

## INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISTS (IFEJ) CONGRESS

9:30 am – 5:30 pm, 21 November 2005, Gulmohar Hall, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

The International Federation of Environment Journalists (IFEJ), which was formed in 1993 in Dresden, held its 13<sup>th</sup> Congress in New Delhi in conjunction with the environment and wildlife film festival, Vatavaran – 2005 hosted by the Centre for Media Studies (CMS). The theme of the congress was ‘Human-Wildlife Conflicts and Sustainable Development’. The congress, which was held for three days from 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>th</sup> November, opened with an address by the Chairperson of the Forum of Environmental Journalists of India (FEJI), Darryl D’Monte. In its three-day long deliberations, the congress hosted one open session, three presentations, four panel discussions and two workshops. Availing the opportunity of Vatavaran 2005, journalists specialized in covering environment and wildlife from eight countries met over these four days and deliberated their experience in their respective countries and appealed to Governments and TV channels to consider more pro-active coverage of these issues.



*International Federation of Environmental Journalists (IFEJ) Annual Congress*



**Date:** 21<sup>st</sup> November 2005

**Presentation:** *Environment and Media*

**Presenter:** Dr. Bhaskara Rao, Chairman, Centre for Media Studies, New Delhi

**Background and purpose:** The main objective in this presentation was to provoke people to think. Dr Rao acknowledged power of the media to set the agenda. However, the media do not work in isolation. There are various social linkages and contradictions at work that influence media dynamics. Power shifts in this context could be seen in terms of who constitutes the ‘new gatekeepers’ as against the ‘old gatekeepers’: the emphasis had shifted to “me and mine”, from “we and us”. His presentation was based on the data collected by the CMS Media Lab wing of the Centre for Media Studies, which is specifically devoted to the monitoring of print and electronic media. Significantly, there has been a decline *both* in the reportage of social and environmental issues in the media as well as that of politics; conventionally, the preoccupation with politics has been at the cost of the former. Dr Rao mentioned that the problem starts with people thinking of environment as the government’s responsibility. He strongly asserted that television and films could make a difference.

**Chair’s remarks:** Across the world, opinion polls show that environment figures among the three to five top concerns because it is related to health – a message that politicians, bureaucrats and, most of all, the media itself does not understand. Media specially, in India, is dumbing down with a vengeance, which is also being referred to as the ‘Murdochisation of the media’.

**Presentation:** Basing his analysis on monitoring nine national news channels in India, Dr. Rao revealed that coverage on environment issues has declined to just 1.3% of the total number of news items in 2003 and less than 1% in 2005 (up to September 2005). Pre-occupation with party politics also showed decline as also that of social development (health, development and environment). Data showed a fixation with Delhi and Mumbai as the origin of news. Rural India did figure in national channels; it was as if nothing was happening in the rural India. The contradiction, in terms of the concerns of media, was ‘me and mine’ as opposed to ‘we and us’.



The credibility of the print media had gone up but it was attempting to follow television, as against the other way round initially. Newspapers were doing a better job in covering environment. This has been shown by case studies like *Mathrubhumi*, a Kerala-based regional paper. When the paper took up water as an issue, its circulation went up.

Dr. Bhaskara Rao highlighted that the mass media promoted a “me and mine” syndrome. Unless there was a “we and us” engagement, environment concerns could not be addressed. The community should matter more than the consumer, but it was the consumer and markets that mattered today. The media was posing a threat to environment issues in terms of its content, direction, priorities and pre-occupations. The paradigm shift added to this problem. ‘Gatekeepers of change’ referred to media people -- journalists, editors, sub-editors, etc., but the scene has changed today. Today there is advertising, corporate public relations, market research and space/time buyers. There is a need to sensitize them, for a larger impact.

The environment and wildlife film festival – Vatavaran 2005 -- was an attempt to promote environment concerns. It aimed at galvanizing civil society, promoting space for environment issues in the public media and provoking the public and opinion-makers. Its response could be gauged from the fact that from an initial number of around 100 entries in its first year (2002), it increased to 154 in 2003 and 244 in 2005. Dr. Bhaskara Rao hoped to arm himself with case studies to convince the media that by tackling these realities, their ratings and credibility would only improve.

**Discussion:** Dhara Vala drew attention to the space in-between, where negotiation/persuasion takes place. Participants noted that the response to Vatavaran showed that there was an interest in environment as an issue. A participant cited the decline in coverage of the environment in the electronic media though the interest on these issues was going up. He further questioned what exactly constituted an environment story and what did not: the lines between environment and other issues could be blurred.



Shantanu Dey wondered that if the data showed a drop in coverage not only environment but also of politics, which was considered the central concern, what then had replaced it? The response was that markets and consumer-related issues had taken centre stage.

**Key issues of concern:** Unrestrained consumerism in mass media, a paradigm power shift in media dynamics and absence of rural issues in media coverage.

**Date:** 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2005

**Presentation:** *Human – Wildlife conflicts, with reference to India's vanishing Tigers*

**Presenter:** Sunita Narain, Editor, *Down to Earth*, Director, Centre for Science and Environment and Head, Government of India's Task Force on Tigers.

**Background and purpose:** The objective of the presentation was to look beyond the declining tigers at Sariska and other National Parks, to examine what factors were responsible for this crisis.

**Presentation:** Narain made a strong case on the need for environment journalists to remain primarily journalists, reporting the facts, and not to turn into environmentalists themselves. She drew attention to stories that appeared in the *Indian Express* on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of November, citing that it was based on the confessions of a poor man in the Ranthambhore National Park and that there was no other proof that the man had actually poached. Tigers were so magnificent that journalists could get swayed by emotion rather than report on the facts.

What went wrong in Sariska was a breakdown in internal management, coupled with commercial poaching that had links with organized networks. Actual tiger sightings – as distinct from the official estimates of the tiger population -- revealed selective poaching in 2005. The breakdown in the relations between park managers and the local people was a cause of great concern; there was tremendous bitterness between the two. Huge populations in the fringe area were dependent on the reserve for grazing and firewood. This put the tiger in jeopardy, as villagers were coming

into the reserve. The current approach of guns-guards-fences simply did not work. The reserves needed to be better protected, but each reserve needed to be protected differently: there was no “one-size-fits-all” strategy.



The “core tragedy” of the central Indian peninsula was that the poorest people lived in the richest areas. The tiger districts were also where the forests, mines and watersheds were located. The report of the Tiger Task Force, “Joining The Dots”, strongly recommended the setting up of a Wildlife Crime Bureau. The international community’s inability to crack down on poachers was also strongly critiqued. The report pointed to the need to expand the areas where only the tigers lived, if it was possible to relocate villagers, and but pointed to coexistence being a more likely denouement. Ms. Narain mentioned that in 30 years of Project Tiger, there has been no assessment of the number of people living in tiger reserves.



**Discussion:** Richard Brock, the British film-maker, suggested that guns, fences and guards should be replaced by DVDs. Narain responded that while sensitive films were needed, simplistic films have done more harm. She stressed the need for a holistic development strategy. Suggestions were made on relocating villages within sanctuaries.

**Key issues of concern:** First and foremost issue was the need for journalists to report what they saw, not what they did not – and to remain environment journalists without turning into environmentalists. Secondly, conservation practices needed to be site-specific. Thirdly, the management of natural resources was a core development issue in India.

**Date: 21<sup>st</sup> November 2005**

**Panel discussion: *Do Tigers or People Prevail?***

**Panelists:** Chaired by Keya Acharya, Vice Chair, FEJI; Pankaj Sekhsaria, Kalpvriksh, Pune, Madhu Sarin, Land rights activist, Chandigarh and P.K. Sen, World Wide Fund for Nature, Delhi.

**Background and purpose:** The panel discussion took off from Sunita. Narain's presentation on conservation practices in India and carried forward the theme of human-wildlife conflicts.

**Chair's remarks:** There was a perception in most of the western media that poaching happens because south-east nations are behind it, but the role of the richer western nations that are part of this trade is not highlighted enough.

**Presentation:** For Pankaj Sekhsaria, the question *Do tigers or people prevail?* brought forth the development paradigm in the context of wildlife. However, he asked why this issue had to be posed as a choice in this manner. He emphasized that the focus on tiger was important but the scope needed to be broadened to conservation as a whole, as it concerned not only tigers but also other species of animals and plants as well. Issues of social equity in relation to development and conservation needed to be examined.



Madhu Sarin described the very question as unfortunate, as both needs to be looked into. The constitution had two separate schedules on governance of tribal areas, Schedule V and VI. Ironically, as wildlife conservation was getting media attention, no one was looking into what was happening to the constitutional requirements regarding rights of the people. “Tigers versus people” was not the issue; but land rights certainly was. Vast stretches of land have been appropriated by the state. In the name of development, mining and related practices were being cleared without looking at the ground realities and the consequences for the people. Outsiders were allowed to exploit resources, but not local people. This had resulted in the indigenous people being converted to thieves or poachers in their own lands. For instance, Orissa demands a royalty 30 times more on tendu leaves than on bauxite. She pointed to the governance issue of recognizing tribal rights over their own land.

The question was one of sustainability for P.K. Sen – how to sustain tribals and tigers in a particular space. Unfortunately this country did not have a policy for managing tigers, despite the constitutional guarantee to protect wildlife. The Ministry in charge of land-use should chart out a land-use pattern to decide which land was to be put for which purpose. Even where rights had been given, they had not been utilized properly. Relocation was the priority of the government, not of the forest department. The rural development department had money for health, education, housing and for all other amenities when the villages are shifted out and named revenue villages.

**Discussion:** Armed guards had reduced poaching in the rhino sanctuary of Kaziranga in Assam but the same would lead to anarchy in Bihar. Conservation needs had to be addressed specifically. Mapping of forest cover did not help, as there was the possibility of vast stretches of wasteland being listed as forests. While relocation gave tribals land, this was not enough, since they could no longer sustain themselves from the forest and without this resource, they could not survive. The conservation policy had created conflicts. As regards inadequacy of data, the Forest Survey of India did not distinguish between plantations and forests, while the Forest Conservation Act did not accept the former as forests.



**Key issues of concern:** Indigenous people's rights, relocation issues, conflicts arising out of conservation policies, environment concerns in conflict regions and mining activities continuing without legal clearance.

**Date:** 21<sup>st</sup> November 2005

**Panel discussion:** *Are environmental journalists a vanishing species?*

**Panelist:** Chaired by Darryl D'Monte; Jim Detjen, Director, Knight Centre for Environment Journalism, Michigan State University, US.

**Background and purpose:** Jim Detjen stressed that environmental journalists are not vanishing but are certainly threatened. Natural disasters have sparked off new kinds of citizen journalism – blogs, cell phone photos, the use of net to provide for ways of aiding people, etc.

**Presentation:** In 2002, Mark Schleifstein of *Times-Picayune* in New Orleans predicted the likely collapse of the levees and the flooding of the city, as occurred in 2005 due to Hurricane Katrina. This was some of the best investigative reporting in America on environment in America. Katrina has spurred new kinds of journalism – websites, cell phone photos, etc.

The Society for Environmental Journalists (SEJ) in the US, with 1,500 members, continues to offer new resources to its members. The SEJ has shown a rapid increase in freelance journalists, academics and news media in its membership.

Why is environment journalism important? Most of what the public knows about science and environment comes from news media – TV (80%), newspaper (50%), internet (20%) and radio (18%). The citizen's biggest concern in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is environment, followed by war, poverty, crime, overpopulation, etc. Environment journalism helps combat scientific illiteracy.





Environment as a beat began in the 1960s. Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* (1962) helped set the stage for the environment movement in the U.S. Newspapers started hiring environment reporters in the 1970s and 1980s. Its coverage has waxed and waned but has increased overall in the last 30 years. News coverage on the environment has shown an increase following calamities. Instances can be cited of Three Mile Island (1979), Bhopal (1984), Chernobyl (1986) and Exxon Valdez oil spill (1989). The Exxon oil spill in Alaska sparked off the growth of environment reporting on TV and the news media. World population growth, rising water usage, global warming and the problems caused by it are expected to remain critical environment issues in the next 50 years. Some of the environment issues in India are deforestation, air pollution, water pollution, tiger and wildlife threats, controversy over dams, animal species and soil erosion.

Journalism as a field is changing. In 2004, it is in the middle of an epochal transformation. Some of the factors influencing this transformation are technical changes, growth in the concerns of media, decline of mainstream media. Other sources of news in the US comprise ethnic media, alternative news, internet, National Public Radio. Environment news on TV is fast disappearing and the credibility of news has continued to decline. Other problems are the lack of resources, decline in international news coverage and mainstream newspapers covering celebrities more than serious and national issues. On the brighter side, the public has shown interest. Environment and science journalists are better educated. Moreover, professional organizations are not only growing but are financially healthy. Environment-development issues, specially sustainability, are being reported in the non-traditional media. Experiments are growing with citizen journalism, the media democracy movement and blogs and wikis.

Is citizen journalism really journalism? Information in citizen journalism is often unconfirmed and raw but many social and political movements did begin with it. An instance is of Tom Paine during the American Revolution. An ethical dilemma faced by journalists is the blurring of lines between news and business, which can get translated into a conflict of interest.



**Chair's remark:** The situation in India is different and there has been a marked decline since the 1980s. Environment journalism took root after the Emergency when the Indian media came to its own. Hindi journalists, who covered issues like the Chipko (Hug the Tree) movement in the Himalayas, did the best work. Development and environment are two sides of the same coin. It is not a question of stopping the trees from being cut but seeing that the root cause was the lack of development which forces men to migrate and women to forage resources for themselves. Environmental movements in industrially developed nations are different from that in developing ones and this is reflected in their journalism. The environment binds nations, which are otherwise in conflict with each other.

**Discussion:** Issues that were brought up were water resources, the Narmada dam, migrants, dangers of citizen journalism. According to Detjen, one reason for citizen journalism being on the rise is that the mainstream media has been declining, creating a void.

**Key issues of concern:** Preserving the environment in the face of development.

**Date:** 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2005

**Panel discussion:** Original title: *Does TV do a better job on environment reporting?* – which was modified as *How can TV do a better job on covering the environment?*

**Panelists:** Chaired by Nalaka Gunawardene, TVE Asia Pacific, Colombo; Damandeep Singh, National Geographic Channel India, New Delhi; Swati Thyagrajan, NDTV, New Delhi; and Bahar Dutt, CNN-IBN, New Delhi.



**Background and purpose:** The Chair suggested that the title be changed to ‘How can TV do a better job in covering the environment?’ Rather than compare TV with other media, it would be more productive to see how this powerful medium can improve its own coverage. Surveys across Asia Pacific have shown that TV has emerged as the primary source of environmental information for the non-specialist public across much of Asia. This provides both opportunities and challenges for environmentally conscious journalists and film-makers to use this powerful medium to communicate messages of conservation and lifestyle change.

This medium’s versatility is in that it offers a range of programming formats for getting environmental information across: news and current affairs, documentary, public service announcement (PSA), and even entertainment formats like drama and music. Each of these formats offers different paths to engage various segments of our mass audience, and these can be used effectively to raise awareness, advocate for specific changes, influence behaviour and lifestyles, and support environmental education, he said. Gunawardene quoted Sunita Narain from her opening address at the Vatavaran Film Festival, where she said many environmental stories are complex, multi-faceted and challenging, and asked: ‘How do we tell these complex stories to people who are not necessarily interested or informed about the background issues?’



**Presentation:** Swati Thyagarajan mentioned that print medium has so far done a far better job than TV in covering the environment. In NDTV, 95 per cent of coverage is on entertainment and politics while 5 per cent is on issues such as environment. There are several constraints in covering environmental stories for TV, including: the need for visual proof for a story; problem of filming sources who often don't wish to be quoted or their identity known; limited budgets; and difficulty of access to some locations of environmental interest. There are also institutional challenges in getting environment stories on air, though it has been becoming easier in the last three years. TV has been accused of 'dumbing down' stories, and being a superficial medium. While it is true that compromises have to be made to make a story more appealing, the medium also has its huge advantages: it is immediate and effective with audiences – seeing is believing. It still remains a relatively expensive medium. There are also situations where the environmental culprits being investigated in news stories turn out to be big-time advertisers of the same media organization.

Bahar Dutt pointed out that the potential of TV medium in communicating complex issues of environment and wildlife remains largely untapped. She agreed that the print medium is doing a far better job -- but then, it has a longer history than TV and has evolved to that stage over time. Evoking the audience is important, but that needs to be balanced with a solid base of science in conservation stories. She related her own experience as a former conservationist who took to television mid-career to get people more supportive of conservation.

She lamented that there is not enough coverage of the science of conservation in many environmental stories appearing on Indian television. She added: We need more resources, time and reporters to engage in more in-depth and sustained coverage of issues as they evolve. We also need to move environmental stories away from being treated as soft, feature stories to hard news. There are serious turf wars being fought over environment and natural resources.



Damandeep Singh addressed the larger problem of reporting environment. Media practitioners need to be aware of commercialised media being exploitative of situations, people and issues they cover. “The public interest is not necessarily what drives the media’s agenda. There are many pressures – including political and commercial – that play on media organisations,” he said. He added: “We need to find or create new space for more positive stories. But let’s be clear that it’s not media’s role to educate; that’s only a by-product of the media playing its principal roles of investigating, reporting, analysing and informing.”

**Discussion:** The discussion covered aspects as diverse as the political economy of the mass media and ethical considerations of environmental coverage to the impact of new media technologies and outlets on how environment is covered in the mainstream media. The following concerns were raised during discussion.

- Credit-taking by portraying a story as breaking story though it may not be breaking in that sense is an issue.
- Pankaj Sekhsaria, of the environmental group Kalpavriksh, raised the issue of foreign film crews visiting India and engaging in bribery and corruption to obtain filming permits and to gain access to restricted areas such as wildlife sanctuaries and national parks. “In the end they might get a good story, but it spoils the chances of all others who come after them,” Sekhsaria added.
- Bahar Dutt recalled how a park ranger had once offered to dig up buried eggs just so she could film it. “I immediately turned it down, but someone else might have been tempted – it was a chance for a good visual.”
- The ethics of using hidden cameras was also discussed. There was broad agreement that it was acceptable when engaging in investigative – sometimes hazardous – reporting on illegal



activities that damage the environment. These include smuggling in endangered species of wild animals and plants, or poaching in protected areas.

- An environmental educator lamented how too many good films that are made for television remain beyond the reach of those engaged in awareness raising and education. Too often, there are copyright restrictions, language barriers and other factors that prevent these material from being used, she said.

**Key issues of concern:** Tendency to see things as ‘either-or’ situations – people versus wildlife, ethical codes of conduct, the need to convince editors, visual proofs and the difficulty in getting people to talk on camera, along with the role of the vernacular media formed key issues of concern.

**Date:** 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2005

**Workshop:** *E-journalism*

### **Presenter**

Jim Detjen, Director, Knight Centre for Environment Journalism and Dave Poulson, Assistant Director, Knight Centre for Environment Journalism

**No. of participants:** approximately 40 participants, mostly students.

**Presentation:** The starting point for Detjen was why environment journalism is important. Natural disasters have encouraged new kinds of citizen journalism – blogs, cell phone photos and websites. Environment journalism is important as most of what the public knows about science and environment comes from news media – TV (80%), newspaper (50%), internet (20%) and radio (18%). Citizen’s biggest concern in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is environment followed by war, poverty, crime, overpopulation, etc. Environment journalism helps combat scientific illiteracy.

Scientists, government agencies, environmental activists and eyewitnesses are people that have been interviewed by environment journalists in pursuit of stories. [www.proofnet.com](http://www.proofnet.com) and [www.mediaresourceservice.org](http://www.mediaresourceservice.org) are two sources of finding thousands of science experts. Some ways of obtaining information are public documents, court reports, databases and libraries, eyewitnesses reporting, aerial and satellite images and hiring experts to do testing (in the case of investigative reporting).

Detjen cited some useful journalism organizations – the Society for Environmental Journalists ([www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org)), Knight Centre for Environmental Journalism, International Science Writers Association, National Association of Science Writers, Investigative Reporters and Writers and International Federation of Environmental Journalists ([www.ifej.org](http://www.ifej.org)).



The big question here is: how do you make sense in evaluating environment risks? The best environment journalism is grounded in sound science and put into a historical context. It is important to know who you are writing for, to include multiple sources of information and double-check information for

verification and confirmation. Environmental journalists face such challenges as evaluating risks, translating jargon, making technical information interesting, dealing in uncertainties besides the hazards in covering environment disasters. There is also the dilemma on ethics. He concluded that journalism is in the middle of an epochal transformation as momentous as probably the invention of the telegraph and television. Technology is rapidly changing things for journalists.



Dave Poulson's presentation was entitled 'Frontiers of environment journalism – get out of the office and learn some skills'. He stressed that being an environment journalist is not the same as an environmentalist reporter. One has to look for facts, and in searching for these facts, one should think about pushing one's limits. He referred to the two journalists who worked on the loss of wetlands in Florida by generating their own data from satellite images. Poulson emphasized on the use of technologies and visual references to communicate, as this would not only increase impact but also has the possibility of leading to stories.

**Discussion:** Blogs become important where information is critical of governments, especially in environmental issues and in a situation where hardly any TV channels chase such stories. Questions were raised regarding international platforms to share and report issues and possibility of payment in e-journalism.

**Key issues of concern:** Marketing environment to editors and the question of linking environment to other issues were key issues in the workshop.

**Date:** 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2005

**Open session:** *How environment journalists can help themselves.*

Chaired by Darryl D'Monte

**Background and purpose:** The open session was aimed at throwing up ideas on how environment journalists can help sustain themselves. Since a large number of such journalists are freelance, they could be helped by helping each other getting published in their countries or regions.





**Chair's remarks:** In capitals like Delhi, which has among the largest number of broadsheets in the world, it is difficult to get the attention of journalists, as shown by the sparse attendance, because they are pampered and have too many other issues occupying them. The function of the IFEJ was to keep environmental journalists throughout the world in touch with each other, as environment was getting increasingly globalised. It arranged for journalists to attend international conferences, held training workshops and put out useful information on its listserv. Its slogan could well be: 'networking or not working'.

**Discussion:** Participants shared information on available resources like web-links, fellowships. Some of the resource links were [complusalliance.org](http://complusalliance.org), [downtoearth.org](http://downtoearth.org), [www.scidev.net](http://www.scidev.net), [indiatogether.org](http://indiatogether.org), [infochangeindia.org](http://infochangeindia.org), [sustainablebusiness.com](http://sustainablebusiness.com), [craigslist.org](http://craigslist.org), [www.loe.org](http://www.loe.org), Neiman Fellowships (at Harvard University), Stanford University, Knight Wallace Fellowships (Michigan), Knight Science Writers Fellowships (MIT), Reuters Fellowships and Fulbright Scholarships. Mention was also made of the Hupert Humphrey Fellowships for journalists from the developing world.

**Discussion:** Usman Jimada raised the issue of outlets for environment stories. As environment concerns in Nigeria mostly focused on oil spills, forests, conservation and activities of oil companies - who are mostly advertisers as well - the efforts of environment journalists do not find support in the media. There is, hence, a serious need for outlets. The suggestion was to try to get published through environment journalists' networks of contacts.

Another need for environmental journalists, specially freelancers, was to build contacts with NGOs and research organizations. A suggestion was to relate environment to other spheres, 'to talk in their own language'. This meant that if the medium was oriented towards entertainment, environment concerns should respond accordingly.

**Key issues of concern:** Difficulties of marketing environment to editors, opportunities for networking among international environment reporters.



**Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2005**

**Presentation: *Seven years of Conservation International's Biodiversity Reporting Award in Latin America and Africa***

**Presenter: Haroldo Castro, Vice President, Global Communications, Conservation International.**

**Background and purpose:** The purpose of the presentation was to discuss an analysis of the trends of the Biodiversity Reporting Award (BDRA) and its evolution since 1999. The BDRA is an environmental journalism contest designed to increase the quantity and quality of environmental reporting by building capacity, providing training and recognizing the outstanding work of environmental journalists in the biodiversity-rich countries where Conservation International (CI) works. The BDRA is a collaborative effort between CI, the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) the International Federation of Environmental Journalists (IFEJ) and the Fundación Biodiversidad (FB).

**No. of participants:** Approximately 30 participants.

**Presentation:** The presentation started with a video clip about the BDRA, which provided general information about the award and clips of the international award ceremonies that took place during 2005.

Mr. Castro's presentation was based on an analysis of the results of the BDRA from 1999 to 2005, in Brazil and the five Andean countries, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela. A total of 999 articles written by 446 journalists from 191 media were compared and analyzed.

The analysis studied what topics journalists favored in each country, the BDRA jury tendencies when selecting the winner articles and the perspectives that were used to write such articles. The analysis found that "Animal Species" was the most popular theme among journalists and the



jury, 15% of the articles focused on this topic and 22% of the awards were given to articles written about animal species. The other most popular topics were articles written about "Ecosystems" (11% of the articles and 18% of the winner articles) and "Protected Areas" (14% of the articles and 13% of the winner articles). The less popular topics were indigenous people, infrastructure and environmental education.

The perspectives used by the journalists who compete in the BDRA tend to be either Informative, Denunciative or Solution-oriented. Of the 999 articles analyzed, 451 (45%) articles were informative, while 334 (33%) were denunciative and the remaining 214 (21%) were solution-oriented. However, it was found that in general the articles that manage to incorporate the three perspectives tend to be more complete and tend to win more awards.

Furthermore, the analysis studied the proportion of the journalist's gender in each country, compared percentage of articles published in magazines vs. newspapers, and highlighted tendencies regarding whether the articles were published in capital cities or rural areas.

**Discussion:** There were some questions and discussions regarding several aspects of the Biodiversity Reporting Award 2005 and about topics such as gender proportion of the BDRA judges.

**Date:** 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2005

**Panel discussion:** *Reporting on environment, science and development*

**Panelists:** Chaired by Nalaka Gunawardene; A.S. Paneerselvan, Panos South Asia, Kathmandu; T.V. Jayan, *Down to Earth*, New Delhi and T.V. Padma, SciDev, New Delhi.

**Background and purpose:** The panel discussion is contextualized in the significance and the challenge of reporting on science and creating a scientific outlook among people.

**No. of participants:** approximately 35 participants.



**Presentation:** It was generally accepted that science and environment are part of our lives and that science needed to reach the people. While reporting on environment, research should not be avoided. Rather, it should be used to strengthen journalism. TV Jayan elaborated on how environmental movements are strengthened when backed by science. The Chipko (Hug the Tree) movement was more of an emotional appeal rather than based on science while the successful movement against a dam in Silent Valley in Kerala was built on scientific reasoning.

For Paneerselvan the real challenge in reporting on science is that one has to be content with one-sided reports of experts. Taking the instance of nuclear plants in India, he listed two problems. Firstly, the Indian nuclear establishment is a supra-national body answerable to none and secondly, science needs to be looked at from a scientific angle and not out of 'sheer patriotism'. He stressed the importance for science journalists to look at other sources beyond ministries to cull out figures and never to be threatened by the question 'are you a scientist?', often thrown on them by scientists.

TV Padma agreed with Narain that 'environment journalists' need to be differentiated from 'environmentalists'. SciDev is a site formed to help individuals and organizations in developing world to make an informed decision on science and technology related issues that impact social and economic development. It tries, for instance, to address how biodiversity concerns can be reconciled with development needs.

The panel discussion focused on the question: if one has a message to convey, what will it take to attract news coverage? What efforts and hazards are involved? Taking instances, Panneerselvan warned that very often journalists themselves, instead of testing the limits, indulge in censoring themselves even before censors get into the act. For Damandeep Singh, the Tehelka episode – where the defence establishment was caught by hidden cameras accepting cash for contracts -- proved the power of the image. Sadly, the involved people not only faced charges but



also were virtually ostracized by the media. Gunawardene pointed out that the challenge remains in trying to get scientists to talk in non-technical terms.

**Discussion:** the issue of lack of transparency on nuclear issues and the need to draw guidelines for journalists' access and right to information was raised. However, it was stressed that the Indian nuclear establishment was a supra-national body and most media-savvy. Mention was made of the American investigative journalist Paul Jacob, who exposed the Tarapur Atomic Power station in the inaugural issue of *Mother Jones* magazine in the mid-1970s, during the national emergency.

Participants asked whether the SciDev site was interactive. The response was that it was not a two-way process. However, policy makers and NGOs who have made use of the site have given feedback. How do you work with someone who is not media savvy but has the conviction and expertise? Are there too many talking heads in environment stories? These were questions thrown open to the audience. The response was to ensure that those persons do not come in front of the camera as it might even hamper the case but to make use of their expertise through the use of such techniques as voice-over, etc. comments were invited on the 'art of interview' to open up people.

**Key issues of concern:** The Barah amendment, according to which the United States would provide funds to build nuclear stations in India, is a cause of concern as it was felt that it would mean a surrendering of sovereign rights. Exposure to radio-active substances has been voiced with concern – be it in university labs across India, or their dumping in the Periyar river in Kerala or the nuclear residual fall-out route (transportation by road).

**Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2005**

**Workshop: *Broadcast journalism: How can environment make TV news?***



**Panelists:** Chaired by Nalaka Gunawardene, TVE Asia Pacific, Colombo; A. S. Panneerselvan and Rakesh Kalshian from Panos South Asia, Kathmandu; and Damandeep Singh, National Geographic Channel India.

**Background and purpose:** The workshop's scope was defined and confined to the news and current affairs content on broadcast television. TV news is a powerful programme format as it attracts consistently high audience reaching a cross-section of society. How can this format be used optimally to cover environmental issues?

**No. of participants:** Around 45, mostly students of mass communication.

**Chair's remarks:** The Chair presented a series of questions that framed the workshops presentations and discussions:

- What exactly is an environmental news story for TV?
- What requirements have to be met for a TV channel to carry an environmental story?
- What green and brown stories seem to interest TV news bulletins or channels – and why? Is there such a thing as news agenda?
- Where do environmental news stories first emerge these days – newspapers, TV or websites? What triggers and processes are involved? Who follows whom?
- Where does an aspiring young TV journalist look for authentic, exclusive environmental stories?
- What does a discerning news editor expect and demand of environmental stories?
- Is there a bias for – or against -- environmental news in the news rooms?
- What factors hinder or block some environmental stories from getting on the news, or receiving sustained coverage?
- What pressures work on reporters, editors, managers and owners? Are there ways to work around these pressures, or ignore them?



**Presentation:** For Panneerselvan, journalism is not a profession but a mission -- one has to have one's political affiliation and strategy clear. A journalist should be able to pitch and argue for his story with his own gatekeepers. He said there are no 'full-stops' in good journalism; only commas – as a story evolves, the journalist has to stay with it and keep audiences updated. He suggested a slice-by-slice technique of covering the same issue from different angles. Instead of focusing on only one, journalists should realize the media's limitations and work around them. It is also important to take a stand on some issues, and to push for a wide debate – not just to allow the voices of those in positions of power, but also the under-dog and voiceless.

Damandeep Singh acknowledged that environment issues concern not just a 'green reporter' but everybody in the broadcast media. But the question is: how do we communicate it effectively? He urged not to get typecast as an environment journalist, but try to relate everything to the broader environment and development concerns. A journalist should have a clear agenda, but he did not agree with Panneerselvan on accommodating everyone's point of view. The powerful have their own way of getting their views across, so we journalists should concentrate on the normally voiceless.

Kalshian held that the media's grasp of environment was very narrow and shallow, where as in the real and wide world the issues are very complex with intricate linkages. It is essential for reporters to understand these complexities. For instance, why is it that a story in Bihar or Jharkhand does not easily get covered on the so-called national TV channels? He stressed that the art of a good environment reporting is not only to pursue an issue and refer to available reports, but also to be able to think through them.

As part of the workshop, two short films were screened:

- Extracts from a recent TV documentary produced by TVE Asia Pacific was screened. Titled *Deep Divide*, it profiled the work of three environmental journalists – in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka – who investigated the reality of environmental justice in their own countries, under support from Panos South Asia.

- Award-winning Indian film-maker Shekhar Dattatri screened his short film *Mindless Mining*, and described his struggle to end the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company's long disputed mining operations in the protected Kudremukh National Park, in Karnataka state in India.



**Discussion:** The panel remarks and film screenings were interspersed with lively discussion with participants. The following are some highlights:

- If some environmental stories do not attract sufficient attention of viewers, the challenge is for reporters to make them interesting.
- Environment stories have to fight for space – a struggle as most media gatekeepers are 30 years or older, while TV viewers are mostly in the age group of 15 to 30.
- Instead of strict compartmentalization, linkages between environment and other aspects should be brought out. For instance, cutting down of trees in Uttaranchal (Chipko) had a direct effect on the health of women in the area.
- The voice of the journalist is the voice of the citizen. As such, for the journalist it is not niche but a part of life.





- Sometimes political journalists pick up specific environment and wildlife issues like tiger conservation. But that is more for the controversy than the science or substance of the stories concerned.
- It is debatable whether environment stories ought to be classified as such, or be mixed with other issues.
- Environmental journalism entails undertaking risks. However, it would be difficult to take up such risks at the beginning of one's career.
- Panneerselvan advised that there are certain taboo areas in any organization. Beyond these areas, the whole space is open. A beginner needs to figure out what these areas are so that there is less conflict of interests.

**Key issues of concern:** Should environment be mixed with other issues? This question, along with that of ethics, formed key areas of discussion.