum of relationships, I can think essentially of three types of relations:

- (a) Long-term, as mutually dependent organisms: Media as partners*
- (b) Short-lived or opportunist: Media as resource*
- (c) Conflicting: Media as critics/watchdogs*

(a) Media as partners

International organizations engage the media with the understanding that there is much common ground between both spheres.

As civil servants, staff members of international organizations typically work to advance the interests of the world's peoples, in particular the poor, vulnerable and marginalized, to enhance their well-being – somewhat acting as their spokespersons. This is similar in some ways to the work of journalists, who in the pursuit of truth, facts and realities on the ground, fulfill this well-known crucial role of giving a voice to the voiceless or a face to those invisible. Through their news coverage – ideally fair, accurate, inclusive – they turn the spotlight on those that are “out of reach, out of sight, out of mind”.

In other words, they maximize people's space in the media – something crucial in the empowerment process and contribute to ensuring greater participation and transparency—two concepts that are central to successful poverty reduction and development approaches.

Both civil servants and journalists work in their respective ways, to advance what the Secretary-General of the United Nations refers to as the “collective global good”.

In more practical terms, the UN family of organizations, including the Secretariat, specialized agencies, programmes and funds, tend to be authoritative sources of information and data on a very broad range of topics – which many journalists rely upon.

For their parts, media outlets (either print, radio or broadcast media) act as conveyors of new ideas and information. Typically, they facilitate the flow of information among the many actors of the society, community, or nation and inform its constituents, including key policy-/decision-makers, about ongoing events, new developments or emerging challenges.

Through investigative reporting, they may also provide precious background on how pervasive social issues may be in specific settings, for example human trafficking or violence against women, and they may be able to call for better resources, data or services to address these issues.

International organizations reach out to their key audiences oftentimes through the media.

The way media portray an issue has an important impact on how this very issue is regarded. Media influence public opinion and attitudes, shape the mainstream or strengthen the dominant views.

The media also typically foster debates in the public arena, challenging ideas/status quo, debunking myths and discussing taboo topics. Most importantly, they may also question prevailing attitudes and norms which may be detrimental to certain vulnerable groups, like women, persons with disabilities, youth for example.

As a catalyst for change, the civil society, including the media, occupy a special place in many multi-sectoral campaigns conducted by the UN.

(b) Media as catalysts/resources

When international organizations get the media's buy-in on some issues and solutions they advocate, a range of closer relationships can emerge, by which the media act as “third-party validators”; they provide visibility and add to the credibility of work outputs, by writing news or feature stories about research findings, publishing recommendations made by experts or intergovernmental meetings convened by the UN.

The media then become a precious ally to carry forward a message, bringing about social change or mobilization for a particular cause, galvanizing public opinion... Media are precious resources one turns to, in our collective journey (generally from conflicts to ever-enhanced and harmonious coordination).

Other examples of close collaborations can be observed when the UN engage personalities from the media, as champions of our causes or as influential positive role models.

There are also many instances where the UN calls on personalities from the media (often from the broadcast media pool for their well-honed public speaking skills) as moderators for meetings or round table discussions --that is when the UN wants to break away from the monotony of its formal meetings-

-or simply when hiring journalists as consultants to craft or provide expert feedback on communications strategies.

Speaking about two-way communications flow, there might also be times when relationships with the media are more conflicting.

(c) Media as critics/watchdogs

This is typically when the media play well their role of watch-dog, on behalf of all citizens.

At times, the media can be quite critical, skeptical, if not cynical, about the work of the UN... I believe this often occurs as a result of communications gaps or misunderstanding, including about how the UN works and how intimately it depends from the decisions of its 192 member States.

I would rather not dwell upon this aspect further as I actually never experienced it first hand.

Part II. What types of constraints are we facing?

Before citing examples of communications objectives that we have set for ourselves, I would first like to highlight some of the constraints we are facing.

(a) In-house

As mentioned earlier, there are occasionally communications gaps, or some kind of disconnect between international organizations and the media. It often feels as if we live worlds apart and speak different languages. It is the role of colleagues from the Department of Public Information or UN Information Services to act as communicators/translators of the many knowledge nuggets which the UN produces. A key challenge is that our well-known UN bureaucracy seems especially good at dealing with processes—something journalists are precisely not interested in.

Hence, there are constraints inherent to the UN system itself, as it is a highly complex and therefore often slow-moving. As a reminder, this is an organization which virtually has a universal membership (with 192 member States, employing about 45,000 persons and working in five official languages).

But as the UN is committed to maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations among Nations and promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights, no doubt that it is also indispensable and does a far better job than it is given credit for.

Also, one needs to acknowledge that engaging with the media and receiving broad, positive media coverage is hard work. It takes much time and effort. These are investment and commitment which international organizations unfortunately are not systematically making.

Coherent communications strategies are often lacking and initiatives in this field are still, often an after-thought, relationship with the media being of an ad-hoc nature in many instances.

(b) The “nature of the beast”

In addition, there are also constraints inherent to the media world, dictated by what I call “the nature of the beast” and which at times, complicates our interactions.

For instance the tacit rule “where it bleeds it leads” seems still valid in many editorial rooms and consequently the sometime dull and un-snappy UN headlines are not necessarily given the treatment we thought it deserves. Our media-saturated world, in which so many issues are competing for attention and where urgency is the normal mode of operation, may indeed make it difficult for some of the lengthy technical discussions taking place in our “talk-shops” to sound very appealing to journalists.

(c) *Commonplace stereotypes/stigmas*

Closer to my area of work, there are also constraints related to the contents often channeled by the media, which sometime, perpetuates or reinforces negative perceptions related to certain social groups.

For example, disabled persons being featured as objects of pity or superhero, older persons represented as frail, women as weak, vulnerable and in need of protection.

These commonplace stereotypes or stigmas are as many barriers to changing attitudes and mindsets, to help accelerate progress towards (as per our work programme): strengthened regional cooperation to build socially inclusive and rights-based societies in Asia-Pacific (that protects, empowers and ensures equality for all social groups).



Part II. What are our main communications objectives ?

Finally, let me share a few examples of communications objectives both at the UN Secretariat global level and at the regional level, within ESCAP and substantive division.

As the regional development arm of the UN in Asia-Pacific, ESCAP has a membership of 62 Governments, including 58 which are from the region. Its geographical scope stretches from Turkey in the West to the Pacific island nation of Kiribati in the East, and from the Russian Federation in the North to New Zealand in the South. It is the largest of the five regional commissions in terms of area covered and people served, and includes over 600 staff. As its name indicates, ESCAP is a regional organization and therefore doesn't work much at the country-level, where much UN work is done by other agencies.

In the area of communications, ESCAP is under the umbrella of the Department of Public Information at UN Headquarters, which itself has a network of about 63 United Nations Information Centres, services and offices around the world.

The Bangkok-based UNIS provides information services for ESCAP and is also the designated Information Centre for a few countries in South-East Asia, including Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. It provides services such as media and public relations, media accreditation, public information materials and group briefings.

Broadly speaking, DPI is tasked with promoting the work of the United Nations by providing timely, accurate, impartial and comprehensive information to the widest possible audience, in a form and content

best suited to the audience. In other words, through the earlier-cited network of UN Information Centre, it tells the UN story, which has a global appeal, conveying it through print, audio, video and the Internet to local audiences.

Indirectly and through other channels (such as the UN Communications group), it also attempts to develop enabling environments for free, independent and pluralistic media to foster media's ability to engage beyond the role of an information conveyor, to that of platforms for public debate.

As for the Social Development Division of ESCAP, one of the Commission's seven substantive divisions, its work is aimed at supporting the building of inclusive societies for all in the region, including women, youth, persons with disabilities and older persons. Guided by global commitments and regional mandates, it assists countries in the region shape their development agenda in a manner that protects, empowers and ensures equality for all social groups in the region.

The Division is currently reviewing its approach to strategic communications. A comprehensive dissemination strategy has been developed. It clarifies areas such as goal/audience/product conceptualization/distribution channel/monitoring and evaluation activities. For example, the goal as stated is three-fold:

- Increase understanding and knowledge of trends and issues
- Enhance awareness of policy options, strategies and good practices
- Increase knowledge and skills to develop and implement policies and programmes

Apart from much efforts dedicated currently to restructuring the Division's website --its most visible public face --SDD also attempts to more systematically engage the media, according greater attention to the crafting of press releases and drafting a greater number of opinion-editorial pieces for placement in prominent newspapers across the region.

Through a series of "manufactured" events, such as international days (International Women's Day, 8 March; Persons with Disabilities, 3 December; Day of Older Persons, etc.), the Division also attempts to receive broad media coverage, enhancing the organization's overall media profile. Its many constructive, positive and human-interest stories may certainly capture media attention, especially in the vast Asia-Pacific region which accommodates about 60 per cent of the world population and still accounts for about 950 million persons living with less than 1.25 USD a day.

Many other projects and activities are in the pipeline, from story ideas submitted to a range of local and regional media outlets on a regular basis (developed upon specific request only), to sector-specific media briefings or trainings.

For example, in the field of disability, much work remains to be done in close collaboration with the media in order to overcome stereotypes and prejudices, dispel myths that exist about disability and correct the language used including by journalists when portraying persons with disabilities. SDD intends to facilitate a better understanding of the nature of disability and of the current rights-based/social model to address this issue (based for example on the ILO Media guidelines for the portrayal of disability).

In the field of gender and development, SDD intends to work closely with the media to promote social norms that are compatible with gender equality, challenge impunity for perpetrators of violence against women or question entrenched customary and traditional attitudes, practices, systems. The media are key players to assist the larger community organize itself against violence against women.

Let me just conclude, at the risk of repeating myself or coming back full-circle, with my initial point on the central role of the media:

Although we live in a media-saturated world, there is still always sufficient space for high-quality, fair, accurate and balanced reporting. Paradoxically, although journalists have to deal with increasingly specialized topics, giving at times a fragmented understanding of reality, they also need to be able to provide holistic views and help build consensus.

In many fields of knowledge, it is the role of top-class communicators, such as journalists, to help change perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. Success stories in the areas of HIV/AIDS prevention or environmental degradation, for example have all greatly benefited from the work of balanced, benevolent and empathetic journalists.



Lecture:

Voiceless' voices and oral testimony

Panos South Asia | Mrs. Sahar Ali (Pakistan)

Sahar Ali has 17 years of professional experience in media and development in Pakistan and overseas. She is currently working as Country Representative for Panos South Asia in Pakistan. In the past, she has worked for newspapers, on radio and TV. She has been trained as a trainer in oral testimony interviewing and has recently concluded a three-country project for Panos South Asia in which over 90 oral testimonies of women living with HIV have been collected from Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan.

Voices in development – Tuning in to unheard voices through oral testimony

We have all felt hungry often enough, but how many of us in this room have ever experienced hunger? How many have, as one definition goes, felt “the discomfort, weakness or pain caused by a prolonged lack of food”?

Imagine feeling hungry all the time and never getting enough to eat, never knowing a full stomach. Persistent and prolonged hunger leads to malnutrition, to starvation [SLIDE of TIME Magazine photograph of starving Ethiopian boy] and ultimately even death.

When told that her subjects were starving because they had no bread to eat, Marie Antoinette of France commented: “Let them eat cake.” This legendary quote is often used to illustrate the disconnect between the haves and the have-nots.

While we've come a long way from the French aristocracy's insensitivity and ignorance, policies about hunger are still made at forums where people making the decisions are alien to the experience [SLIDE of UN General Assembly session]. How many of the delegates at the UN General Assembly do you think have experienced hunger in their lives?

This presentation -Voices in Development -is about recognizing the importance of the perspectives we are ignorant of or often ignore. The presentation talks about a specific methodology called Oral Testimony which helps us tune in to these “unheard voices”. At Panos, we work with the media on development issues in a manner that provides a platform for neglected or ignored voices.

What is oral testimony?

Oral Testimony is based on the belief that ‘everyone is an expert in their own lives’. An oral testimony is a recorded, indepth, life story interview carried out like a one-on-one conversation without a questionnaire; it is, rather, based on a list of topics developed using a theme that is the focus of the interview. The interview relies on an individual's memory and experience. The person being interviewed is referred to as narrator rather than interviewee because this kind of interview changes the power equation giving control of the interview process to the narrator rather than the interviewer.

The value of oral testimony

Oral testimonies are vivid, personal accounts of an individual's life. This has an impact on the reader or listener, as the following quote from an oral testimony of a poor fisherman, Kishor, living on a lake in Pakistan, illustrates:

"I am a poor man... Sometimes I simply offer my guests water with love."

Kishor, PAKISTAN, 2005

Being an individual, personal experience, oral testimonies challenge the generalisations of statistics and of quantitative research. They can also complement quantitative research by providing insight into a statistical finding. Oral testimonies capture the experience of development, or lack of it. They can, therefore, help inform development policy.

"I live like a lioness. Even if there is nothing to eat at my home, I will keep it to myself and never let it leak out."

Salma, PAKISTAN, 2005

With its focus on individual voices, oral testimonies highlight the uniqueness and the differences. Oral testimonies are about the everyday reality of a person's life and therefore fill in the spaces between the big events in an individual or community's life.

Since the oral testimony interview is carried out without the help of a questionnaire, there are no pre-conceived notions or leading questions – this allows the unexpected to emerge bringing forth new learning and perspectives.

But most importantly, oral testimonies give voice to the poor and marginalised individuals and communities and are therefore democratic.



The Oral Testimony Project and Process

An Oral Testimony project has 4 stages:

Training – at this stage, a team of interviewers is trained in conducting oral testimony interviews

Interviewing – next, the interviewers record interviews, transcribe them, the interviews are then translated (if necessary) and edited

Review – the project team meets to share experiences of interviewing, to select powerful quotes, identify themes in the testimony collection and talk about ideas for dissemination

Dissemination – dissemination plans are put into practice i.e. presentations are prepared, booklets published, etc.

The Oral Testimony Process

A five-day training workshop covers the following sessions:

- Topic development (themes for interviews are discussed according to the project focus i.e. HIV, poverty, migration)
- Questioning skills (what kind of questions to ask to enable the narrator to share their story i.e. open ended vs leading)
- Interview relationships (discussion about body language, behaviour, dress code, language, introductions, etc)
- Ethical considerations (consent and confidentiality)
- Equipment (using recording devices)
- Practice interviews (interviewers practice their skills on each other)
- Transcription (they transcribe the practice interviews they have recorded)
- Talk about dissemination

The Interview Process

- Interviewers conduct and record an average 3 testimony interviews
- All interviewers prepare word-for-word transcriptions of their testimonies
- Interviewers also prepare summaries or interview introductions
- Interviewers take photographs to accompany testimonies

Reviewing the project

- Feedback and discussion on process
- Discuss problems and successes
- Analysis of themes
- Selection of best quotes
- Maintains project momentum

Sharing the testimonies

There are several ways to disseminate the testimonies to a variety of audiences, large and small

- Locally: community presentations, local language booklets, exhibitions
- Nationally: national language booklets, roundtable meetings, media coverage
- Globally: online dissemination, contributions to journals, showcasing at international conferences

In Pakistan, dissemination took place by engaging 4 mediapersons (3 journalists from print and TV + 1 theater producer) who collected testimonies from 2 sites and produced 4 newspaper articles, one 30-minute TV show , and one 20-minute interactive theater presentation

The question is...Is anyone listening?

“I have sat in on almost all the meetings on coordination of the relief effort. I have heard more plans about where to build the cities, hospitals, schools, and even spanking new four-star hotels than about camps and the vast number of people whose pockets are empty and bodies vulnerable to infections and disease.”

-senior UN official speaking anonymously to Newline magazine about the Pakistan earthquake 2005

In conclusion...

For too long now, citizens have left policies and decisions that impact their lives and determine the course of development to closed coteries of ‘intellectuals’ and policymakers.

The Centre for Communication & Development Studies

There can be no development unless its beneficiaries also engage in the process as actors and decision-makers. Oral testimonies provide an opportunity for this engagement to take place.

Study case:

The Internet revolution and the adaptation of Vietnamese journalism

Báo Lao Động Điện Tử | Mr. Thang Do Lê (Vietnam)

Thang Do Lê was a reporter tracking array of information technology and communication for nearly ten years and is now specialized in the development of new media especially the online media in Vietnam. He is the author of many articles about the role of new media as well as the newspapers evolution. Some of his articles published in the newspaper Lao Dong (Labour Newspaper) are then posted back on hundreds of websites such as: Who will be proactive not copy -paste, Vietnamese love read online news, Online ads waiting for e-commerce, etc. In addition, Thang Do Lê have presented the process of online news and the difference between social media and journalism in several workshops on new media in Vietnam.

The Internet Revolution and Journalism in Vietnam

Section 1: Internet Revolution in Vietnam

Over the past ten years access to the Internet and to mobile telephones has grown exponentially. A few statistical figures will serve to highlight the process and help give a clearer image of the present environment in which journalism and online networking operate in Vietnam.

1. *Internet Access on the Increase*

The Internet was introduced to Vietnam in 1977 but it took until 2003 for it to really take off and reach an impressive number of users. From a few thousand subscribers at the beginning of the year 2000 it has grown to over three millions subscribers ten years later, which implies that over twenty five millions people (ie practically 30% of the population) now have online access. (Statistics supplied by the Ministry of Information and the “Centre de l’Internet” of Vietnam).

2. *A revolution in telecommunication*

The increase in the use of mobile phones has been spectacular from 2005 on. From 19 millions users it rose to 142 millions in 2010. In addition new services available via mobile technology have attracted more customers and in particular over one million people have chosen to access news and information via their mobile phones.

3. *Technological development*

In 2000 I used PageMaker and Dreamweaver to layout content for Webpages. In April 2001 Lao Dong was the first newspaper to introduce the “Content Management Solution” system developed by a Vietnamese company. This system won the Golden Prize of the APICTA (Asia Pacific ICT Awards) in 2003 whilst another content management system fetched the First Prize at the most renowned competition for technology in Vietnam. This bears witness to the emergence of a trend of technology that has made a variety of locally produced CMS systems (web/wap) available at reasonable prices on the market. The first mobile application compatible to the majority of mobile phones appeared in Vietnam in 2008. It enables the news publishers to collect small amounts of money (micro payment) from their readers who can in turn have permanent access to updated news on their mobile phones.

Section 2: Journalism catches up with technological development

“Amateur journalists” have taken advantage of the growth of the Internet and telecommunication and gained in status whereas print newspapers still find it hard to compete.

Success of the “amateur journalists”

In 2001 VnExpress was born as a website that collected the most interesting news from all the daily newspapers. It did not produce any original content apart from translations from foreign newspapers. This website operated under the sponsorship of the Group FPT a high ranking company dealing in technology. This online news website (amateur newspaper) started without any reporters and correspondents. It operated with one sole journalist and a number of so-called news editors who picked up the most interesting articles from the press and uploaded them on the website. It goes without saying that professional journalists from the printed press did not approve of this venture and did not believe that it deserved success. Yet it did not take long for VnExpress to dominate the market thanks to its ongoing supply of hot local news items, to its online availability and to high technological performance. It did gradually decrease the percentage of “copied” articles and started to produce its own content. Whereas it had started with only one professional journalist it is now run entirely by professionals and the same scenario applied for Vietnamnet.vn (2000) and Dantri.com (2003).



With regard to blogging and online social networks that the Internet revolution made possible, Vietnamese websurfers can now easily publish their own content online thanks to free tools such as Yahoo!360, Blogger, WordPress etc. Bloggers take advantage of the anonymity of the Net to disclose otherwise un-publishable stories and to break social taboos. This does of course attracts growing numbers of readers and it is rumoured that a considerable amount of know how and technological information is published on specialists websites.

Last but not least mobile applications are a trendy development to access news and information in Vietnam. The Wireless Access Point (WAP) technology appeared in Vietnam five or six years ago but it never really managed to overcome the major local hurdle related to the collection of payment from individual users. By contrast this is the strong point of mobile applications. The launch of the first mobile application to supply news in August 2009 (baomoi.mobi) opened up a new model for business: pre-paid subscriptions: This system has already managed to attract more than one million subscribers.

“Amateur journalists” become professional

What happened in the media environment in Vietnam is first and foremost a business revolution. The so-called “amateur journalists” were in fact powerful businessmen and they very quickly realised the need to invest into professional newsrooms. They hired good reporters and journalists with a track record of professional experience. They structured the operation of the newsrooms and introduced computer technology to upgrade the editorial process.

As for citizen journalism the degree of professional skills became visible mainly in the approach taken by bloggers. At the beginning most were uploading their own content online for fun but for a number of them it turned out that millions of visitors were actually reading their texts. They did then take advantage of advertising services such as Google Ads to start collecting cash from their readers. The rapid growth of user generated content has led to the creation and the development of companies that provide online services such as zing.vn that attracted nearly five millions bloggers.

Major challenges

In 2009 VNExpress made around 10 millions dollars profit which puts it on a par with major print newspapers. The monthly subscription to a mobile news service is around one dollar per user. Journalism in Vietnam has had to live up to a major challenge with the emergence of online news services that raised the stakes of competition.

The Internet revolution has brought along the emergence of an online advertising market and we have witnessed that a number of Vietnamese companies have ventured into launching advertising campaigns on social networks on the Internet.

This proved to be a wake up call for print newspapers and by now most of them have started their own online edition and a number have gone a long way to bring them up to competition level. The distinction between the print and the online edition gradually became more visible, whereas in the beginning they used to upload print content online. Instead of having identical contents in print and online newspapers now have a distinct editorial concept for their online edition with videos, images and a more steady flow of hot news.

On the other side of these positive developments one needs to note that the “cut and paste” approach has caused prejudice to the creativity and the motivation of journalists. Instead of working according to the rules of the trade most online news providers have simply copied content produced by others. One online news service uploaded a record 6000 texts within one month.

Many online newspapers do not have any practice of the editorial process and strong competition has even lowered further the poor quality of articles that tend to bet on sensational headlines. It may be that the success of mainstream newspapers has eclipsed the quality of more select publications. In addition only very few online publishers give any prominence to information relevant to specialists’ sectors.

Weaknesses of the print newspapers

The major online newspapers exist without ever having had a print version and they all have been established within the last ten years. On the other hand all the print papers now have their own online version and they have the benefit of fifty years of professional experience. Yet within the online competition it is the younger that win the day.

The editors in chief of the print media have possibly been too hesitant and speculated for too long about the risk of seeing the print edition lose revenue because of the online circulation. They may also have lost time in identifying the process of convergence between the print and the online version, as a consequence they did not come up with the necessary decisions in due time and the opportunity was lost.

On the technological front print publishers have not yet risen to the online competition and not been able to take advantage of their strongest asset which is their professional journalists.

Lecture:

How to deal with public health topics?

Freelance journalist | Mrs. Sylvie Sargueil (France)

Sylvie Sargueil was a practicing medical doctor for ten years. In 1995 she studied Scientific Journalism at the ESJ (Graduate School of Journalism) in Lille. Since then she has worked as a freelance journalist specializing in health for the mainstream press and television (France 3) and for publishing. She currently writes articles for a newspaper of Pediatrics and leads training courses related to the media coverage of health information. She has published books on medical information coverage by journalists.



How to deal with public health topics ?

It's not possible to think of developing a country without improving public health and journalists have a role to play in that way.

The question which has been asked me to answer is «how to deal with public health topics? »

Actually it's a very complex issue because of scientific and technical complexity of medical topics, because of globalization of health issues and because of the huge importance of the economy and policy in these topics.

Health is not only an individual issue but also and especially a public issue and a public good. So public health depends on local and international politics.

As a matter of fact, the main progress in health and the first one in history wasn't done by physicians, medicines or surgery but by the access to hygiene...

Good health requires drinkable water:

2 million children die every year from diarrhea because of non potable water.

Non-potable water is the main cause of dysenteric diseases like cholera

- Good health requires sufficient food in quantity and quality
Undernutrition and malnutrition create nutritional deficiencies like anemia (lack of iron) and blindness (lack of vitamin A)
- Good health requires sufficient sanitation
- Good health means also living in a healthy environment

For example, at work, people who breathe a lot of metal or wood dusts all through the year are exposed to catch pneumonia, asthma or lung cancer...

And also, we need special health policies to take care of pregnant women and newborn children... and so on

Public health is based on prevention by access to hygiene and also by vaccine campaigns, access to medicines and screening tests...

In order

- to prevent avoidable diseases
- to detect as soon as possible curable diseases
- to develop health care structures

What can be done by the journalists to improve public health?

- We have to inform our fellow citizens:

This means not only to collect information but also to verify it and to make it understandable to all.

Spreading false information could be very dangerous.

A rumor can be fatal, for example the rumor about polio vaccine in Nigeria, that was supposed to sterilize people. It was not true but people were afraid and stopped vaccinating their children. Then polio, which was close to disappearing totally in that country, increased once more.

Making information understandable by the public is an important part of our job because, would it be useful to report information if our public isn't able to understand it?

- We have to fight discrimination against ill people

Often people lose their jobs because they suffer from aids or cancer. They even lose their friends and their social place. Sometimes they are rejected by their families...

It is particularly true when people are poor and with a low level of education.

To do this job well we first have to collect news and information and to verify them.

For every topic, we need to answer the questions who, why, what, when, where and you can add how and to whom.

To do that, don't hesitate to use internet BUT be careful.

You need to have your own addresses and compare the information on various sites such as:

WHO: <http://www.who.int/en/> (World Health Organization)

Institut Pasteur: <http://www.pasteur.fr/ip/easysite/go/03b-000021-04k/press/press-releases>

CDC: <http://www.cdc.gov/> (Center of Diseases Control)

All the ministries of health and of course Ministry of Health in Lao PDR, I suppose (I can't read Lao language)

European Agency for Safety and Health <http://osha.europa.eu/en>

Etc...

After consulting the internet you have to interview human sources:

-experts like researchers, physicians...

-and Health policy makers

-but also all kinds of health care workers (like nurses)

-And please don't forget **ill persons** and their relatives

To get a good approach of the truth and the reality of an health topic you need to multiply sources because all the actors are living different aspects of this issue.

When you interview **experts** don't hesitate to make them repeat if they are not clear enough, that's always possible with scientists and physicians, who are accustomed to using jargon. Ask them to speak to you in the way they'd speak to a child aged twelve.

To make health topics understandable to the public

- All words have to be simple and clear. Think of your public and ask yourself "what do they know about this topic?"
- Have only one idea per sentence
- Explain the scientific data and the social challenges of public health step by step

- Use images, stories, testimonies in the goal to be better understood
Now it's your turn to explain to a twelve years old child!
Regarding public health topics, journalists have an educational role to play.
We have to give people tools to think about health issues in their complexity.
For example on economics and political issues such as cost of treatments and how to fight against counterfeit medicines.
We have to explain to people how prevention and detection of diseases works.
To explain the risks of the diseases and the use of vaccines.
For example: to prevent dengue and all infectious diseases transmitted by a mosquito you have to explain how to fight against this flying enemy: to have children sleeping under a mosquito net, to worry about stagnant water In the same way you have to write articles to explain how to boil water and the necessity of washing and cooking vegetables, the time necessary to cook meat ...
Explain how to use condoms to protect them and their partners from aids...
The examples are numerous.
It's very important and it's your responsibility
A journalist has to be able to give keys to people for protecting them against diseases when it is possible and treat the disease in the best way.
Journalists have also to fight against the discrimination of ill people
Discrimination is a second burden. Ill people have to live with disease and also suffer from negative feelings from their relatives and neighbors and often encounter severe social and work difficulties
These negative reactions are linked to ignorance and to fears.

What kind of journalist could do this work best?

I think that all journalists should be trained to deal with health topics because they all have to do it often and probably more and more often.
But some specialized journalists are needed to be chiefs of columns about this important theme and to produce special programmes for TV and radio. They should receive the necessary basic training.
And what to think about physicians trained to become journalists?
They certainly will be excellent public health communicators and in that way I find it interesting to train some but in a country that has a lack of health care professionals, is this good idea? Unless we train retired physicians.
Actually, reporting about health needs a broaderview than the only medical and biologic aspects of health, it needs good knowledge about society, economy and health policy. So, we first need good journalists that are well trained in health topics.

So, what kind of training could we suggest?

- introduce public health topics for students in basic journalism training
 - long time training (1 or 2 years) composed for example by three times 1 or 2 weeks placements and e-learning all year for established journalists who would like to specialize on health topics
 - Training on basic writing and communication techniques for physicians who would like to work in information on public health
- Finally, I am just trying to give you a few ideas in order to make journalists able to deal with complex public health topics and in this way participate in improving health in their countries.



Study case: Media and social development in Cambodia Phnom Penh Post | Mrs. Simala Pan (Cambodia)

Simala Pan was promoted as co-editor-in-chief for the Searching for the Truth Magazine, after her graduation in Economics and English language. Through the experience working in the area of history, education and tourism, she awarded a scholarship to pursue a Master's Degree in Leisure, Tourism and Environment in the Netherlands. Back to Cambodia, she worked as an assistant to the Secretary of State of the Ministry of Tourism, and as editor-in-chief of Tourism Magazine. By mid-2009, she joined The Phnom Penh Post as a Lifestyle Editor. In the course of the last six years professional experience, she was exposed to a variety of working environments such as government, NGOs, international agencies and overseas.

Phnom Penh Post Contributes to Social Development

As the population of Cambodia reaches 13.4 million, the developing country which has gone through notorious memory of genocide in the last three decades has literacy rate around 78 percents. These people are those who are able to read and write at basic level or completed elementary school. At a quick glance, the figure seems to give hope to print media business while poverty might be the main obstacle for poor people to afford television or radio. However, the nationwide media consumption is predominantly covered by television. The proportion of people watching television is more than 52 percents, radio 38 percents, and newspaper 9 percents.

It is beyond expectation that this developing country has in total 97 radio stations and 44 TV stations. If the content of broadcasting is impartially and beneficially report to the public, there will be a lot of potential for broadcasting media to contribute to Cambodia social development.

The content of both radio and television are market-oriented. For radios, chit-chat show, song request, and commercial advertisement have taken over most of the broadcasting time while television is dominated by live concert, movie and drama can be found at any hour of the day. National and international news are usually very brief and partiality is commonplace for national news. Dubbed as "protocol" news resources, television and radio are all under government's control. Hence, they have tried to avoid political attack to the ruling party and stay away from politics, corruption, human rights abuse and others sensitive issues. Rather than risking their broadcasting licenses, they usually run program relating to entertainment, activities of Cambodian government, National Assembly, and commercial shows.

Not only television and radio, but also the leading newspapers in the country are under government's control. Three major of the tabloids are 19-year-old Koh Sontepheap, 18-year-old Reaksmeay Kampuchea and 9-year-old Kampuchea Thmey. Around forty percents of their content are categorized into crime reports. Another 40 percents is a descriptive story about official activities. Other 10 percents is politics and development issues and another 10 percents covers on world, health, science, entertainment and culture.

Besides the fact that they publish press release and official statements and bias stories that is lack of

insightful editorial content, their longevity and local name recognition has made them survive in the market. Another reason is that they are willing to sacrifice editorial content in order to sell advertisements. Moreover, their cozy relationship with government, local authorities, and economic elites has given them an advantage of easily catching the first glimpse of the news.

On the other hand, the Phnom Penh Post, which is published daily and separately in Khmer and English, are doing differently. Launched officially in September 9, 2009, the Phnom Penh Post in Khmer provides unbiased reporting. Our aim is to run a successful business that benefit society. Our aim is to promote principle of unity, raising human rights awareness, and empower people by providing educational contents which are useful for people's daily life.



A part from being a youngest newspaper in the market, we have enhanced our quality in term of contents and news coverage. Our target readers are expanding educated middle class. Unlike other newspaper which serve readers with crime and accident reporting, we try to gradually turn people to our business page that provide the most insight information for our readers. Our layout, style and format is easy to go through because the newspaper is clearly divided in to five sections.

Our national news is written by many of the Post's staff. Normally, each story requires reporters to get information from different sources and stakeholders, especially vulnerable people. Besides writing story happening within the city, all reporters have extra duty to keep eyes on one or two provinces, especially those they were born or are familiar with. Consequently, our news coverage is spreading 24 cities and provinces. In term of style and word usage, the editors are trying to simplify it so that the information can reach readers of all education level.

The most outstanding section, the business, is divided into local and international. Our local business news focus not only big cooperation, but also small and medium enterprise and family-own business. Besides we also have a column for CEO talk and expert. The business section also covers the area of tourism, agriculture and services which are relevant to people's daily living.

Unlike some local newspapers, The Post's international news is purchased license from AFP, Bloomberg, Reuters, Relaxnews, LA times and the Guardian.

Our in-tuned lifestyle section is not just cover fashion and beauty of the urban people. Entertainment, art, culture, tourism, health, beauty and so on are all in there. We are trying to be inclusive and act according to the motto 'lifestyle for all' which mean we build a connection between city life and rural people. By doing so, we represent different pictures and colors of the country.

Because sports news market was untouched, the Post is first to step in and provide good news coverage in the country which sport are not well-promoted. Rather than focus on the figure, number or result, the Post's sports news also go in-depth helping awake the glory of former sportsmen and sportswomen. Beside these five sections, the Post also publish career and education called Lift, 7days for foreign expatriates, tourism, wedding, property, ICT, wedding supplement, and so on.

Having roughly described about the Post, there are some key roles that this newspaper contribute to social development in Cambodia. As a professional newspaper, we try to inform, educate and entertain readers of all classes and levels. By providing accurate information, readers can empower themselves and make a better decision in their livelihood. Since the Post is not market-oriented, our content is transparent and it helps convey the message or hidden voice of vulnerable people.

However, as the country which has gone through terrible genocide that causing more than a couple millions death, Cambodia is still suffering from the aftermath because its society has no more culture of reading. As observation, young generations do not have the tendency to read books or newspaper, making national and local library so quiet. One of the biggest challenges is that many people prefer television and radio, making newly born newspaper to gain readers.

In response to these challenges, we are working hard to build more readerships by the following strategies. First, we have expanded our geographical scope in term of story coverage and circulation. For instance, we have already given away free newspaper to the provincial people. Second, since we already have five clear sections, we will target different readers. For example, national news is for adult and middle-ages, business for vendors and business people, and lifestyle for working women and housewives. Thirdly, we hope to gradually change people's reading habits by providing some crimes reporting. However, these crimes stories are not merely descriptive ones. We will go beyond the scene and identify hidden social cause that lead to such occurrences. Fourth, at the same time while we are increasing our geographical coverage, we also try to increase relevancy of information. For instance, the local farmer would like to read agriculture stories which have a connection to his daily life. Fifth, in the long run, we will invite more letters to editor, experts, community leaders and academic people to contribute their opinions in our papers. Sixth, we also utilize technology by promoting our two websites in Khmer and English, and reaching to our readers via facebook and other social networks. We only provide information, but also educate and engage readers in the process of developing our society as a whole.



A witness' eyes – Lecture: Journalism and social science Anthropologist | Dr. Grant Evans (Laos)

Dr. Grant Evans was formerly a Reader and Chairman of the Sociology Department at the University of Hong Kong. Dr. Evans' scholarly interests focused primarily on anthropological concerns relating to Laos, Vietnam and Southwest China. He now lives in Vientiane. He has published extensively on Laos and Southeast Asia.

Journalism and social science

Everyone has theories about society and theories about people in their minds, even if they do not call them theories. For example, many men have theories about the 'nature' of women, namely that they are weaker than men both mentally and physically and therefore should be subordinate to men.

A man may hold such a view even though his wife is cleverer than him and does harder work. The wife, therefore, contradicts the theory he holds about women in general. However, he can make an exception for her by reverting to another theory which says his wife has inherited the 'genes' (kammaphan) from her mother who was also clever and hard-working.

These theories are not consistent, and indeed most of the theories that people have about society are not consistent, but nor do they need to be in order for them to get on in life. Indeed most people who talk about, for example, the influence of genes know almost nothing about scientific genetic theories.

Social scientists, like scientists generally, try to construct consistent theories about the way societies work, and how individuals fit into such societies.

However, in the social sciences there are competing theories to explain what we find in society. For example, many social scientists are strongly influenced by Karl Marx, while others may be more influenced by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim, and still others by theories which try to use genetics to explain social phenomena, such as Sociobiology. This always makes for a lively discussion about the relative merits of the various theories and what they are able to explain. Choosing between one theory or another is always confusing for students or people who are just entering the field of social sciences.

Whenever someone writes an article which is not just reportage they will use theories to structure what they write. If one writes an analytical article for a newspaper or magazine on the economy, for example, or on politics or on the family, the article will always be informed either consciously or unconsciously by theories. But unlike everyday life where people unconsciously switch from one theory to another, writing an article requires consistency and therefore conscious theoretical reflection, otherwise the article will be incoherent and unconvincing.

The Lao press in fact carries very few analytical articles. There is reportage about various economic activities, for example, but very little on the Lao economy that could be described as analytical. (As if to contradict me, soon after our conference an excellent analytical piece on the economy appeared in Lao Pattana. 'The reasons for and impact of inflation in the Lao PDR', 24/11/2010). But in fact such articles are rare. Whereas, for example, if one looks at the international press, say The Age in Melbourne, or the Financial Times in the UK, then one can find analytical articles about the economy everyday. Of course, I do not expect this from the much smaller Lao press, but one should be able to expect an analytical article on some aspect of the economy once in a while.

But perhaps this is a result of the fact that journalists with an economics degree are not being recruited by the press. If so, why?

The general theme for this conference concerns giving voice to the voiceless, or something like that. And, I should remark immediately that choosing such a theme contains theoretical assumptions about, for example, 'equality', and so on.

The causes of social inequality and how to overcome it is perhaps one of the oldest debates in the social sciences. Historically the social sciences developed as a critique of feudalism in Europe, a social structure in which inequality was institutionalised and considered acceptable. Modern societies reject this assumption and assert that all citizens are equal. But, what does 'equality' mean?

Naturally, I cannot answer this fully here. But, does 'equality' mean we should all get the same income, live in the same houses, drive the same cars, etc.? Or does it simply mean equality before the law? Or does it mean equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcomes? And so on. As I say, social scientists have discussed these issues in depth and of course this is an issue that arises everyday in our newspapers and our journalists need to be theoretically informed before they can write in depth about such issues. That they are not so informed perhaps explains why we see so few analytical articles about social problems in the newspapers here as well.

In Laos one must consider ethnic minorities because they are considered to be troubled by inequalities more than others. For example, many of them do not speak or read Lao, but fortunately some of them can find a voice both through the national media and local radio stations. They are considered to be disadvantaged in many other ways too, such as living in remote areas which are distant from schools or hospitals. These are problems faced in many countries, and social scientists have tried to think about the nature of these problems and about solutions to them.

They have also thought about issues to do with prejudice towards minorities, not on the part of government, but the everyday prejudices of its citizens. Just the other day I was alongside two Lao men joking about a postcard of a southern minority woman smoking a pipe, the joke playing on the idea of how backward she is. These types of prejudices are common worldwide and both social scientists and psychologists have tried to understand their roots.

The main way minorities appear in the Lao press is as exotic groups living far away in space and time. In fact, many minority people go to university, are in the government or in business. Stories about them would be very interesting, and should be written. But, of course, some successful people disguise their minority backgrounds because of 'embarrassment' and fear that some people may look down on them. As I say, Laos is not alone in this regard and social scientists have studied such phenomena worldwide. Lao journalists, and others, can benefit from their knowledge in order to put Lao experiences into a broader perspective.

Journalism is a relatively new field of study at the National University of Laos, and it is vital that these students receive some grounding in social sciences for reasons I have briefly alluded to above.



Lecture : The role of Media in national development

From an academic perspective

Al Ahram Research Center | Mrs. Howayda Mustafa (Egypt)

A professor of mass communication at the University of Cairo, Howayda Mustafa is also the vice dean at Cairo-based Al Ahram Canadian University and a counsellor of Al Ahram Regional Press Institute. She published many books on the role of the media in contemporary crises.

The role of Media in national development

Introduction:

It is a necessary to define the expression “National Development “ to understand and appreciate the issues involved in the relationship between media and national development .

Development means « a new stage in a changing situation to become more advanced , development includes three factors such as: economic growth self reliance and social justice »

Development is a quantitative change, which entails changes in the structure of the economy, social environment and political disposition The overall objective of national development is to enlarge people's choices for greater access to knowledge, better nutrition, health services more secure livelihoods, security against crime and physical violence political and cultural freedom and sense of participation in community

Contribution of media in National development: influence and factors:

The media with specific reference to the collective entity of newspapers radio, television and the international Network (Internet) play a very important role in national development these roles involves changes or advancement in a nation aimed at improving the political, economic and social lives of the people.

The real influence of the media in national development depend on the media themselves and the societies in which they operate even among similar types of government, other factors, such as technology, the target audience and the message may influence the extent of media impact in the society The media impact in national development aims influencing a change, it influences attitudes, perceptions and decision-making and in generally influences behaviors, which means that media can set the public agenda and act as the gatekeeper of public issues, they perform the control role in political transparency and fight against corruption, in addition media are particularly important in facilitating nation-building especially of post-colonial societies and those experiencing ethnic and religious diversities.

The role of media in national development is dependent upon their independence freedom and the ability to effectively communicate, objective, balanced, fair and professional information to both government and the general public, factors such as media bias, sensationalism, propaganda and distortions, negatively affect the contribution of the media in national development, and to succeed in their role, complementary institutions, such as the judiciary and media councils must reinforce their activities.

The influence of Media in the society: Key issues

Media and Political development:

Media can affect politics and culture by supporting institutional change and working as a tool for the expression of ideas and development to allow all sectors to debate and construct solutions. Also media can promote democracy and good governance by working as a bridge, crucial channel between government and people, work as a tool for an accountability of political leaders, defend the transparency in political, economic and social affairs, allow the recognition of the views and opinions of the public in the formulation of policies, insure that the rule of law is upheld . In addition media can play an important role in political development by defending Human Rights includes the right of life, freedom of speech freedom of association ,right to a fair hearing, prevent or deter the abuses of human rights .

Media Economic Development:

Media can define economic development as a sustainable process of creating economic opportunity for all citizens .

Media can also work for development economic by stimulating business investment and by diversifying the public revenue base and by enhancing quality of life and the factors of productive capacity of national economy and providing an atmosphere for healthy trade -foster business climate of transparency and accountability .

Media can ensure that accurate financial information is available to potential investors and enhances the ability of poor and disenfranchised members of society to make their voices heard Media can help also in sensitizing government programs on poverty alleviation and economic empowerment, so that public services are made more responsive to the poor Finally media can help the national economic system to contribute to the economic growth of nations (ex: Taiwan and south Korea, satellite Instructional Television Experiment in India)

Media and Social Development:

Media can empower the poor and vulnerable people to participate effectively in development processes, and help to assist the society to facing some social problems such as:

- 1-Corruption in both the government and corporate sector (act as a force against corruption in way that are both tangible and intangible provide strong incentives for changing behavior: case of Perez in Venezuela, Collar in Brazil and Estrada in Philippines)
- 2-Communal Conflicts by enhancing political stability and national integration, especially in multi-ethnic, multi-religious heterogeneous societies (case of India and Nigeria, racial violence in urban America and Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East)
- 3-Disasters: by providing extensive coverage of disasters (natural: such as earthquake, floods, hurricanes) technological disasters (such as plane crashes, oil spills and nuclear reactor failure) and broadcast early warnings, evacuation information and increase public awareness about risks and responses (Mozambique flood, Indian cyclone) .

Studies found that there was correlation between media coverage and the amount of funds that flow into disasters area which lead to political action and evoke sympathy, community solidarity and national action.

Conclusion:

The general and specific findings of the study on the “ Role of Media in National Development “ reveal that:

- 1-As fourth Estate, agenda setters gatekeepers and force multipliers, the media have a role to play in society
- 2-The media facilitate political, economic and social development
- 3-Media determine the issues found in public agenda
- 4-While the media play important roles in society, they are sometimes driven more by their political and economic interests, than those of the public
- 5-Media influence the direction of foreign policy
- 6-Media influence economic growth
- 7-The more intense media coverage is on national disasters, the more relief materials and funds are

made available by donors

8-In public health media campaigns immensely contribute in the reduction of diseases

9-In internal conflict situations, the media as instruments of peace contribute to nation-building

10-Ownership, economic factors, technology, government regulations, influence the role of media in national development

11-Sensationalism, propaganda, selectiveness and bias, are inimical to the role of media in national development

12-Societies with high level of state media ownership are much less free, transmit less information to people and negatively correlate with political, economic and social development

13-Violence in the media contribute to indecency, immorality and violence, particularly among children and youths

Recommendations:

1-Media freedom is fundamental in democracy

2-Media must report the truth without misrepresentation of facts, sensationalism, propaganda and bias

3-In reporting the media must take cognizance of national security and the welfare of the people

4-Media practitioners must not be influenced by the interests of ownership, both government and corporate

5-Ownership of the media should be spread to avoid the monopoly of a few, powerful individuals, corporations or governments

6-Display or transmission of violent media materials should be controlled to reduce negative influence on societies

7-more media outfits should be established in rural communities to facilitate development and provide them more access to information

8-Media Institutes should be established to coordinate the activities of both domestic and international media in order to reduce the incident of false or negative reporting

9-Media Interaction should be a regular feature in military training institutions

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