

Addressing HIV/AIDS: Indian Journalists' Opinion about News Coverage, Journalist Roles, and Strategic Communication Efforts

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Abstract: It is estimated that 2.5 million people in India are HIV positive. Set within the context of the role of communication in addressing social justice issues, this paper describes a qualitative study of Indian journalists' opinions about the quality of press coverage of HIV/AIDS in India, including its socially responsible nature, if present, the role of public journalism in this coverage, obstacles to and ways of improving this coverage, and the effectiveness of HIV/AIDS strategic campaigns. The data were gathered from nine journalists in two Indian cities representing English or local (Gujarati) language newspapers.

The general consensus was that coverage had created awareness. Traditional news values were the filters for selecting HIV/AIDS stories rather than any overriding socially responsible approach. The journalists were unanimously against getting involved in communities and then reporting on them as some definitions of social responsibility public journalism suggest because this would compromise their objectivity. Obstacles to good coverage included the need to understand the topic (time consuming) and the need to have an open mind (not always present) and suggestions to improve coverage included messaging in Bollywood films, which have a hold on the Indian public. Journalists had mixed views on the effectiveness of campaigns addressing HIV/AIDS. Some felt that these had done a reasonable amount of good work, others that NGOs wasted money.

Keywords: India, HIV/AIDS, socially responsible journalism.

PURPOSE

The notion of responsible journalism has been around for many decades as evident in various journalistic philosophies and theories: social responsibility, public journalism, development journalism, peace journalism, and such. Similarly, the idea of strategically using communication through social marketing or dialogue to make change has been discussed, debated and practiced for several decades. This study is set within the context of the role of communication (both journalism and strategic communication) in making social change. The larger focus of this study was on journalism, with a minor focus on strategic communication. The issue of interest to this study was HIV/AIDS.

Specifically, this paper describes an exploratory qualitative study of Indian journalists' views about the quantity and quality of Indian media coverage of HIV/AIDS including its socially responsible nature if present, roles of journalists in general in this coverage with a particular probe on the socially responsible public journalism roles, constraints in covering HIV/AIDS, ways to improve coverage, and the success or lack thereof of HIV/AIDS strategic campaigns.

HIV/AIDS IN INDIA

One of the eight UN Millennium Development Goals is devoted to eradicating HIV/AIDS, a testimony to the threat

this disease poses to the world. In 25 years, this disease has taken 25 million lives, and today about 8,000 people die from AIDS every day (UNAIDS, 2006). According to UNAIDS (2008), "In 2007 alone, 33 million ... people were living with HIV, 2.7 million ... people became infected with the virus, and 2 million ... people died of HIV related causes" (p. 16).

India is among the top three countries in number of HIV cases, and the World Bank estimates that treatment cost could be about seven percent of India's total health care expenditure (Majumdar, 2010). UNAIDS (2008) estimates that, in India, in 2007, 2.4 million adults and children were HIV positive. Prevalence among adults, 15 to 49 years old is estimated at .3 percent. Altogether, 880,000 women above the age of 15 are estimated to be seropositive. Among high-risk groups in the capital city (Delhi), it is estimated that prevalence is 6.9 percent among injecting drug users and 6.4 percent among men who have sex with men. A prevalence estimate for female sex workers is not available. Injecting drug use is responsible for many cases in northeastern India (UNAIDS, 2008), and it is suggested that women are mostly infected by their regular partners who have paid for sex (Anonymous, 2006).

In 2006, in India, only 10 percent of those with advanced HIV were receiving antiretroviral therapy (UNAIDS, 2008). Furthermore, only between one and two percent of men and women between the ages of 15 and 49 had received an HIV test and knew their status. Among sex workers in India this percent was higher (34%), but figures were not available for other at-high-risk groups.

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Somewhat more encouraging are the following statistics. Young men and women (15 to 24 years old) in India who knew how HIV is transmitted and who rejected correctly myths about HIV ranged from 24 to 33 percent across gender in 2006. Among female sex workers, the group for which this statistic was available, it was 38%. The percent of 15-24 year olds who had sex before the age of 15 ranged from two to four across gender for 2006. Also, the practice of having multiple concurrent partners was not highly prevalent in India. And, condom use among sex workers was high (UNAIDS, 2008). Still, a considerable amount of work needs to be done, particularly because of the high impact HIV has for poor people: poverty reduction in India will be slowed by 23% annually (*Asia-Pacific's*, 2004). As Mortenson (2009) has said, "For poor people in poor countries, very little simply falls into place" (p. 231).

THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION

While the medical community is addressing the HIV/AIDS related public health situation, pure medicalization of the AIDS epidemic is not sufficient to deal with it; the patient's psychological and emotional well-being are important too (Selwyn and Arnold, 1998). Communication plays an important role in addressing some of these issues by dealing with issues of stigma, community attitudes, family support, and so forth. Communication is also critical in prevention of the disease. According to UNAIDS (2008), to address this disease, prevention needs to be prioritized. At the same time, "Sustaining prevention gains represents one of the great challenges in HIV prevention. To maintain a robust prevention response, countries need to nurture a "prevention movement", build the human and technical capacity needed to sustain prevention efforts, and work to stimulate greater demand for prevention services" (UNAIDS, 2008, p. 96). Two of the major means of communication for creating awareness about prevention as well as about the importance of familial and societal care and support are a) strategic communication campaigns and b) the journalistic word.

Strategic communication campaigns have been widely used in addressing HIV/AIDS through behavior change communication and social marketing (<http://www.comminit.com/>). These strategies apply the principles of marketing and advertising to social causes, essentially and ideally using a participatory approach with local input in creating multiple levels of messages for various target groups to effect change in behavior (Family Health International, n.d.).

The power of a journalist's writing has also been used to address the disease. However, HIV/AIDS' coverage is contingent on the same news values (novelty, timeliness, proximity, conflict, and so forth) used as filters for story selection for other topics. Some have argued however that social issues of importance to community, society, nation and the world might be better addressed by a socially responsible press that uses social justice filters to determine the salience of a story as well as the approach used in covering it. Thus, per this line of thinking, the seriousness of the disease warrants greater and more nuanced and sensitive coverage of HIV/AIDS than traditional filters might allow. Papa, Singhal, and Papa (2006) suggest that "The mass

media also has [sic] an important role to play in amplifying a discourse of dignity" (p. 245).

Various theoretical models for socially responsible journalism are available. In the United States, the Hutchins Commission's social responsibility theory of the press promoted the idea of a press that has the interests of society in mind (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, 1956). Of particular importance, however, to this paper is public or civic journalism, which also had its genesis in the United States. Over time, as this idea was explicated and practiced, it accumulated several definitions from the simple idea of a story providing enabling information such as where to get a vaccination, for example (Schaffer, 1997), to journalists' engaging with the community, through forums such as town hall meetings, to elicit problems and generate solutions. It extended its purpose to mobilizing people and possibly even having journalists participate in the implementation of solutions (Friedland, Sotirovic and Daily, 1998; Schaffer, 2004). Furthermore, such journalism could reinvigorate social capital (Friedland, Sotirovic and Daily, 1998), i.e., the normative bonds that tie a community together in mutually supporting and trusting relationships (Coleman, 1988), which give agency to individuals but inside the network of social relationships.

Communitarian journalism, deriving from South Africa's concept of *ubuntu*, shares some of public journalism's ideas about journalism's and journalists' roles: "Interaction is stimulated among citizens, between citizens and reporters, and between citizens and politicians.... Discussion leads to solutions, to proactive involvement in getting things done. The role of the press goes beyond information to social change" (Christians, 2004, p. 249). Craig (1996) has suggested that in fact communitarian journalism is also being practiced as public journalism, though without being grounded in the communitarian philosophy of an individual's identity being socially constituted and of a dialogic ethic that foregrounds others rather than self (Christians, 2004).

In the developing world, this transformative role for journalism was particularly appealing in face of the post-colonial era development tasks awaiting these newly independent countries. Development journalism, a press theory of the developing world, would encourage a focus on development issues, grassroots efforts, and people's needs (Shah, 1988), and also on critical reportage of development policy and practice (Aggarwala, 1977).

These press philosophies that suggest journalist engagement, through word or deed, in addressing community social issues have met with considerable criticism from scholars and practitioners (Barney, 1996; Merrill, 1996; Sussman, 1981). At the same time, even American journalists who are generally wedded to concepts of objectivity, balance, and distance, report playing responsible, participatory, mobilizing and civic roles (Gade *et al.*, 1998; Johnstone, Slawski, and Bowman, 1976; Weaver, 1998; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996; Weaver, *et al.*, 2007).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Within the context of socially responsible approaches to journalism, this study asked:

1. What were the perceptions of Indian journalists about:
 - a. The quantity and quality of HIV/AIDS coverage in India including its socially responsible nature, if present?
 - b. Roles of journalists in this coverage, particularly whether journalists should play the socially responsible public journalism roles?
 - c. Constraints to this coverage and how coverage could be improved?

The study also asked:

2. What were the perceptions of Indian journalists about the role of strategic communication campaigns (i.e., interventions) in addressing HIV/AIDS?

METHOD

The study received permission from a US university's Human Subjects Committee. It used the method of in-depth interviews. This method is appropriate for an exploratory study because it provides respondents the opportunity to give more nuanced answers and enables the researcher to get a deeper look into any issue through follow-up probes. A contact in the Faculty of Journalism and Communication of M. S. University, Baroda, assisted the author in setting up appointments with staff members in various media outlets. Altogether five journalists were interviewed in Vadodara and four in Ahmedabad, both cities in Gujarat. The respondents came from either English or local (Gujarati) language private newspapers. The English language newspapers were *The Times of India* (three journalists, two in Vadodara and one in Ahmedabad), *Indian Express* (Vadodara), *Daily News and Analysis* (two journalists, both in Ahmedabad), and the local language newspapers were *Gujarat Samachar* (Vadodara), *Sandesh* (Vadodara), and *Divya Bhasker* (Ahmedabad).

The respondents held the positions of Principal Correspondent (2), Metro Editor, Senior Copy Editor, Special Correspondent, Bureau Chief, and Reporter (3). They had worked in journalism for between three to fourteen years (this information was not available for one respondent). Four of the respondents were females and five were males. One had a bachelor's degree, six a master's degree, and the degrees of two of the respondents is not known. The respondents ranged in age from 26 to 41 years.

The data were collected in November 2006. A standard protocol was used for each interview. Thus, all journalists were asked the same questions though probes based on their answers could be different. The protocol had questions about the quantity and quality of coverage of HIV/AIDS in India, as well as the journalists' own contribution to this coverage, constraints and ways to improve coverage, journalists' roles in covering the disease especially the considerably engaged roles that some definitions of public journalism advocate, and the role of strategic campaigns in addressing HIV/AIDS.

The author had to explain the various definitions of public journalism to the respondents because most were unfamiliar with it. She also explained the specific meaning of "strategic campaigns" (a package of messages specially created to target certain audiences for a certain purpose, usually using more than one medium—TV, radio, etc.) to ensure that there was a shared understanding of the question.

The questions were asked in the order in which they appeared. Seven of the nine interviews were recorded and later transcribed; two were recorded on paper.

FINDINGS

Quantity and Quality of Coverage of HIV/AIDS: News Values and Socially Responsible Journalism

The general consensus was that coverage of HIV/AIDS in Indian newspapers was reasonably good, comprehensive and prominent and had created awareness and generated reader response, sometimes positive and sometimes negative. An example of reported positive effects of coverage was that a leading newspaper had created a matrimonial column for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHA); the journalist who provided this example believed that this gave PLHA the confidence that they could live normal lives. At the same time, the journalists did not think that the coverage was sustained; they thought it was episodic and mostly relegated to the human-interest feature story genre. Journalists also felt that some of the coverage was sensational at times, was creating fear of the disease, and that the media projected HIV/AIDS as a demon, as death. Journalists mentioned that critical stories were also written; one story was about a government hospital that sterilized disposable equipment because it was short of funds.

While the issue of socially responsible journalism did arise in interviewer responses to the quality of coverage of HIV/AIDS, journalists did not mention any special social justice or socially responsible journalism news value. When what they tended to call a "positive" story was written, it found its way into the newspaper because it had one or more of the traditional news values. Examples of stories using novelty as the news value and thus receiving extensive coverage included a story on marriage between HIV positive people and a story about a "swayamvar," where a bride picks a groom from several men who have lined up. In this case, HIV positive men and women gathered to choose partners so that they could live with someone who understands the disease and thus have a support system built into the family. Respondents indicated that without this element of the unusual, HIV/AIDS would receive little coverage because HIV was not news any more; it has been reported on "for ages." The sex worker condom story was of "no use" because the red light precincts were inundated with condoms but in general stories about sex workers were "spicy" and therefore "highly readable." Controversy was also used as a news filter; one story questioned whether HIV was undercutting funding for other diseases.

In addition to the traditional news values, if an HIV/AIDS story provided a frame or peg that could capture audience interest, it was selected. The story had to have a "USP"—a unique selling proposition, a term that advertisers use to sell their products. It had to be packaged to make it past the superiors because a story without "dum" (punch) would not make it. Its "readability" was important; just providing information would not do if this information was not presented in an interesting manner. Thus a story about two HIV positive children being thrown out of an orphanage was more about drama and discrimination than about HIV. A health reporter said that her HIV/AIDS stories appeared on page one not only because they were sensitively done but

also because she used a news peg that caught the reader's attention. Stories would not be covered if they did not have news pegs/frames or other traits that would attract audience interest. For example, because Gujarat NGOs had done a good job in addressing HIV, HIV/AIDS cases with "pathos" were not easily available, the implication being that coverage was therefore limited. Other points of view also emerged, that HIV was not a "stale" issue and journalists were interested in covering it, but these were in the minority.

The issue of the social responsibility of journalists was also brought up. One journalist believed that in the past journalists, doctors and teachers were all bound by a sense of responsibility but that doctors and teachers had moved away to some extent from this approach and so had journalists. The implication was that this expectation of social responsibility from journalists might be misplaced. At the same time this journalist suggested that to break away from usual coverage based on routine news values, journalists had to be serious in their approach to the disease and have a social commitment as well as a sense of responsibility about gathering information, making it public, and questioning policy. Some journalists mentioned that social responsibility was a personal trait. One journalist said that her sensitivity was part of her personality rather than an approach honed by her education in development communication; she would give up a story rather than hurt someone.

Socially Responsible Public Journalism Roles in Covering HIV/AIDS

Among the socially responsible role theories of journalism is public journalism. While the author asked respondents a general question about the roles of journalists in HIV/AIDS coverage with a probe on public journalism roles, most respondents focused on answering the question in terms of the public journalism role, and more specifically within public journalism on a role that involved the journalist in community dialogue. Thus they did not address the issue of social responsibility as much as their professional roles of objectivity.

The journalists were unanimous in their position against getting involved in communities and then reporting on them. One journalist called this "missionary journalism;" another said that such emotionally involved journalism would be an injustice to society. Such involvement would compromise their professional objectivity and make them activists identifying with a cause and possibly with some vested interest. Their job was to find out about and report on the other side of the issue too. They must have the freedom to move around in different "camps," which would be precluded by any alignment with one camp/cause. While they should be socially responsible, the company was not paying journalists for activism so activism should be relegated to personal time.

One journalist, who had very successfully covered social change stories, had a more nuanced understanding—she spoke of the need to be inspiring in words but not activist in deed; the words should lead to action on the part of others, the reporter would be the catalyst. Beginning with a few of her stories on female feticide, she and her colleagues developed a series (with a logo) on saving the girl child. The series received attention and generated action from the

government and from parents who formed a "single girl child parents' association." One of her colleagues said that this was not activism but good reporting that addressed many different aspects on the same issue.

Constraints on HIV/AIDS Reporting

Practicing socially responsible journalism may often be constrained due to workplace ideology, routines, etc. Thus, news values, discussed earlier, are a part of the media routines that limit the window through which news is assessed and reported. Other constraints however also exist.

At the macro level, financial return was important. One journalist said that electronic media needed TRPs (rating points, i.e., viewership), and that because a blank page of paper cost more than the price of the newspaper and the newspaper had the added value of the news on this page, the newspaper had to succeed financially to recover this cost. Another journalist felt that journalists were under pressure from their bosses in this respect; they worked for a newspaper, not an educational publication.

HIV/AIDS coverage was also influenced by news sources and ethical concerns. For example, a non-government organization (NGO), which served street children with condoms as an HIV prevention measure, was fearful about backlash from their funder and possibly the public when a journalist accidentally stumbled upon the story and wanted to cover it. The editors also expressed some uncertainty about reporting the story. The journalist assured the NGO that she would handle the story sensitively without inserting judgment about the use of condoms by street children. Thus fear of sensationalization existed both within and outside (e.g., sources) the news organization. Unwillingness of sources including doctors and "authorities" to talk about HIV because of disease stigma was also present; even when doctors and NGOs were willing to discuss HIV, they were very hesitant to provide access to PLHA, even if the journalists promised anonymity for the PLHA. The journalists adhered to certain ethical guidelines for HIV/AIDS reporting such as not revealing the identity of the person, but this lead one journalist to "mask" the story, essentially suggesting in the story that the person had a viral infection prevalent in India at the time.

Journalists also explained that some stories could create a backlash and therefore may not be covered. A journalist had heard about condom distribution in hotels in a town at a particular time of year when pilgrims come there for worship at a famous temple. Sex workers also converge in this town at that time. The journalist did not cover the story because it would offend religious sentiment and was likely to lead to hate email and stoning of premises because temples wield a lot of influence.

Journalists' personal attitudes also influenced coverage. While some journalists made positive comments, overwhelming skepticism about the work of NGOs came through repeatedly in the interviews—that the NGOs were only into condom distribution, which was a morally misplaced focus, that they had "crores of rupees," that they had "mis-propagated the issue," and that they held rallies only once a year on World AIDS Day but should instead work "365 days" of the year. One interviewee questioned the amount of funding HIV/AIDS received as compared with

other diseases. NGOs' lack of understanding of journalists' work also created obstacles. NGO staffers did not know what made a good story and therefore journalists had to work hard to get information from them. Journalists were also skeptical about public health work--that doctors did not want to undertake the "hassle" of treating an HIV positive person because of the "hard work" involved in it.

Lack of resources and time, and particularly of training, and the fact that generalists or crime reporters often had to cover HIV were obstacles. Also, where a journalist had a health beat, the beat was described as one in which the journalist went to the hospital to get statistics and information about accidents and suicides because the beat was defined within the framework of a crime beat; this approach did not give much ground for other types of health coverage. Also, some journalists mentioned the need to understand and think about the topic/issues (time consuming) and have an open mind (not always present) for better coverage of HIV/AIDS to occur. Shortage of space also lead to lack of coverage but according to one journalist vernacular papers had begun to devote two to three pages to soft stories in general, and he saw an opening there particularly because he believed the youth would read such stories. Journalists mentioned that if the organization was behind the issue, it got covered more.

On the whole, journalists mentioned many of the same macro and micro level influences Shoemaker and Reese (1996) detail. Personal beliefs and attitudes, media routines, the organization's values, extra-media factors, and the ideology of private ownership and capitalism all played a role.

Ways to Improve Coverage

One journalist believed that a health section should be introduced. If current information was provided, such as recent figures on incidence of HIV/AIDS, medical developments, and vaccine success/failures, it would be covered. Or "soft stories" and star power (a celebrity endorsing an HIV/AIDS campaign) would lead to coverage. Staff in vernacular newspapers should be sensitized so they would increase HIV/AIDS coverage because the English papers reached only the educated. A few respondents believed that while some PLHA were disclosing their status and organizing social functions, lessons about sensitivity to identity issues still needed to be reinforced particularly in the local language press. Other journalists said that the coverage reached and made a positive impact more clearly on the educated classes; more reporting that would reach the poor people was needed. Some however believed that newspapers are not pervasive and have limited reach; thus other means had to be found to reach the poor.

Journalists suggested several critical topics for coverage, which would take time and tenacity, in place of the current reporting on lifestyle issues or on using a moral policing approach. These included 1) discrimination against PLHA, 2) resources and skills within the medical community to handle HIV and their attitude to PLHA (sometimes negative and therefore negatively impacting PLHA), 3) HIV impact severity as compared with other health problems such as infant and maternal mortality, 4) validity of funding

agencies' approach (i.e., distributing condoms), and 5) appropriateness of policy.

Role of Strategic Communication Campaigns in Addressing HIV/AIDS

Journalists had mixed views on the frequency as well as the success or failure of strategic communication campaigns. They said these had succeeded for specific populations such as sex workers but not for the general public or that the efforts had reached only the educated and not the illiterate people living in distant areas. They criticized the focus on condom use or claimed the messages were ineffective. Some mentioned public service announcements they had seen, others the fear some of the messages had created because of their use of high emotion. One narrated the immense emotional influence these had on him, but felt that the emotion may get in the way of information and might create stigma. The journalists felt that it was time to move from providing information about transmission to removing stigma, or that Bollywood (India's film industry, which is the largest in the world) needed to get involved because a two-to-three hour story about HIV, in a beloved medium with their heroes and heroines in it, would really make a difference. Bollywood films, according to this journalist, "cross connect to classes and masses" and occupy more "mind space" because audiences immerse themselves in this long experience and their minds are open for "programming." One journalist felt that street plays and songs were more effective than billboards and ads. Most of the journalists believed that the NGOs had done a reasonable amount of really good work through these campaigns, particularly in creating awareness; a few believed the opposite.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This is an exploratory study, descriptive in nature, to get an understanding of journalists' beliefs about HIV/AIDS coverage and related issues. Essentially, journalists believed that HIV/AIDS reporting was good despite the corporate bottom line pressures, time, space and resource constraints, and the lack of access to information.

Journalists felt that because HIV was no longer a new topic, to receive coverage it had to have one or more news values. Thus the topic was treated no differently from any other topic. The fact that HIV/AIDS is a social issue does not necessarily invoke in journalists the social responsibility role, i.e., to cover the issue for societal benefit. Even if a journalist feels strongly about social responsibility, s/he has to interest the audience, to satisfy superiors and essentially to meet the bottom line. But a few journalists found interesting ways to merge their social responsibility role with the needs of the paper by, for example, using news pegs to delve into issues or using dramatic events to highlight them. Some mentioned that journalists who were sensitive and committed to a serious outlook on their job functions would more likely cover stories that are in the socially responsible genre of writing.

Journalists were unanimous in their rejection of the socially responsible public journalism role that would take them into communities to help define problems and solutions

and then report on them. They believed such a role would rob them of journalistic detachment and make them activists.

Journalists' attitudes toward NGOs, skeptical and negative, tended to influence their willingness to write about social issues. Many gave credit to NGOs with regard to the effectiveness of strategic campaigns, but in their answers to news coverage questions, respondents mostly mentioned NGOs negatively—the NGOs were seen as squandering funds and time or focusing on condom distribution, seen by some as morally questionable. The journalists however did mention other factors that may hinder their coverage of HIV/AIDS in a socially responsible manner such as lack of training on how to cover this issue and lack of access to information.

The journalists exhibited sensitivity to being responsible in terms of giving anonymity to PLHA and providing value-free non-sensational reporting. Their suggestions for improvement also exhibited social responsibility; they wanted the coverage to reach the poor and they suggested that the local language press staff be sensitized to issues of identity disclosure of PLHA. Their suggestions for increased coverage included focusing on discrimination against PLHA, examining policy appropriateness, and looking into resources the medical community has to address this disease, all socially responsible topics.

Still, within the larger context of the type of journalism practiced in India for HIV/AIDS, it is apparent that the liberal model of objective journalism that informs the public but is not necessarily influenced by a social responsibility orientation is dominant. The coverage draws on the prime news values that this liberal model has spawned and is set within the framework of news organizations as business ventures. Even though many Indian journalists are trained in development journalism during their university education, the norms of the workplace appear to override what they may have learned in school about socially responsible journalism. Only two respondents mentioned "development journalism/ communication" during the interviews.

With globalization and its accompanying spread of the western liberal model of journalism to much of the world, considerable debate is taking place about what kind of journalism and journalism education are suited to the developing world (Banda, *et al.*, 2007, Domatob, 1987; Mano, 2009; Moge kwu, 2005; for example). While this study did not address these issues, its results provide some qualitative empirical evidence indicating the influence and dominance of the western model of journalism. These results may be useful in discussions about journalism and journalism education in the developing world. Ramaprasad (2010) has recommended that journalism educators in the developing world consider including journalism philosophies and theories from around the world as part of the theory and critical thinking courses for their students.

The findings are also of practical importance to international funding agencies that support training for journalists and NGOs. They provide areas of doubt, of constraints, of possibilities, and of promise. Funding agencies could use these findings to better design their training programs and development assistance. NGOs certainly need to work hard to dispel the skepticism

surrounding their work among journalists. If the skepticism derives from the lack of accurate information about their work and workings among journalists, NGOs must correct this situation. In addition, if NGOs want their messages multiplied they must learn to interact with journalists and understand deadlines and news routines as well as the very nature of journalism, particularly its allegiance to objectivity and its distance from public relations no matter how worthy the cause. If social issues coverage is important, it must be included in the education of journalists as well as in the education/training of NGOs and government officials.

Interestingly, journalists tended to answer the questions within frameworks that they were most familiar with. They spoke of the traditional news values as filters and they honed in on the participatory definition of public journalism from among other definitions of this press theory and focused on the concept of professional objectivity versus activism.

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