

Media and Civil Society - Working together towards Social Conscience Raising

"This is the first workshop that I have attended where the Media and the NGOs are sitting together trying to understand each other's point of views and the everyday challenges they face" said a TV journalist from Pakistan at the Media Workshop organized by SARI/ Equity and facilitated by IREX in Colombo from 5 to 9 December 2005.

Twenty six participants from six South Asian countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, not only acquired the skills of effectively "packaging" or "reporting" about issues of equity and gender for the print, electronic and visual media but also forged closer human ties between the Media and Civil Society across the South Asia region.

As part of a series of practical exercises joint teams of journalists and NGOs undertook site visits to Colombo-based organizations (Young Asia TV, Seva Lanka, CDS, Lanka Plus, WIN, CENWOR, NPC and Sarvodaya) to report on social issues.

Action plans jointly prepared by the Media and NGOs at the conclusion of the Workshop testify to their commitment to continue the dialogue and to produce issue-based media stories (both print and electronic) in each of the six countries.

It is hoped that the **Excerpts** presented hereunder from the **Workshop's Report** will arouse the interest of a broader group of NGOs and Media in the Region to work together in tackling the many human person-related issues of importance to both of them and in understanding and doing away with the difficulties or misconceptions that each of them may harbor vis-à-vis the other.

🚩 Objectives of the Workshop

- Promote more frequent and thorough media coverage of SARI/Equity's focus areas in the region. Specifically:
- Assist NGO representatives in understanding and working with the media and effectively engage the media as part of a broader advocacy strategy.
- Enable reporters and journalists to familiarize themselves with the techniques of covering socially sensitive issues; and indicate ways of effective networking.

🚩 Enhancing the Understanding of NGOs and the Media

"Things You Need To Know About Us"
(To help NGO and media representatives to understand each other by sharing experiences and challenges)

Media "Hesitations"
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ NGOs use Media for Promotion "of their Motives" viz. 'Propaganda' to get funding / Donor driven NGO Needs○ Need to reach a contact person "24/7"

- Provide guidance to media
- NGO Press releases do not provide the required information - being either "sketchy" or too long
- NGOs must take the media to the "field"
- NGOs should develop a media sensitivity
- Find your allies/ "media friends" - those who "love" your issues not money
- Trust the Media
- Media is interested in talking to the "victim" - "direct beneficiary"
- At press conferences invite victims/beneficiaries instead of ministers or celebrities to avoid distraction and facilitate focused attention on the issues and victims.

NGO "Hesitations"

- Media distort information
- Media are not familiar with NGO expertise and do not attempt to find out
- Journalists do not come to conferences/meetings/field sites despite committing
- Reporters/journalists use insensitive language
- Journalists want money for coverage - "yellow journalism"
- Political agenda of media owners - deepening the suspicion between Media and NGOs
- Diplomatic pressures make Media "censor" their reporting
- Media "victimize" victims further
- Media representatives are not trained in social issues
- Media want "sexy" stories - create scandals
- Deal with 'one case' without addressing the "big picture"
- Difficulty in identifying the "right" contact person

It was generally recognized that the Media (especially the social/women and children welfare "beat") depend on NGOs and similarly NGOs depend on the Media for reporting/publicity/awareness on vital issues. Collaboration and amicable working relationships are "a must".

Social Journalism - Why Cover Civil Society?

Introduction of the concept of social journalism and the media's role vis-à-vis civil society.

Social Journalism - as seen by Participants

- Journalism that covers social / community issues
- Voices of the "People"- covers issues of daily life and deals with rights/needs of the people.
- Issue oriented journalism
- Covers trends/patterns/cultural issues
- Recognizes and understands how issues interconnect

- It is about problems and finding solutions
- It is about making government accountable
- It is the public arena of the media

The importance of "Social Journalism" was recognized and the role of the media as a powerful tool owing to their outreach; ability to shape opinions/influence beliefs and as "watch dogs" / "change agents"/ "truth tellers".

Identifying Key Themes and Ideas for Media Stories

In country-specific groups Media and NGOs jointly identified priority themes/stories requiring media coverage - with an indication of the purpose for such coverage. They defined key issues, target audiences, and mechanisms to reach out to different forms of media.

Some common themes:

- Acid throwing - increase public awareness and advocate for its elimination
- Documenting missing children - build pressure on the government for cooperation and for setting up coordinated country mechanisms for tracking missing children
- Emerging patterns of abuse of domestic workers - especially in middle class homes in North East India - facilitate public exposure and create watchdog bodies to reduce abuse (India)
- Laid off garment workers post MFA (multi fiber agreement) - generate interest and funding for alternative livelihood options
- Street children - raise public awareness
- Rehabilitation, reintegration of trafficked camel jockeys from UAE - create pressure for the development of infrastructure facilities
- Traumatized children - highlight that the existing psychosocial, counseling and medical services are inadequate to deal with the repatriated child camel jockeys
- Results of trafficking - create awareness among families and communities on the hazardous effects of trafficking
- Economic empowerment of repatriated children - encourage the establishment of centers for vocational training
- Safe migration since people were unaware of the dangers of unsafe migration
- Domestic Violence - raising awareness about the new Domestic Violence Bill in Sri Lanka
- Girl children who become mothers - highlight the nefarious impact of sexual abuse and exploitation
- Pedophilia - raise awareness and advocate for its reduction

NGOs and Media jointly explored **SARI/Equity core issues to develop story ideas** and **themes**
Violence against Women

- Increasing rate of violence against women

- Beating women accepted as part of "traditional culture" and seen as a way of demonstrating manhood
- Marital rape
- Torture of women by women (especially in-laws) for purposes of dowry extraction
- Emotional and psychological impact of violence on women

Trafficking/Migration

- Impact of the termination of the Multi Fiber Agreement on women - being pushed into the sex trade; impact on families; increased suicide rates among laid off garment workers; impact on HIV/AIDS
- Women migrating to the Gulf States: possible consequences and assistance
- Reintegration of child jockeys - How are the families tracked?
- How does the trafficking mechanism work?
- How does government fight the trafficking of children?
- How does government fight the trafficking of children?
- Trafficking and Migration linkages

✚ Identifying Press Releases: Content and Processing Mechanisms

The NGOs, in small country groups, developed talking points for press releases around identified themes based on a proposed format and content including "theme, quote, statistics, examples and solutions/recommendations". **Journalists** provided **Tips on the Content** and Process of Handling Press Releases:

Tips: "Theme"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do not use initials/abbreviations (Example, CWC etc.) ○ The theme has to be specific (Example: Domestic violence is on the increase in ..) ○ Do not provide less important information in the beginning - start with the "Finale" followed by the background

Tips: "Quotes"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To be specific ○ By people who are directly affected (either victims/survivors/NGO interveners/caretakers) since the human angle is important ○ Not to repeat the theme of the story but to complement/support it. ○ To be short; evocative; innovative; should express something different from what had been said earlier - your "own words" ○ Convey powerfully what has been seen/experienced - the good and bad - by the NGO/Target group.

Tips: "Statistics"

- Information to be complete (Example: 80 out of how many people; how many cities etc.; what is the trend - is it increasing or decreasing?)
- From the information provided by the NGO, the journalist should be able to pull out 2-3 stories as follow up stories

Tips: "Examples"

- A thorough background to the story is important - When; where, time, place
- Stories/examples should not be sketchy
- Cases/examples should be clear and simple and linked to the theme /topic
- Detailed information about the victim/survivor- so that the reader can place him/her as a "real person" - "humanitarian/human angle"
- Spot light on one human being - one story will be more relevant than a number of cases/examples.

Tips: "Recommendations/Solutions"

- Provide clear guidelines on what is expected from the "target groups" (Example: what is expected from the government in connection with the issues raised through media coverage).
- Two parts in a recommendation - suggestions on what can be done now and what can be done in the future
- If the recommendations are clear, the media can become a communicator to government or other target stakeholders on what is expected from them

Tips: "Prerequisites for Processing Press Releases"

- Well written, clear; must contain all the information journalists require to create a story
- NGOs should attach pictures of the event to give an idea of what happened - at times false information is given on events - as a result journalists become prejudiced at times.
- NGOs should provide their contact details on the press release so that journalists can follow up
- NGOs usually do not have separate media persons - the program

staff is writing the press releases as well, so skill building is important

- NGOs must build relationships with the media - 'media allies' for continuous collaboration.

Tips: "Mechanism for Processing and Printing Press Releases"

- In case of media coverage of an event, NGOs must let the media know a week prior to the event
- The press release should be sent two days prior to the event - and followed up with a reminder the next day
- NGOs should know who at a media outlet covers "their" issues.
- If NGOs do not know, the release should be sent to the features desk.
- Mode of communication: Emails (mostly), or fax, or sometimes hard copies are preferred - find out what would be the best mode for the media the NGO wants to target

A few **"Tips for the Media"**: Journalists should be apt at picking up 'the nuggets' - key aspects from the press releases - to probe further on interesting points. Media/news organizations should provide contact details/emails of each desk.

✚ Elements of a Press Conference

In small groups, NGOs conducted mock press conferences on three topics selected in a 'story brainstorming' session (i.e. Garment workers' lay off; Cross-Border trafficking and increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS; and Violence against Women). Journalists provided comments, critiques and suggestions on how to improve the style, format, timing, content and delivery.

Tips from Journalists to NGOs: "Organizing Press Conferences"

- Select the team for the press conference carefully
- Frame messages well
- Decide the target audience and reach out to them well in advance
- Decide the target media -Regional; Print; TV; National; International
- Prepare press releases

✚ Media: Journalism Basics in the Context of Socially Sensitive Journalism

In a separate group, media participants examined the issues of credibility, objectivity, diversity, balance and responsibility of journalists. They discussed story

planning and investigation and the ethical considerations while covering socially sensitive topics.

Tips from NGOs to Media: "Socially Sensitive Reporting"

- Victims' names not to be revealed, however to clarify for the reader the reason for the same.
- Provide specific information about the person/victim in terms of clothing, face/appearance, behavior etc. to make him/her appear a 'real person'
- The story should be detailed enough to be convincing
- The journalists must follow up cases/stories they cover. The outcome/judgment of court cases should be covered when the start of the case had been reported.
- Stories should not be long since they lose the attention of the reader.

Use of Media Advocacy

A country-specific group exercise was carried out whereby Media and NGOs jointly reviewed the priority topics identified by them and examined the advocacy models and techniques which would best serve their purpose. They created messages for different stakeholders on the kind of change they wanted to provoke.

Tips for NGOs: "Media Advocacy"

- Define the issue
- Set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timeframe) goals
- Analyze stakeholders and select target audience(s)
- Collect sufficient data, information, and statistics
- Craft a 'targeted' message
- Prepare materials including media kits, photos, slogans, and database of media

Techniques of Interviewing

The "role play" method on conducting interviews in "delicate" situations was used. Concepts of safety, sensitivity and special needs were discussed. NGOs worked out strategies on how they could help to protect the confidentiality and dignity of the victims/survivors who choose to tell their story to the press. Common mistakes in covering socially sensitive issues (sensationalism, blaming the most vulnerable, secondary victimization, perpetuating negative stereotypes) were highlighted.

Tips for Journalists: "Interviewing Skills"

- Do not rush through interviews
- Ask the necessary questions only

- Remember victims are people not "things"
- Build trust before starting the interview
- Do not be too "directive" about the interview - let the victims tell their story in their own way and at their own pace.
- Be well prepared as to what kind of information you want but be flexible
- Be patient to listen to the entire story
- Take permission for interviewing and publishing the story
- Be aware of your body language; for example, sitting at the same level or lower level than the victims rather than standing above them, softness in voice and gestures.
- Location
- Preparation before the interview - work through each step properly.
- Avoid 'Emotional Blackmailing'
- Do not provide assurance to the victim if this cannot be followed up
- Get information about a child from the shelter staff/NGO/mother rather than probing the child.
- Do not ask lead questions
- Do not refer to the victims as a "case" or "victims" while interviewing them

✚ Social Journalism Techniques - Working with Material

Field assignments - in and around Colombo - were organized on topics/stories identified by the participants. NGOs and journalists, in pairs, visited the sites assigned to them in order to research and develop their story. The media representatives were advised to pay attention to content gathering, and how reporting one story could generate another story idea or angle. At the subsequent plenary, the media participants reported on their experiences and shared with NGOs their insights on 'reporting assignments' while NGOs shared their impressions on how journalists were working and their sensitivity in collecting information.

✚ Common Challenges and Tips to Solve Them

The facilitators shared a list of tips that had emerged during the five days - both for **Media and NGOs**.

**MEDIA AND NGOS
THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW
and
COMMON CHALLENGES
AND TIPS TO HELP SOLVE THEM**

MEDIA PERSPECTIVE	NGO PERSPECTIVE
NGOs do not know who does what so they send things to the wrong person	We do not know who to talk to (at media agencies) about our issues and just when we figure it out the person changes
NGOs expect media to promote their	Media does not always acknowledge

organization (for image, funding, etc.)	our organization in a story to which we have substantially contributed
Our editor changes our work assignments at his/her own discretion	Media sometimes commits to attend and then does not come
We have limited time and resources and we cannot cover everything	We can't count on media coverage when we need it
Our salaries are often low and we work very hard and very long hours	Our salaries are often low and we work very hard and very long hours
If we cover the same NGO repeatedly, it looks like propaganda (or nepotism) and we lose our credibility as journalists	Media do not realize the wealth and breadth of expertise we have or understand how to use it
NGOs do not always provide us with content that is "newsworthy" or "fresh"	Journalists are the experts on how to find or frame the story into something "newsworthy"
We want what our readers/audience want to read/view	Some editors just want things that are "sensationalized"
Press releases and other written information is sometimes sketchy and missing a lot of what we need, so we write what we have information about	Media publications/footage sometimes distort the information we provide; journalists print inaccurate information
Press releases and other written materials are sometimes arduously long and we do not have time to read through them	Journalists and editors do not read what we send them
We cannot always find someone who is available to answer questions when we need responses on deadlines	Journalists ask us for complex information at the last minute
Media needs to go to the "field" and talk directly to clients, victims, survivors, etc.	We are sometimes afraid that media will further "victimize the victim" because they are not always sensitive to the situation
We need access to information 24 hours 7 days a week	Our time priority is given to our clients
We may have to generate several stories every day	Journalists/editors are seldom willing to write in-depth stories or provide ongoing coverage
There are external pressures that help decide what gets covered and how	Sometimes the media is censored and it reduces our chance of getting coverage
Paying for stories is unethical and only unprofessional journalists would ask for money	Some media expect us to pay for coverage
NGOs should coordinate better and not organize overlapping events so	Use us as a resource; we are the experts in our field

that we cannot attend both	
Trust us to be ethical and sensitive in working with victims/survivors and take us to meet with the	Let us help you be more sensitive/informed about the special needs and sensitivities of victims/survivors
Find a "friend" at the media to explain things (how it works, what we need, etc.)	Designate a person to work with us on our issues
The night shift may be more available for direct contact	
Put contact numbers on press releases/materials and be sure someone is there to respond (or update website, etc.)	
Find a media friend who "loves the news"	

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Workshop proved to be successful at many levels. The effective transfer of knowledge and skills was visible in the highly active participation of both NGOs and journalists and in the action-specific and concrete content of follow up plans. Participants demonstrated enthusiasm and sustained involvement throughout the Workshop and the facilitators were successful in keeping energy levels high in each session. One of the media persons commented that "The Social Journalism concept is something that I will share with my colleagues back in the office". Many other participants stated that "This was one of its kind of a workshop where NGOs and Media together - critically yet positively - gave tips and feedback to each other". The bond created among the participants was yet another indication of the success of the Workshop - demonstrated through effective networking and deliberations during; get-togethers outside and email-exchanges subsequent to the Workshop.

A number of stories/articles were published soon after the Workshop in the local country/regional papers. Those directly related to SARI/Equity focus areas and indicating NGO/Journalist collaboration are available on the SARI/Equity website at www.sariq.org. (See below under "Media Coverage".) A dozen of others that may very well have been prompted by the knowledge acquired during the workshop are in the archives of the SARI/Equity team. Further updates with relevant articles will be undertaken regularly. It is the strong hope of the SARI/Equity team that the above Excerpts from the Workshop Proceedings will spark further interest among a wider group of socially conscious journalists to "bond" with NGOs in bringing issues of interest and concern to the region up front in the print media, radio and TV. (A list of participants in the Workshop is annexed for possible contact and further information.)

Media Coverage

Agonizing tales from Central Jail >>
 Innocents remain in jail for years waiting for pardon.

Culture **Victimizes** **Women** >>
Married women cannot return to her-in-laws house until their husband comes to take them.

Parliamentarians Commission for Human Rights Bill Submitted to National Assembly
>>
Suggesting, the formation of a Protection Team to ensure transparency in the cases of domestic violence

Social **ostricism** **mars** **inter-caste** **bliss** >>
Madan's family is undergoing psychological trauma as neighbors continue to humiliate them for going through with the union

Domestic **Violence** >>
Up to three women a day die from "stove deaths" in Pakistan, for reasons such as the failure to give birth to a son, disobedience, and allegations of adultery

Children **continue** **to** **suffer** **in** **conflict** >>
A study conducted in 11 districts in Nepal in June 2005, said that rape, abduction, and their illegal detention were found to be on the rise.

Caste **no** **bar** **for** **their** **Families** >>
Writes Sangeet Nijal, who participated in the Media Workshop organized by SARI/Equity in Colombo

Helpline **becomes** **inaccessible** **to** **children** >>
Returning to India after having "bonded' with NGOs in getting to know more intimately about a number of social issues Sudhi chose to write about Child Helpline in Kochi, Kerala

15,000 **kid** **jockeys** **from** **Rahim** **Yar** **Khan** **District** >>
Reveals a report on the life and situation of child camel jockey', prepared by Pakistan Rural Workers Welfare Organisation.

Displaced **Women** **and** **Employment** >>
The biggest brunt of displacement is faced by women and children. The displaced women are forced to seek employment for the livelihood of their family members, writes Sangeeta Rijal.