

# Best practices and potential for improved information flows in media and civil society

Centre for Policy Alternatives  
Sri Lanka

Material from this publication may be used with due acknowledgement to the authors, CPA and Hivos.

**Hivos** is a Dutch NGO inspired by humanist values and works in more than 30 countries world wide, where it support civil society organisations active in a variety of programmes. For more information, see [www.hivos.org](http://www.hivos.org). In Sri Lanka Hivos is active since the early 1980s. During more than two decades it has supported a large number of civil society organisations in a variety of sectors, including economic development and micro credit, sustainable development and women's rights. At the moment, it maintains a small support programme in the areas of human rights and women's rights, the arts and culture, and sustainable production. Hivos prefers to support innovative activities of strategic value with relative small amounts of money. Where larger amounts are needed, it often seeks cooperation with other funding agencies.

**Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA)** is an independent, non-partisan organization that focuses primarily on issues of governance and conflict resolution. Formed in 1996 in the firm belief that the vital contribution of civil society to the public policy debate is in need of strengthening, CPA is committed to programmes of research and advocacy through which public policy is critiqued, alternatives identified and disseminated.

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# Executive Summary

This report looks at the conditions favourable to and severely vitiating the potential of information flows in support of peace, human rights and democratic governance within and between civil society and mainstream media in Sri Lanka. As Hivos notes in its Terms of Reference that guided the production of report,

*Under the escalating political conflict and the erosion of democracy in the past few years, many of the civil society organisations and their initiatives came under pressure. Direct threats and the feeling of fear have silenced many groups. Where in the past, groups could still express their ideas and mobilize (local) opinion for political debate and change, albeit in a limited way, at the moment the slightest space for this seems to have disappeared. Freedom of expression has increasingly come under attack.*

CPA's own analysis of the overarching socio-political and economic situation, informed by local and well as international processes and actors and in large part, a Government hell bent on defeating the Liberation of Tamil Tigers Eelam (LTTE) military suggests strongly that NGOs working on peacebuilding and governance and independent media will face even greater challenges in 2009. Sri Lanka is already the third most dangerous country in the world for journalists. NGOs, particularly those advocating for greater power sharing and a federal model, have come under vicious attack, including from leading individuals associated with / part of the Government as well as other members of parliament.

This report is timely and pertinent in such a context. It reflects and builds on a number of varied and rich initiatives and conversations with civil society and media over a number of years on issues related to the development of communications and media strategies to meet the growing challenges of peacebuilding in Sri Lanka, and particularly after the cessation of the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) in early 2008. It is not easy to conduct primary research in Sri Lanka today on media freedom and issues facing NGO activism. There is a palpable fear of being targeted for speaking out. Critical dissent, independent media, impartial, accurate news and information on war, investigative journalism – these are all essentially dead in Sri Lanka. Revitalising the debate requires courage and not everyone is convinced that it can be done with the present government and its all-consuming war against the LTTE. A language of pariahs and patriots defines the mainstream discourse on war and peace, making it exceedingly difficult even for international actors such as the UN to support humanitarian initiatives and human rights in the country.

There is nevertheless a lot of content produced by media and civil society. Much of it is in print form, though the content increasingly finds its way to the web and in some cases, is first / only produced for the web (e.g. e-books, e-publications and online video / audio). This report looks closely at this content and the various initiatives and institutions that produced them with a view to analyzing how successful they have been and are in shaping public discourse. This analysis is framed by a context in Sri Lanka that violently clamps down on any dissent, so the recommendations herein reflect on what can be done to strengthen NGO communications and independent media even in light of the escalation of hostilities.

We found in the course of our research that there is, in addition to the shared alarm at the Rajapakse regime's disregard for democratic governance and human rights, deep suspicion and a widening divide between media and NGOs. There is a mutual distrust – bordering sometimes on outright accusations of political and foreign bias – between independent journalists and leading NGOs. This severely undermines the mainstream media's ability to reflect the rich diversity of civil society initiatives and also undermines efforts by NGOs to reach out to journalists in a professional manner (in contrast to links with media based on personal friendships, which is the dominant mode of interaction between journalists and NGOs). There are a number of problems associated with NGO communications and media strategies. Lack of human resources and training, lack of equipment, inability and unwillingness to use and leverage new media and web media – these are some key challenges bedeviling NGO led efforts to strengthen their communications and through it, their footprint in the public consciousness.

Donors too have to answer for a number of myopic processes and approaches to funding and capacity development of NGOs and media. The report highlights a number of recommendations

in this regard aimed at developing the capacity of funders and donors to better understand and engage with media development in Sri Lanka.

Ultimately, this report will not change the regime's mind regarding its reprehensible approach to and understanding of human rights protection in Sri Lanka. It will not change the minds of donors too set in their ways to acknowledge that their funding is not making any difference on the ground. It will perhaps not change the opinion of NGOs who believe that they are doing the best they can and that to do more would be to risk experimenting with new processes, tools and technologies that are unfamiliar and untested.

Though the report has a number of recommendations that really take into account the context in Sri Lanka, they will alone achieve little. CPA realizes that long-term change requires courage and strategic thinking. CPA's new media initiatives are a case in point, demonstrating by example to both local and international audiences including donors that new media and mobiles can play a significant role in information generation, dissemination and consumption even with unprecedented levels of state and self-censorship in mainstream media<sup>1</sup>.

Supporting innovation in information flows within cycles of violence requires forward looking actors such as Hivos to seriously explore ways through which knowledge and financial capital can be transferred to support actors and processes that are fragile, at high risk of violence directed against them and often have no sustainable model for content production beyond funding. This needs to be stressed. Whereas much can and should be urgently done to strengthen independent media and NGO communications by getting journalists and civil society actors to reflect inwardly and ask themselves to honestly answer the question as to whether they are making a difference, it also requires donors and funders to support nascent and innovative processes, ideas, projects and social change-makers concentrating on media development writ large. This includes supporting and strengthening grassroots (street) theatre groups, performance artistes, painters, poets and various local / regional cultural practices as well as the more traditional means of media and communication. The report deals with this at some length.

The report ends with three key annexes that critically analyse the media landscape in Sri Lanka, the legal and regulatory framework and enumerate concerns regarding the publications of human rights issues in mainstream media based on a large survey carried out by CPA in 2007.

The recommendations, analysis and broad overview of the media in Sri Lanka today must inform more sustained, larger and longer-term programmes to support media development in Sri Lanka that is independent of (yet responsive to) the vicissitudes of war making and peace building. Pegged only to peace when peace is dominant, initiatives to support media freedom and media development have largely failed to make an impact when war and violence are dominant. Addressing this deep-rooted systemic violence requires media and NGOs able to understand, adopt and adapt a spectrum of media and communications channels and techniques. It is to this end that this report looks at the state of play today and looks forward to stronger bonds between journalists and civil rights activists, and the NGOs they head or work with, in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Read Award Winning Citizen Journalism - Looking back at 2008 - <http://www.groundviews.org/2008/12/29/award-winning-citizen-journalism-looking-back-at-2008/>

# Introduction and context

The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) responded positively to a request by Hivos late 2008 to look into existing practices of information flows in media freedom advocacy and civil society activism in Sri Lanka, including media and communications initiatives of NGOs. CPA has grappled with the significant deterioration in media freedom and the space for the articulation of critical dissent in civil society in a number of ways. Our new media initiatives, including the introduction of citizen journalism in Sri Lanka in English as well as in the vernacular, have demonstrated that even when mainstream media voices are censored, independent journalism online – including narratives by ordinary citizens – can serve as powerful anchors for progressive discussion and debate on issues related to war, peace and democratic governance.

This report was written in the context of a war against the Liberation of Tamil Tigers Eelam (LTTE). The evolution and terrorism of the LTTE is well documented and known. Less so is space to highlight, decry and openly debate that of the State in its self-styled war against terror. The Rajapakse regime has with scant regard for human rights, monumental levels of corruption and with total impunity succeeded to a great degree in crushing the LTTE militarily, but at significant cost to democratic governance and civil liberties. Media freedom is a notable and obvious victim in this regard. Journalists have been killed, abducted, tortured, incarcerated, threatened and have been forced to leave the country. These are overt signs of State censorship. Less obvious is the fear psychosis, the anxiety that has gripped independent journalists in the country, leading to unprecedented self-censorship. The result – a polity and society unable to access impartial, accurate and responsible journalism that interrogates the on-going war as well as other reprehensible policies and practices of Government.

NGO initiatives related to anti-corruption, peacebuilding, power-sharing, federalism have suffered hugely as a result of the violence directed against them. Beyond this there is also a deep schism between civil society / NGOs and journalists, with each blaming the other for the inability of mainstream media to reflect the rich spectrum of civil society initiatives that support and strengthen peace. This deep mutual suspicion, at times downright acrimonious, has been exacerbated on account of the overarching context of violence, that requires journalists to watch what they say, and afford NGOs and key public intellectuals little or no space in mainstream media to promote their opinions and initiatives.

Donors too have been hesitant to fund, and be seen to fund, media and civil society initiatives in support of opening up debates on governance and strengthen independent media. Their parochialism and lack of strategy have also contributed to the piecemeal approaches to media reform and building the capacity of NGOs to engage better with mainstream media (as well as develop their own alternative media channels).

Key innovations in new media offer new opportunities to engage with audiences on issues that cannot and will not be published in mainstream media. At the same time, leveraging cultural practices such as drama, theatre, story-telling in verse, traditional village festivals, dance, song and public performances also demonstrate the potential to interrogate war and peace in a manner that anchors macro-level concerns and challenges to a village level consciousness and existential concerns.

Reporting on human rights has taken the greatest toll in recent years. Information flows with regard to the communication of rights violations, particularly in terms of extra-judicial and para military abductions, killings and on the issue of child soldiers, have been fraught with difficulties. Leading journalists have been branded as traitors and terrorists for their exposes on inconvenient truths for the regime. Though the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) commemorated 60 years in 2008, there was little to celebrate in Sri Lanka at a time when rights violations are extremely high. And yet, media is unable and unwilling to report these issues, or give space to NGOs and key individuals who are fighting, at great personal risk, to champion these issues in local and international fora. As the Hivos Terms of Reference noted<sup>2</sup>,

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<sup>2</sup> See Annexure 4



*Those who follow the news on Sri Lanka, know how rapidly the political and human rights situation has deteriorated in the past three years. With the increasing incidence of unlawful killings, enforced disappearances and arbitrary arrests which all go unpunished, and massive displacements, the situation has become very grim, while at the same time the state of the rule of law gradually collapses. Data on these developments are being disclosed by human rights organisations. They have their established channels through which information from the local level is communicated to relevant regional and international organisations and bodies. However, human rights activists increasingly face serious threats on their lives and their fact finding missions are often made difficult to impossible. Hopeless is also to discover that the government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) seems to be deaf to any international pressure. One of the weapons the GoSL has is the suppression of the independent media, which it combines with widespread and effective campaigns to inculcate its own vision and “philosophy”. Since the most recent escalation of the war, “the proponents of a military solution (to the conflict) have gained ascendancy in political arenas and in the media, an unprecedented level of hate speech is being generated and broadcasted against the media and journalists who cover the ethnic conflict in a balanced and unbiased manner. The space of dissent, or for holding diverse opinions, has shrunk and the spirit of constructive criticism of politics and politicians has almost disappeared....”<sup>3</sup> A similar situation prevails in the LTTE-controlled areas where dissident voices are brutally silenced.*

There is thus a general black hole in information and knowledge sharing regarding war, peace and governance in Sri Lanka. Significant concerns in this regard were taken into account and formed the foundation for this report. CPA has for a number of years worked with other NGOs and civil society organisations to develop their media and communications skills. Therefore, we were keen to work with Hivos to answer two key aspects as proposed by them:

1. To assess practices of and identify potentials for an effective voicing of the aspirations, messages and demands of civil society organisations and their constituencies. What is involved here is mainly information on the ongoing violence and abuses as well as on positive actions and ideas for dialogue and public debate.
2. To assess practices of and identify potentials for the creation and improvement of local/community systems of information flow and exchange.

This report first looks at the overall conditions and context of media and NGO activism in Sri Lanka. It looks at issues of media professionalism, media standards, the divide between State and Private media and significant concerns about the editorial integrity and impartiality of both. The report then looks at innovative information flows and exchange programmes at local and national levels, examining for example the ways through which (street) theatre has played an interesting role in promoting good governance at the grassroots level. New media initiatives in Sri Lanka in particular, and web / online media in general are looked at as well.

The report then goes on to critically examine the reach and effectiveness of the communications strategies of human rights organisations, as well as women’s rights organisations.

The (already small and tragically shrinking) space and potential for community radio in Sri Lanka is also examined in this report. The report avers that **all** ‘community radio’ / regional services are accountable to the Head of Regional and Community Services at SLBC and have no financial autonomy. However, it does go on to highlight some key innovations in this regard, including the e-Tuk Tuk initiative.

Perceived and real linkages between mainstream media and civil society are explored in the next section of the report. The report notes that “Although many NGOs are committed to strengthening human rights and democracy, few demonstrate the necessary allocation of time, energy and financial resources to allow for work with the media on these issues on a long-term

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<sup>3</sup> From the report for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council by FFM and INFORM, quoted in CPA, “War Peace and Governance in Sri Lanka, Overview and Trends in 2006”, page 2.

basis” and goes on to suggest that “Sri Lankan NGOs have not developed any creative strategies that consider ways and means of promoting the work done by them.” With quotes and in-depth analysis of key grassroots and national level communications strategies of CBOs / CSOs and NGOs, this section looks at print, alternative, mainstream media, electronic media, web media and cultural communications leveraged by civil society. On the other hand, issues related to language in particular and accessibility of information in general were presented by leading journalists as challenges that dogged their ability to report more effectively news and information on and coming from civil society initiatives. Senior journalists said that “... NGOs were fearful and hesitant, for whatever reason, of journalists and requests for more information on certain issues or initiatives an organisation was engaged in. Journalists felt that a mutual distrust and lack of respect for the challenges faced by each sector undermined efforts at constructive engagement.”

A number of recommendations from senior journalists are captured in the report to strengthen the interaction between mainstream media and NGOs.

The report then goes on to explore bottlenecks and challenges in reporting human rights issues in mainstream media. Some of the concerns and challenges noted by leading journalists and human rights activists are, sadly, familiar and enduring. Results of a comprehensive survey of media institutions and senior mainstream journalists that looked at the state of human rights reporting in the media are also included.

The report then lists a series of endogenous recommendations anchored in the art of the possible in Sri Lanka today. The recommendations are tailored towards journalists and editors of media organisations, human rights organisations, civil society and NGOs, media freedom activists, and donors and foreign funders. The report also looks at the vexed issue of developing media literacy as an integral and inextricable part of media development. Calling for the need to be culturally sensitive, the report also recommends a holistic, long-term strategic towards media development that is based on collaboration and cooperation of donors and civil society actors.

Annexure 1 gives a comprehensive overview of the media in Sri Lanka. Annexure 2 gives in more detail that the body of the report the results of the survey on human rights reporting in Sri Lanka. Annexure 3 provides a comprehensive overview of the legal and regulatory frameworks governing media freedom, media ownership and broadcast in Sri Lanka. This section also flags several key and urgent concerns regarding the incarceration of J.S. Tissainayagam, the first journalist in Sri Lanka arrested under draconian Anti-Terrorism Laws.

Finally, Annexure 4 gives the Terms of Reference that framed this report as designed by Hivos.

# Media in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka today is a country at war where all parties to the on-going violent conflict treat media freedom and the freedom of expression, amongst other vital human rights, with scant regard. This includes the government. In fact, the significant deterioration of media freedom and the freedom of expression is a marker of an inexorable erosion of democratic governance. With it, the safety and security of media personnel and journalists has also diminished significantly. Today, we countenance a regime in the South that is a mirror image of the Liberation of Tamil Tigers Eelam (LTTE) in its inability and unwillingness to engage with, in sincere, civil and progressive manner, issues related to media freedom and the freedom of expression. The vicious language of hate and harm, a culture of impunity, open abuse of journalists, abductions and extra-judicial killings, the breakdown of the rule of law, the arbitrary actions against media by paramilitary groups sheltered by the Government, the shocking complicity of the Police in schemes to abduct senior journalists is a situation that media in Sri Lanka today faces that beggars belief.

Accurate, impartial and responsible reporting is almost impossible in Sri Lanka today in relation to the war, corruption or matters related to the regime and its constituent members. Do so and simple yet effective Government propaganda based on post hoc, ergo propter hoc fallacies — after this, therefore because of this — through the diarrhetic commentary of its most outrageous apparatchiks names and shames courageous journalists as those who are partial to or supportive of terrorists. Sometimes they are simply called terrorists themselves. As a result, media in the South is placed in a context no better than journalists under the diktat of the LTTE in the Vanni — there is perhaps the freedom to express oneself, but the consequences of doing so can be quite devastating. Blithely ignoring the vital importance of media freedom and the freedom of expression to any just and lasting peace, parties to the war shamelessly claim they safeguard the right of journalists to report in the public interest, but actively hunt them down when they do so. Free media is under unprecedented siege in Sri Lanka today.

The most odious affront to media freedom was when a Government Minister and his gang of thugs stormed into the State-run television broadcaster Rupavahini and assaulted its News Director in December 2007. Unequivocally condemned by all political parties and civil society, the Minister nevertheless got off scot-free. On the other hand, journalists of Rupavahini who stood up against the Minister's brutish intrusion were assaulted, attacked and had to flee the country for their protection. The Minister, to this day, continues to verbally threaten and abuse journalists with total impunity. The regime takes great exception to the observations of political commentators who correctly point out that the President and a coterie of murderous brutes have egregiously undermined democracy and media freedom. Yet it is silent and indeed, conveniently brushes aside indubitable markers of a loathsome culpability in the significant deterioration of media freedom in Sri Lanka.

The intensified hostilities have resulted in a humanitarian and human rights crisis that could further escalate with disastrous consequences to both. While the current focus of military operations is the Northern Province, incidents of violence have been recorded in other parts of the country including in the East and North Central Provinces in the recent months. The violence has incurred the loss of life, exacerbated a range of human rights violations and led to the brutalisation of communities, mass displacement, destruction of property and infrastructure, loss of livelihoods and mobility and an increase in militarization.

Given the number of reports on the intimidation and harassment of journalists it is apparent that the Cabinet Subcommittee recently appointed by the government to look into the grievances of the media community is powerless to foster media freedom and the freedom of expression in Sri Lanka or investigate meaningfully the violence directed at journalists. Civil society actors and NGOs have also come under increasing pressure due to a number of factors including rising public support in the South for the war, political intolerance for dissent and the intimidation of actors calling for the restoration of the rule of law, democratic governance and human rights. According

to major local and international press freedom groups, 14 journalists/media workers have been killed since 2005. 7 have been abducted. More than 25 have been forced to leave Sri Lanka.

Independent media and the freedom of expression have been violently suppressed in Sri Lanka over the past two years. Sections of the Government with their private militia, members of the TMVP, the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Army have been responsible for physical and verbal attacks and hate speech against journalists and human rights defenders. According to major local and international press freedom groups, 14 journalists/media workers have been killed since 2005. 7 have been abducted. More than 25 have been forced to leave Sri Lanka. Renowned journalists and defence correspondents such as Iqbal Athas have been vilified repeatedly by the Ministry of Defence, which on its website has openly published hate speech against independent journalists and organisations such as the Free Media Movement (FMM). The Government has shut down entire media establishments for spurious reasons. Government Ministers repeatedly and openly verbally and physically attack journalists with absolutely no disciplinary action taken against them. 13 journalists, at last count, have been arrested and detained by police.

The Government has shut down entire media establishments for spurious reasons. Government Ministers repeatedly and openly verbally and physically attack journalists with absolutely no disciplinary action taken against them. Senior columnist and news website editor outreachsl.com J.S. Tissainayagam, and printer and manager of the outreachsl.com Jaseharan and his partner Valarmathi were detained by the Terrorist Investigation Department (TID) for months before they were formally charged, and then too with ludicrous offences. As the Free Media Movement noted on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2008,

*While FMM has not so far seen a copy of the indictment, reliable sources suggest that it contains the following charges against Mr. Tissainayagam, viz., (1) offences under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) in respect of the printing, publishing, and distribution of the magazine known as the 'North Eastern Monthly' (sic) during the period between 1st June 2006 and 1st June 2007, (2) offences under the PTA in respect of bringing the government into disrepute by the publication of articles in the said magazine, and (3) the violation of Emergency Regulations issued under Gazette Extraordinary 1474/5 of December 2006, by aiding and abetting terrorist organisations through the raising of money for the said magazine.*

*FMM is dismayed that, after five months of detention purportedly for the purposes of investigations by the TID, and in which considerable procedural leeway has been given the authorities by the courts, the Attorney General has only been able to frame charges against Mr. Tissainayagam on such manifestly insubstantial and absurd grounds as these. It appears that the authorities are desperately attempting to manufacture grounds on which to prolong the incarceration of Mr. Tissainayagam using legal provisions that can only be described as oppressive.*

There are disturbing reports of torture and psychological abuse of journalists detained by the Police. Ironically, instead of investigating and preventing attacks against journalists, the Police have themselves attempted to abduct journalists. Several journalists live in fear of their lives and have been forced to bunker in safe houses. Tellingly, the Chairman of the State controlled Sri Lanka Broadcasting Cooperation (SLBC) openly called for the death of a senior journalist in June. The Army Commander Major Gen. Sarath Fonseka has repeatedly made incredibly racist comments in the media and tellingly, no State or Private media have asked him to be accountable or to resign forthwith. Several journalists have been repeatedly named and shamed by the Ministry of Defence website as traitors and enemies of the State. The Defence Secretary and brother of the President Gotabaya Rajapakse, named by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) as a media predator in its Annual Report, has repeatedly and viciously threatened senior journalists and Editors with complete impunity.

The situation on the ground in the Eastern Province, even pursuant to elections held earlier this year, remains volatile for independent journalists. In fact, the TMVP has repeatedly violently acted against critical voices as well as media distribution networks in the region. It is unlikely that any dissent or reports on corruption and governance will be tolerated. In August, a TMVP (Karuna faction) supporter/member threatened journalist Thakshila Jayasena from *Sandeshaya* –

the BBC Sinhala Service - when covering a protest campaign by the United National Party, Sri Lanka's main opposition party. In September, journalist Radhika Devakumar, a provincial correspondent of the *Thinakaran* newspaper, a Tamil daily, survived an assassination attempt in her home during which she received three gunshot wounds. Radhika served as the media coordinator for Eastern Province Chief Minister Sivanesanathurai Chandrakanthan alias Pillayan for a short period. Late October, tension prevailed in Batticaloa as armed cadre of Karuna and Pillayan factions violently clashed over the ownership of the *Thamil Alai* newspaper.

In late October, a letter posted to leading Human Rights defenders and lawyers, as well as given to all Court Registrars to be handed over to lawyers who appear for human rights cases. The letter, in Sinhala, from a group that called itself the 'Mahason Balakaya' (Mahason Regiment) clearly states that lawyers who defend human rights cases will be summarily killed or receive life-threatening injuries.

The International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Sri Lanka in June 2007 found that "safety issues are more important than at any stage in the past year and a half. An increasing number of journalists were killed, kidnapped, arrested, assaulted and threatened - especially in conflict zones in the North and East." These issues have yet to be fully resolved and in some cases have been exacerbated on account of the significant deterioration of media freedom in Sri Lanka. As the same mission noted with regard to the journalists in the Eastern Province,

*... the situation in the East that the mission members saw was perhaps the opposite of transparent. One telling comment made by a senior journalist at the meeting in Ampara was that when a robbery takes place in the area, the local community is often aware of the identity of the perpetrators. However, the press would be shackled, unable even if it manages to assemble all necessary evidence, to report on the issue. With press freedom under severe pressure, journalists in Sri Lanka's East find that they are unable to fulfil their role, except to record and broadcast the pronouncements of the government and others who wield coercive power in a highly polarised environment. The perspective offered by one senior journalist was that "journalists are reduced to being stenographers for the government."*

As the Reporters Without Borders *Annual Report 2008* notes<sup>4</sup>,

*The northern Jaffna Peninsula, where Tamils are in the majority and which the army directly administers, has become a nightmare for journalists, human rights activists and civilians in general. A wave of murders, kidnappings, threats and censorship has made it one of the most dangerous places in the world for the press. Two journalists were killed there during the year, two more kidnapped and at least three media have been the victims of direct attacks on them. Scores of journalists have fled the region and others have chosen to abandon the profession altogether...*

*Throughout the year, the government and its allies have tried to block the flow of independent sources of news in Tamil. Those living in the north and east of the country, already isolated by the war, have also been gradually deprived of media not affiliated either to the government or an armed group. For their part, the LTTE increased their surveillance of Tamil journalists, threatening those who dare to criticise them openly. And the media in the areas in which they control are forced to relay the movement's belligerent propaganda.*

*In its war against the LTTE, the army at the end of November bombed the installations of the movement's official radio, near Killinochchi in the north. Nine civilians, three of them station staff, were killed and around a dozen more were injured. The radio Voice of Tigers is certainly a propaganda radio run by the LTTE, but the attack violates rules of engagement that restrict military bombing to strictly military targets.*

*By contrast, the pressure brought to bear by the LTTE was less visible than that of the authorities, but was every bit as effective. The separatist movement has never hesitated to*

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=25690](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=25690)

*go after dissidents within the Tamil community and the press is no exception to this rule. The head of a Tamil media explained: "We know that the reaction of the LTTE can also be potentially harmful for our staff, so we are very careful. We weigh every word when we talk about the LTTE and the army. And naturally we never refer to the Tigers as terrorists". The LTTE intelligence services often summon or call Tamil journalists when they want them to provide them with information.*

### **Media Trust<sup>5</sup>**

Most respondents were quick to retort their ambivalence on whether media institutions could actually be trusted, and furthermore the accuracy of the information disseminated from such institutions. It was stated by a majority of interviewees that state media was completely untrustworthy and furthermore that private media, could either be completely trusted by most respondents or trusted to a limited degree. An interesting comment of one respondent was that a critical eye must be adopted when consuming media in Sri Lanka and there was a need to 'read between the lines'.

In terms of newspapers and TV news programmes, many respondents see such media as less trustworthy as the content tends to be 'pre-determined'.

One respondent stated,

*"...electronic and print media are carrying out certain policies to disseminate partial ideologies and incorrect information for the last 25 years. Especially during the war, there was devastating impact on all fields of our society. The media is an instrument, where the ruling class ideology can approach the people very easily. Media has not been able to stand on its own. Print media, has been putting forward pro-war sentiments. This applies to Sinhala print media and to some extent English print media"*

What can be identified from the variety of responses from the interviewees is that the trust factor would depend entirely on the type of media and its political affiliation. For example, a specific newspaper might be considered completely bias due to its affiliation with the government and hence trusted and viewed less. Interestingly, radio is a less preferred medium of media with few respondents actually listening to the radio. This one may speculate is indicative of the poor quality of radio stations in terms of content and music genre.

### **Effectiveness of Media in Sri Lanka**

Media standards in terms of journalism was viewed to be extremely 'poor', due to the lack of qualifications, the absence of ethical standards and the overall lack of professionalism- '*skill and knowledge is lacking*'. However, hope was instilled in such institutions such as the College of Journalism, which one respondent stated, would change the dire situation of journalism in Sri Lanka.

Most respondents felt that the media in Sri Lanka addressed the ethnic conflict well; however other areas such as economic development were completely blind-sighted. The concentration of social and political issues whilst completely disregarding the economic sphere was felt to be a major issue that needed to be incorporated by the media. For example, one respondent stated that the media had not addressed the implications of high energy costs for business and manufacturing industries. However, whether addressing economic issues in the media in a

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<sup>5</sup> This section as well as *Effectiveness of Media in Sri Lanka, Media Freedom, The 'state' of State Media and Private Media, Ethnic and Professionalism: The progress of the media and Media Influence* are part of an ongoing study into new media in Sri Lanka by the author. It is not to be quoted or republished. Those surveyed to date in the study include bloggers, senior journalists, media commentators, mainstream print Editors, Public Service Broadcasting TV producers and communications experts. Some spoke on the condition of anonymity. Interviews were conducted via email and face-to-face where possible, with respondents sourced from across the country and from the diaspora as well.

country that is held back economically by social and political issues would perhaps improve economic awareness or improve the economic situation is a moot point. In a sense, there was no insight given on how exactly more economic content in the media would help Sri Lanka; respondents casually felt that it was needed though to educate the people of Sri Lanka not just socially and politically but economically as well.

The key issue facing Sri Lanka today, as conveyed by the media would be the conflict and peace situation, which takes up a majority of discourse in the media. However, again respondents stated that issues like *'...equitable and sustainable development, governance, environment, poverty, women and children, etc which are equally important but doesn't become a priority as much as war and peace'*.

Additionally, a need for coverage of military operations from an independent viewpoint as well as the human costs of war was conveyed. The lack of such coverage was attributed to the lack of demand of such content from readers.

The content of media such as newspapers was another issue; the presentation of facts without citations reduced the value of such reporting as accurate and trustworthy sources of information. One respondent also stated that the media did not address issues facing Sri Lanka, as there is an issue with,

*'...the transmission of information in terms of analysed data of people's experiences, where different aspects of people's experiences are not proportionate...'*

Issues in Bollywood and Hollywood take up unnecessary space, when clearly there are other issues that need to be addressed in Sri Lanka such as *'agrarian poverty, the stories of displaced people and South Asian regional issues'*, and in this respect the media does not effectively address the key challenges facing Sri Lanka today.

## **Media Freedom**

The question of whether there is media freedom in Sri Lanka has always been responded to with a wry smile, given the last year or so of media repression. The freedom of the press is considered to be 'a joke' and freedom in general in Sri Lanka is viewed to be constrictive. The government screens any news on the war and the limited access to the war front contributes to this answer. Additionally, the assault of journalists and what has been identified as a culture of impunity has limited the media in its activities and ability to voice opinions on sensitive subjects. For example, the attempted murder of a journalist in Batticaloa in September 2008 by armed thugs is one example of many incidents that have inhibited the progress of journalism in the country.

One respondent stated that there is no media freedom in the South and in the North. In the north, media organisations are controlled by the LTTE. In the end, one respondent states, *'... the northern media reflects mostly the Tamil viewpoint and the southern media the southern viewpoint'*.

The fact that the Ministry of Defence has issued guidelines that restrict coverage on military procurement and strategy tends to hinder the freedom of the media. Yet, the Government of Sri Lanka's reasoning behind such guidelines would be the liability of such information to their effort of defeating the LTTE. However, when there is pressure not to cover areas such as human rights within the media enforced by the 'invisible hand' of the government, then clearly one may propound the conclusion that media freedom in Sri Lanka is deteriorating. Another example would be the brutal assault of Namal Perera (from SLPI) and another person he was travelling with at the time from the British Consulate. No perpetrators have been brought to justice. However, such repressive trends are not only confined to the GOSL, as the LTTE as well exerts pressure of news agencies to limit coverage.

The threat of abuse, abductions and killings of journalists has also contributed to the lack of media freedom. Issues that should be discussed are avoided due to fear and thus there is the

perpetual circle of impassivity within journalism in Sri Lanka due to this threat. This self-restraint within the media has led to the strengthening of the ruling party's discourses within nationalist newspapers and news agencies that have the freedom of reporting content, which strengthens the perceptions of the government. Essentially, what transpires is assisted propaganda. One respondent (Matt Abud, former head of Internews in Sri Lanka) stated that,

*'The range of attacks on media; the pressure on journalists, the overly-high level of business conglomerates as media owners compared with specialist media enterprises; the level of control over frequency licenses in especially regional areas – all are considerable obstacles to media freedom in different ways'.*

**The majority of media in Sri Lanka, if not all, does not question the status quo.** A few respondents stated that newspapers like 'Sunday Leader' have actually questioned the governments actions, but political agendas of such newspapers tend to impede their attempt to encourage opposition discourses against the status quo, as many in the public eye argue that the 'Sunday Leader' has lost credibility. Even more discouraging is that the government, which allows for the dissemination of 'pre-determined' information and propaganda, has appropriated some of the biggest newspapers.

Comparisons were made with India as well, where Sri Lankan media freedom was a lot worse comparatively, but better off than in some dictatorial countries. Sri Lanka remains the 3rd most dangerous place of journalists.

### **The 'state' of State Media and Private Media**

A majority of the respondents stated that the state media will never be accurate or impartial regarding the 'so-called peace process' and since the 1970s, state media institutions such as the government information department, Lake House and ITN have been biased in reporting information due to their affiliation as government news agencies. Therefore sensitive information regarding corruption or conflict related material tends to be spun in away that enhances the government image positively. The state media hardly ever addresses issues of corruption, which is line with the lack of governmental action regarding corruption amongst the political elite. One may argue that a symbiotic relationship has developed between that government and government media. Therefore, most readers relegate these sources of information as completely untrustworthy and biased. However, individuals that do so tend to be part of the upper-middle class educated category that have access to a wide variety of news sources that disseminate the truth. Whilst in the rural areas, villagers can only afford the state media and are limited in their exposure to various news sources that challenge the status quo and bring to light the injustices of the government.

Media in general was viewed as biased to some degree by the interviewees, and many identified that some private media is biased in its wholly anti-government stance. At this end, information too is distorted and many readers do not believe these sources to be trustworthy unless sources are indentified. Pointless ramblings in newspapers are considered propaganda of the other extreme. However, certain newspapers such as the Daily Mirror to adopt a middle of the road line and hence are trusted and respected by most readers.

*'The private media is less partial and more impartial in their reporting, though some of the private is more so than other sections of the media. The better performance of most of the private media is that they are not hundred percent dependent on one side or the other'.* (Dr. Jehan Perera, Executive Director of the National Peace Council)

Several more issues plague the private media as well, in that it has failed at exposing the two-fold nature of the war against terror. Furthermore, quality of reporting at both the state and private level leaves much to be desired. This view was reinforced by a majority of the interviewees, who argued that journalism and media operations in Sri Lanka lack professionalism.



Some private media have been viewed to have severely failed in addressing the ethnic issue in the country. For example, Gamini Viyangoda, Editor of a leading news and information website on Sri Lanka, states that *'in terms of electronic media, the Maharaja group are trying to be impartial; they however, are not portraying impartiality regarding the ethnic issue'*.

### **Ethnic and Professionalism: The progress of the media?**

There is no established practice of ethics and professionalism in place. For example, an ethical newspaper would depend entirely on the journalist and the editor of such a newspaper. Some journalists have to follow interview protocol by either revealing an anonymous contact intentionally or distorting information obtained from an interviewee with the sole purpose of selling the story. In that sense, there is hardly an ethical and professional media in Sri Lanka. In terms of electronic media, G. Viyangoda brought out an interesting observation during the interview regarding the use of language during the news bulletin on any local television channel when reporting issues regarding the conflict, which would describe LTTE as *'Kotti pattawu'* and praise the armed troops who were lost in battle as heroes of the nation. That may be, but using phrases such as *'Kotti pattawu'* completely debases any form of professionalism and ethical reporting that should be conducted by news readers and the television station. Regardless of the fact that the LTTE is a terrorist organisation, this should not be an excuse to use such phrases in news reporting, which is supposed to be an objective medium. News channels should be completely unbiased when reporting the news; however in Sri Lanka most state-led news channels have an inclination towards euphemistic speech of the government. G. Viyangoda argued that the term has been used for the last twenty-thirty years and is completely unethical (did not want to be directly quoted). To contrast, one will not witness a professional American or British news station using derogatory language with regard to *'al-Qaeda'*.

However, most respondents felt that state media would be more unethical than private media, given that the former has constantly distorted information and facts regarding sensitive issues.

For example, Nalaka Gunawardena, a renowned media commentator and writer, stated that,

*'Some sections of the private media have their own ethical compass and framework in which they engage in their work. These may be imperfect, but the ethics must come from within the profession and NEVER imposed by babus in government or theory-totting academics who have never been inside a newsroom'*.

The media has to come up with a set of ethics and conduct interviews, gather information and write articles in accordance to the highest professionalism. This would also prevent the flow of incorrect information and propaganda of certain journalists or television stations from reaching the masses, which could contribute to conflict as well as fostering hatred amongst communities. The trust relationship must be strengthened between the media and the citizens of Sri Lanka who have begun to doubt the veracity of such sources.

In the sphere of journalism, there seems to be little hope other than the College of Journalism. Most journalists have left the country and private media institutions have realised that in order to survive they must present an innocuous front. The popular blogger, Indi Samarajiva pointed out that most journalists tend to attend press conferences for the food and drink, rather than for any passion to get a story. Under-qualification is an issue; journalists tend not to hold a degree in journalism or any other field in Sri Lanka, which explains the lack of professionalism and ethics that would otherwise be in-built through the training and education in the field itself; for example Rajpal Abeynayake's incident of plagiarism. Apart from lack of qualifications, there is also a perfunctory attitude amongst most journalists who are in the field. Such digressive trends, if continued, hold very little promise for the future of Sri Lankan journalism and progress of the media. Hopefully, the College of Journalism will begin to improve standards, but low salaries relegate journalism as an unattractive career prospective. Additionally, the lack of union-representation and negotiations with media owners creates pressure to *'maximise perks outside of fixed and poor salaries leads to unprofessional conduct'*. Levels of professionalism though, are quite high amongst some existing journalists in Sri Lanka.

The roots of malpractice in journalism were argued effectively by one respondent;

*“The poor wages that journalists get in Sri Lanka at the moment deserves serious and urgent attention as it directly contributes to poor research &, over a period of time, bias. It appears to be an entrenched problem as owners of media are also on the boards of the key journalist organizations and therefore maybe blocking attempts to restructure the industry. Most freelance journalists get extremely poor pay that discourages researching stories well, while poor pay discourages talented people from continuing in the profession. A journalist at the top English private daily told me that some reporters who made a fuss in the past about salaries were immediately fired and their chairman does not tolerate any dissension about wages, and as a result there is no hope of such negotiations”.*

## **Media Influence**

Politicians in Sri Lanka are deeply affected by what is written in the media about them or their practices. Allegations of corruption, ridicule and general criticism by the media has led to the assault and murder of journalists as well as media personnel. For example, Minister Mervin Silva attacked an official at the Rupavahini Corporation last year. Similarly, in August 2008 Minister Mervin Silva was involved in an incident with the crew from the television channel ‘Sirasa’ at the opening of a flyover. Despite constant media focus on the Minister’s frolics, there has been little response by the state authorities and in that respect, even though issues are brought to light by the media, it remains ignored. The government would have to bring to justice those who break the law, regardless of their position in the state. Democracy is in a constant state of failure in Sri Lanka, due to the ruling party’s blind disregard of such injustices.

Those that take a stand against the status quo have been threatened and assaulted which has led to the declining standard of media freedom in Sri Lanka. Programmes such ‘Vimasuma’ on Sirasa TV and the exposé’s it conducts have got reactions from Ministers. Yet, all this dissent towards the status quo and politicians has been completely limited in terms of changing policies and behaviour. The persistence of injustice and its further exacerbation in Sri Lanka reinforces the former point.

According to the Jehan Perera, politicians look at the media for a good analysis of events in Sri Lanka, and offer benefits to journalists who report a favourable view that makes all involved look good, however, if any criticism is levelled against these politicians, the immediate consequence is assault, murder at a more serious level and abduction. Policy makers, similarly, are affected by the media; however whether such a concern transpires in the diversion of policy making is a moot point. It remains difficult to outline such a change in the past in Sri Lanka. As one respondent noted,

*‘Yes. I think the current wave of attacks on media could not take place without the support of high-level policy makers, which logically means coverage is of concern to them if they’re prepared to put so much effort into controlling it and shutting it down’.*

In trying to influence the policy makers and politicians in a better way, it seems that perhaps disseminating quality material that speaks the truth and outlines the correct path that needs to be followed would at some point get the attention of the political elite. The issues of professionalism in the media are the very afflictions that impede any ability to bring about an inclination of change. The respected blogger Java Jones states, *‘I don’t know if flogging the dead beast will make a difference, but I guess they will have to keep on plugging the truth in such a way that eventually it would be difficult for even the diehard bozos out there to justify their earlier views’.* This is of course a very hopeful outcome given the political history of Sri Lanka and the zeal of politicians in this country. Indi Samarajiva believed that at this point in the country, striving to influence policy makers and politicians, should not even be an issue. What is more pressing is trying to protect media personnel from the current trend of impunity. This pointed was argued by Matt Abud as well,

*'First media safety is the priority. Then reporting ethically would become more possible. Currently there is very limited space for the wide range of possible reporting that would fulfil necessary roles vis-à-vis policy makers'.*

# **Innovative information flows and exchange programmes at local and national levels**

## **Innovative use of theatre**

Theatre as a means of communicating messages central to peacebuilding, democracy and human rights is relatively under-developed in Sri Lanka. Traditional media and communications projects by donors have by and large glossed over the potential of the arts and theatre to complement and strengthen mainstream media and civil society initiatives in support of peace and democracy. Two groups in Sri Lanka stand out for their thought-leadership in using theatre to instigate discussion amongst diverse audiences on the highly emotive and contested issues of conflict, violence, gender and identity.

## **Forum Theatre by Stages Theatre Group**

"Stages" is a Colombo based theatre group mainly working in English language. They perform primarily for an audience comprised of English speaking people. They have produced several full-length dramas and short plays. A significant contribution this theatre group has made is in introducing the Forum Theatre format. Although several forms of applied theatre have been used in Sri Lanka by theatre groups as a tool to work with children with special needs and traumatized children for example, Forum Theatre had never been widely used to build up a dialogue among the general public on issues such as ethnic conflict, gender equity, homosexuality. Stages has used forum theatre very effectively since 2001.

Forum theatre offers the theatre audience an opportunity to get involved in the making of a play. The concept is simple- the actors perform a stem scene that is taken to a state of crisis and then stopped. The resolution to the problem is then in the hands of the audience. The rest of the play unfolds according to the suggestions of the audience, made then and there. A method devised by Augusto Boal, Forum theatre is an exciting and engaging method used to address and stimulate dialogue on complex and sensitive social issues. The issues addressed by stages through forum theatre have included domestic violence, ethnic conflict, homosexuality, conflict between parents and adolescents and gender based violence.

Stages have not sought funds from anywhere. Their shows have been sponsored by several corporate sponsors, but because of the nature of funding, their desire to take their productions and Forum Theatre format across the island have to date been unrealized.

## **Janakaraliya Mobile Theatre**

Janakaraliya goes to remote villages carrying all the necessary equipment to create a theatre hall with them, thus providing opportunities for rural and grassroots communities to enjoy drama. Veteran dramatist Parakrama Niriella conceived this idea and developed the mobile theatre venture with dramatist /actor H.A. Perera.

Janakaraliya travels all over the country and conducts provincial and district level "theatre education" and "Theatre in Education" programs. The Janakaraliya mobile theatre is constructed as a "new arena theatre", open to the audience from all four sides and has an audience capacity of 500 adults or 800 children. It can be dismantled and loaded in a single truck and transported to any part of the country.

Janakaraliya has 7 original dramas it selectively produces depending on the location. It conducts drama and theatre workshops, theatre appreciation workshops and performance workshops for school children in the area it sets up the mobile theatre in. It also conducts workshop to develop

the skills and creativity of youth in these areas. Local / rural dramatists are provided opportunities to perform and are encouraged to write and produce more plays for mobile theatre.

Janakaraliya is actively engaged in developing better relations between various ethnic communities estranged by the protracted violence and war. It treats and welcomes the participation of Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala communities when conducting drama and theatre workshops and in all the other activities of Janakaraliya. Producing and performing all of the Janakaraliya plays both in Sinhala and Tamil enables all the communities to enjoy them. Janakaraliya is also using forum theatre to help audiences understand the underlying / root causes of violent conflict in Sri Lanka and help, as a result of the active participation, in the processes of conflict transformation.

### **Third Eye**

Led by Mr. Sivagnanam Jeyasankar, Third Eye is a local knowledge and skill activists group based in Batticaloa. To create a dialogue on issues related to cohabitation, economic disparities and globalisation's impact at the grassroots level, they conduct workshops, seminars, informal discussion groups in the universities, schools, villages and at other social events and publish a newsletter "Moondravathu kann". Third Eye uses innovative theatre activities for the workshops they conduct to promote gender equity and equality, children's issues, environmental issues, ethnic harmony and related issues. Believing in the strength of the community to address its own needs and challenges, Third Eye does not accept funding from local and international NGOs.

### **Small Grants and Media Houses / Resource Centres – Best practices from Internews in Sri Lanka<sup>6</sup>**

In 2006, CPA was invited by Internews (then headed by Matt Abud) to join a Technical Assistance Board to advise the design and implementation of their Media Houses (MH), the first of which opened in Matara. The Media Houses continue to operate to date, with one in Ampara and another in Colombo in addition to the original Media House in Matara. The main goal of the MH is to provide the resources, training, and facilities for local journalists to pursue their work. The MH also provided opportunities for community organisations to explore issues of their concern, through community-based media training and production. Radio training and production was the prime focus of MH activities. This is because of the relative ease and speed with which radio programming can be produced and distributed in Sri Lanka. However MH also provided support to other media workers, particularly working in print to develop / strengthen their digital media skills. The idea at the outset was to have each MH develop as an institutions that could coordinate and provide strong support to other media initiatives in the region where they operate, as resources for training, for production, and for access, for both journalists and community groups.

Media House operations included (in all locations around the country)<sup>7</sup>,

- Structured short courses over approximately 14 months for journalists and community groups. This training was provided by a combination of national and international trainers. National trainers were sourced from a range of different organisations, and commissioned on a consultancy basis.
- Training delivered in Sinhala and / or Tamil, through interpretation as necessary.
- Access to computers, Internet, subscriber publications, radio recording equipment and radio production studio. Access areas can also be used for a range of other local events – including cultural events, local gatherings and discussions, film screenings, exhibitions, and so on.
- Facilitation and / or commissioning of story and programme production, focusing on local issues and concerns.

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<sup>6</sup> The author was part of the Technical Assistance Board of Internews and was also a member of the Small Grants Technical Evaluation Board.

<sup>7</sup> Information taken from concept note for Media Resource and Production Centre (the original name for the Media House) sent to author by Matt Abud.

MH training operations were structured in the following manner,

- Potential participants would be able to apply to take part in regular training programs. Training programs would last for approximately six days over a period of one month. Schedules and curriculum will be designed to best meet local needs. Certificates will be presented to participants on completion of their training.
- Following the training, they would be able to take part in local current affairs program production.

Production at the MH was structured in the following manner,

- For trainee journalists, stories were commissioned for a regular current affairs programme. Internews staff -local and international - mentored the production and journalists were paid for the work they produced.
- Community groups would also receive support for program production.
- The resulting programming – on current affairs, produced by journalists and community group programming – would be broadcast via a relationship between the MH and Uva Community Radio (subsidised paid airtime model).
- Audiences were able to respond to program content live via phone, or via post. Other possibilities, such as SMS and email, were to be explored at the beginning, but to the best knowledge of the author of this report, never really took off.

Other means of program distribution were to be explored and developed, such as web streaming and pod casting. All programming was archived on CPA's the Voices of Reconciliation Radio – <http://radio.voicesofpeace.lk>.

Access to the MH was liberal. Journalists and community groups who already have computer and media production skills were able to use and access resources of the MH. Those who lacked these skills were able to use the access resources after participation in one of the training programs. Access will be free of charge to users for the period of the project.

As noted by Internews in the interview conducted for the purposes of this report, Media Houses will expand into Trincomalee, Badulla and Kurunegala. Target groups include local experienced journalists; and novice journalists drawn from the following groups: youth affected by conflict; women; and plantation estate workers.

Currently, the Media Houses provide training programs for journalists and community groups, and have a radio studio and production equipment, field recorders, computers, fax, and Internet resources for journalists. Local content is produced in the Matara, Ampara and Kalmunai media houses, and broadcast in Sinhala and Tamil via a relationship with regional state radio stations part of the SLBC network. That is Real Voices, the radio program produced by local journalist and CBO trainees in Sinhalese and Tamil and broadcast through SLBC associated radio stations.

From the Ampara Media House Real Voices is produced in Sinhala and broadcast through Uva Radio on Sundays (87.6FM from 6.15pm to 6.45pm). The Kalmunai Media House broadcasts in Tamil on Saturdays through Pirai FM (102 FM from 5pm to 5.30pm). The Matara Media House produces Real Voices in Sinhalese and broadcast through Ruhunu Sevaya every Sunday (107.2 FM and 105.4 FM from 10.00am to 10.45am). From April 2007 the East Media House contributes with 15 minutes of programming to the Matara Media House to promote a better understanding about issues in the east to people in the south. In a country divided by community and geography, Real Voices tells stories about issues that affect everyone. Real Voices is the most comprehensive radio program dealing with community and social issues and current event available to local audiences. Programs explore local problems, and frequently have a focus on discussing potential solutions to those problems. Through Internews' "Cross Productions" Real Voices also shares stories across different locations, languages, and communities. Journalists from the south work together with journalist from the east in both locations so audiences in the south can hear stories from the east, and eastern listeners can hear stories from southern communities.

The challenge for the Media Houses' Real Voices Radio programs is addressing the various perceptions of the current conflict between the two ethnic groups. Program producers face an uphill battle in striving to ensure that no single ethnic group's views are either ignored or misrepresented amidst the government's adversarial view promoting the conflict as "us versus them", with one side winning or losing and having all or nothing.

Internews also initiated a Small Grants Scheme (SGS) during the first phase of its operations in Sri Lanka. CPA was invited to join the SGS Board, which oversaw SGS operations and selected the projects that were supported. The SGS was called 'Regional Voices' and the grants aimed to support the production of innovative programming that focuses on the stories, issues, and experiences of communities from outside Colombo. The Regional Voices Small Grants Program was funded by the United States Agency for International Development / Office of Transitional Initiatives (USAID / OTI). These grants supported production in different media, but were in design biased towards radio programming. The use of new information and communication technology (ICT) was particularly encouraged.

Grants were awarded on a competitive basis and applications evaluated within the Regional Voices theme according to:

- Innovation of subject, with a particular emphasis on stories that currently receive reduced coverage
- Creativity of format
- Target audience
- Experience and / or future goals of producers

The potential for ongoing production beyond the initial grant period was also be taken into consideration during the evaluation, particularly for grant applications that included the procurement of equipment (capital expenditure). SGS grants were designed to offer support in the form of production operational costs, equipment such as computers and recording equipment (whether procured or for temporary use), post-production, and distribution and archiving. Grants included the support of single programs; a series or serialized form; a particular project within a larger existing production process; the establishment of resources aimed at longer-term production goals. Internews also offered some technical and developmental support to grant recipients as required, so that the SGS whenever possible was integrated with MH operations. Total grant amount was not to exceed US\$ 7000.

Grants supported the following individuals and organisations<sup>8</sup>:

- Jasmine Newswire: From 15.09.2006 to 07.04.2007
- The Yellowin Media: From 25.09.2006 to 14.04.2007
- Paradise Community Development Organization From 25.09.2006 to 14.06.2007
- Mr. T.C. Senanayake: From 01.10.2006 to 07.03.2007
- The Power Foundation: From 27.09.2006 to 16.04.2007
- Mr. T.S. Mugundan: From 01.10.2006 to 07.02.2007
- Sahana: From 01.01.2007 to 21.08.2007
- Dushiyanthini & Indrajith: From 01.01.2007 to 21.08.2007
- Low Country Community Based Organization Consortium: From 01.01.2007 to 21.06.2007
- Women Resource Centre: From 01.01.2007 to 21.06.2007
- PDF Sri Lanka: From 01.01.2007 to 21.07.2007
- The Power Foundation: From 01.04.2007 to 31.07.2007
- Saara Media House: From 01.04.2007 to 31.07.2007
- Creative Media Network: From 01.04.2007 to 31.07.2007

Across all the grants, the following observations were made,

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<sup>8</sup> Information taken from final report of SGS grants given to author by Matt Abud.

- The potential for the radio / podcast format to explore local issues, stories, and perceptions in-depth could be much further explored and strengthened.
- Programmes covered a wide range of issues affecting local women, and include a broad range of women's voices.
- Public response including visits from women seeking further information on specific issues was positive and shows potential for greater ongoing activities.
- Extra capacity in skills and resources resulted in a lasting improvement in the existing program production of grantees.
- The timeframe and process for engagement at village level could be increased, to ensure broader participation of all sectors of the community, as some groups were unable to take part in production due to work and other commitments.
- Producers required further training.
- Several villages requested participation in programs throughout the broadcast period.
- SMS based news service is valuable and developing. Commercial agreements and the competition stimulated between mobile phone companies to provide SMS news services was a significant impact facilitated by the SGS grants.

**HIVOS is strongly encouraged to look at the design and impact of the small grants scheme to encourage civil society at the grassroots level, especially in geographical proximity to the locations of the Media Houses, to produce content that could lead to the development of alternative, independent, vernacular media in the region – in print as well as through other media.**

Another project Internews is currently implementing is a Humanitarian Information Project called *Lifeline*. Its purpose is to provide information regarding humanitarian assistance to vulnerable communities in Sri Lanka through media productions. Lifeline is a Humanitarian Information Service aimed to improve the access to information to Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs) and vulnerable communities affected by the conflict through media productions in Tamil and Sinhala language. Lifeline is producing a weekly 30-minute radio show broadcast through national (Sooriyan FM) and regional radio stations (Pirai FM) and a 4-page newspaper distributed directly and for free to IDPs camps and also as an insert with Sunday Virakesari every week in Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Mannar, Jaffna, Vavuniya and Puttalam. We also broadcast stories in Sinhala through our media house in Matara. Through these media productions Internews tries to disseminate relevant and accurate information for IDPs and conflict affected communities to know about humanitarian projects, campaigns and services that Government, I/NGOs, UN agencies and others are providing, and more importantly, how these communities can access and benefit from those services and information. The goal is to support these communities to obtain information that can help them to better cope with their situation. *Lifeline* is broadcast island wide every Saturday in Sooriyan FM (6.00-8.00am, North East and Kandy 97.3, Jaffna 93.0, Colombo and South 103.2, island wide 97.9) and on Sunday through **Pirai FM** (1.30-2.00pm, 102 FM in the east). You can also download the radio shows through our website ([www.internews.lk](http://www.internews.lk)) and **Voices of Reconciliation Radio (VOR)** <http://radio.voicesofpeace.lk>. *Lifeline* newspaper is distributed every week for free to IDP camps and as an insert with *Sunday Virakesari* in the North and East.

### **Groundviews and citizen journalism in Sri Lanka<sup>9</sup>**

Citizen journalism is also known as participatory journalism, which allows for the strengthening of democracy through the dissemination of information that is accurate and wide-ranging as

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<sup>9</sup> This section is part of an on-going study into new media in Sri Lanka by the author. It is not to be quoted or republished. Those surveyed to date in the study include bloggers, senior journalists, media commentators, mainstream print Editors, Public Service Broadcasting TV producers and communications experts. Some spoke on the condition of anonymity. Interviews were conducted via email and face to face where possible, with respondents sourced from across the country and from the diaspora as well. Excerpts from the study are used in the following sections as well - *Popular websites, new sites and blogs in Sri Lanka, Popular websites, new sites and blogs in Sri Lanka, Electronic, Print and Web Media: And the winner is?, E-mail campaigns, Perceptions of NGO E-mails on Peace, War and Human rights, Access of news-based web services on Sri Lanka*



interpreted by the citizens of that country.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the advantages it presents, most of important of which, is the strengthening of democratic values through the freedom of expression and encouraging dialogue, has been recognised as one of its most positive attributes. Citizen journalism can help mitigate violence. With new Internet and web based technologies that are revolutionising communications even over vast distances, citizens in Sri Lanka who have been effectively cut off from mainstream media have found new ways of expressing themselves, their concerns, their aspirations and their ideas for conflict transformation. Often, this new age of citizen journalism lacks the grammar of age-old diplomacy and socio-political norms – the conversation is raw, visceral, impatient, irreverent, pithy, provocative. In Sri Lanka, it is a conversation that's largely still in English, and also limited to urban centres. The potential of citizen journalism, however, is that in giving a foundation for all citizens - literate, illiterate, male and female, of all ethnicities, castes, class and religion – to express themselves freely, the transformation of polity and society to accommodate ideas and measures that facilitate conflict transformation and engender peace also occurs apace.

At least – this is the much-vaunted promise. The reality is somewhat different. Citizen journalism can fall by the way side as a fad if it doesn't foster measurable and tangible change for citizens facing the brunt of violence and conflict. The conversations can be trivial and silly as well as racist and deeply divisive. It cannot be assumed that communication automatically brings with it greater understanding and it may well be the case that terrorists (and sections of the State interested in the perpetuating of war that brings with it huge material wealth for a coterie deeply disinterested in peace) mould the basic technologies and frameworks of citizens journalism to spread hate and violence.

Cognisant of the above, and yet interested in the subversive nature of citizen journalism to effect progressive conflict transformation in Sri Lanka through a space simply not available in other media, *Groundviews* – [www.groundviews.org](http://www.groundviews.org) - was launched in December 2006 as the first trilingual citizen journalism initiative in the country<sup>11</sup>. It is to date the only such initiative. The features stories that are vital pegs of hope, diversity and coexistence. They are those that will possibly never make it to mainstream media. Ordinary citizens, weary of violence, write them. Artistes, human rights and media activists, academics, young bloggers and thinkers – none of them with any journalism background or training, write them. *Groundviews* is already a repository of content and the thrust and parry of debate that is sorely lacking in mainstream media, and is eroding in mainstream polity and society. It is, finally, an experiment in progress – the enactment of new anti-terrorism legislation by the government that is in effect a means through which to shut down voices of dissent – is a Damoclean sword for *Groundviews*, and all websites in Sri Lanka, that seek to air voices of citizens interested in federalism, democracy and peace.

Therefore, there is no guarantee that it will foster a new social movement in support of peace, even when to do so is to risk one's life. There is no guarantee it will secure peace and support real world conflict transformation initiatives. There is no guarantee that hate speech will not take over the timbre of online debate. Ironically, the more *Groundviews* is successful in fostering new voices in support of peace, the more it will be a target of concerted attacks to prevent it from growing further. And it is here that the greatest challenge lies. Not in the technology itself, but in the creation of a social and political movement, fostered by citizen journalism mediated through new media and new technology, that is able to maintain, in some small way, the hope of a just and lasting peace. Citizens journalism is not a magic bullet against terrorism, but is an increasingly important vehicle for ordinary citizens to record their views in support democracy as the only way through which terrorism can be effectively combated.

As noted in a missive written by the Editor of *Groundviews* (also the chief author of this report)<sup>12</sup>,

*Content published on Groundviews since its launch in 2006 demonstrates how professional web based citizen journalism can strengthen progressive, civil dialogues on highly complex*

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<sup>10</sup> *We Media: How Audiences are Shaping the Future of News and Information*, by Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis

<sup>11</sup> Disclosure: The author of this report is also the Editor of *Groundviews*.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.groundviews.org/2008/12/29/award-winning-citizen-journalism-looking-back-at-2008/>

*and inflammatory issues and topics. The site regularly publishes content that will not and cannot be published in mainstream / traditional media in Sri Lanka today. In doing so, it shows that web based citizen journalism and media can meaningfully foster vital debates on war, peace, human rights and democracy even within violent conflict.*

### **Popular websites, new sites and blogs in Sri Lanka**

*Daily Mirror, TamilNet, Ministry of Defense, Google news services, Lanka Dissent, BBC, Groundviews, LBO, Inter Press Service, Al Jazeera Online, Tamil Nation, Tamil Guardian, Andrew Sullivan, New York Times, India Uncut, Deane's Dimension, Indi.ca, Kottu, Info Lanka, News.lk, Factiva, Defencenet*

### **Popular websites, new sites and blogs in Sri Lanka**

- Daily Mirror- general coverage, decent news, updated relatively regularly, fast news services with a range of news items
- TamilNet- general coverage, LTTE view
- Defencenet- access to quick info on military operations
- Ministry of Defense – SLA position, military news
- Google News Services- international representation and coverage of SL issues
- Lanka Dissent- Alternative view and comment, interesting articles
- BBC- general coverage, impartial news, less politicised than SL media
- CNN- international news, less politicised than SL media though there is less coverage
- LBO- economic coverage
- Andrew Sullivan- intelligent coverage of US politics, many updates, well-written
- India Uncut- Indian readership
- Deane's Dimension- challenging and liberal economic perspectives
- Indi.ca- popular readership
- Groundviews.org- commentary, interesting articles, open forum, debatable views, non-media reports from public and additional information
- Al Jazeera- general coverage, impartial news
- Factiva- wire news coverage
- News.lk- government view
- Infolanka- aggregates a number of news sites
- Sunday Leader- forms an ideology on issues, general coverage, questions the *status quo*

### **Electronic, Print and Web Media: And the winner is?**

An overwhelming majority of respondents to the questionnaire trusted web media more than electronic and print media. This was due to the diversity of viewpoints that can be found on the web. However, a few respondents stated that print and electronic media would be trustworthier. Firstly, electronic media has clips of live news that are more accountable to viewers. As Java Jones states, 'seeing is believing'. Print media quotes sources that enhances its reliability, but there is the risk of misquoting and altering information as journalists have done in the past.

Selecting which medium would be more trustworthy is difficult, when all of them have their drawbacks. However, the increasing reliance on web media is indicative of movement away from traditional news services in Sri Lanka into the far more used web based services. This could be due to a realisation that web media is more accountable, reliable and trustworthy. Matt Abud argued that,

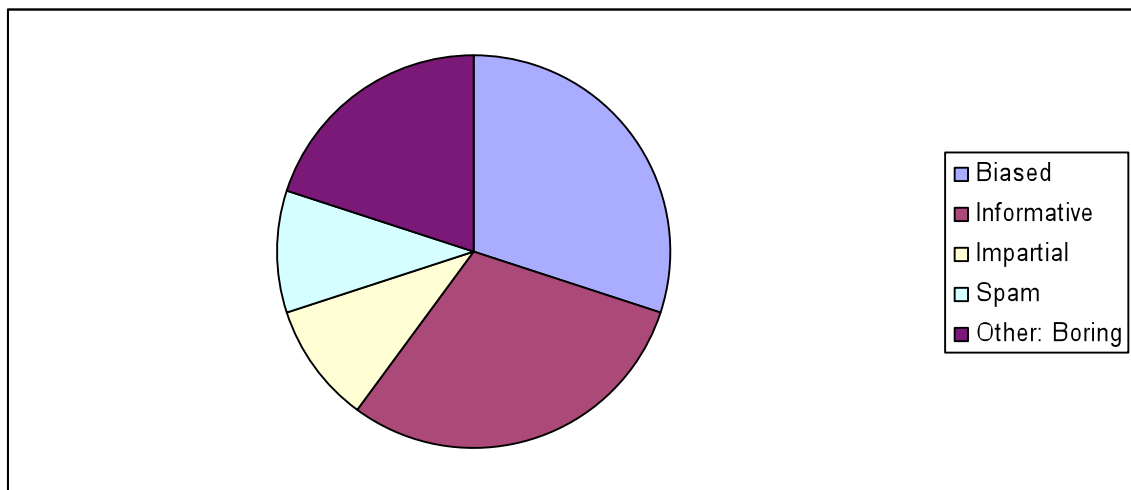
*'Most, I trust to represent a position, if you can call that trust. None I trust to tell me comprehensively what is going on, either due to political bias, skill level, or (for some) because comprehensive coverage is not part of their editorial mandate.'*

### E-mail campaigns

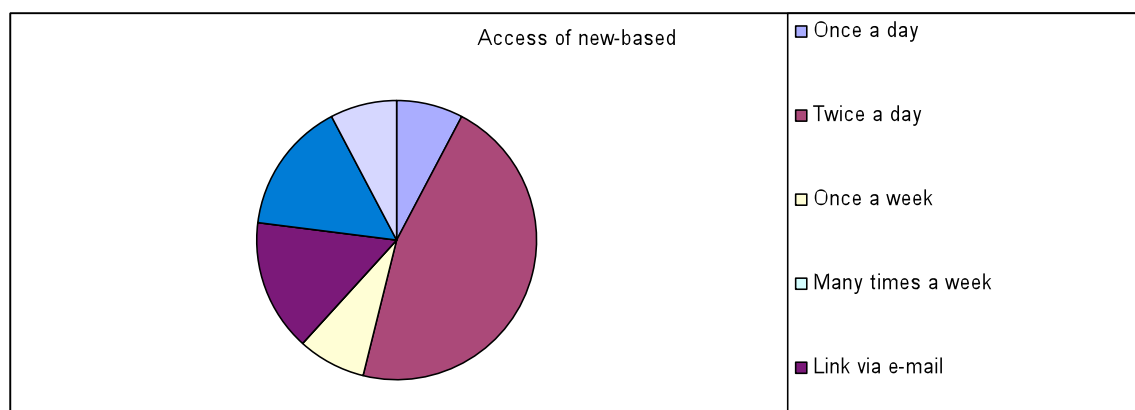
E-mail campaigns as a tool to mobilise public opinion is ineffective as the knowledge of using such technology is only available to a very limited percentage of the population and access is limited as well. Furthermore, public opinion in Sri Lanka tends to be fractured and unaware. Additionally, the fact that most of Sri Lanka is rural, with very little access to such technology makes it difficult for any sort of campaign to mobilise the public. Furthermore, language remains a barrier as most e-mail campaigns are conducted in English.

### Charts

#### Perceptions of NGO E-mails on Peace, War and Human rights



#### Access of news-based web services on Sri Lanka



## Funding map

An overview of current donor funding going into NGO / civil society media and communications initiatives is below<sup>13</sup>:

Donor	Activities since 2006	Planned beyond 2008
Sweden	<b>Contribution to Sri Lanka Press Institute (SLPI):</b> (1st phase 2003-2006; 2nd phase 2007-2009), SIDA will withdraw after that phase	
Norway	<b>Contribution to SLPI</b> 2006: 1.7 Mio. NKR (320'000\$) 2007 – 2009: SLPI Training plus safety fund  2007/8: <b>FMM “Diversity” program:</b> 70'000\$: award programme for provincial journalism – enhancing diversity and public services value; award and training program to strengthen independent reporting on the country.  2007: contribution to <b>MRTC Jaffna</b> (946'000 NOK = 175'000 \$) for 2008: 33'000\$	In future: grant for buying location of SLPI (50% of costs) SIDA might join that effort.
Denmark	<b>Contribution to SLPI:</b> Radio TV Training (2005 to 2009): Danida will withdraw after  2006 only: participating in <b>FLICT program</b>	
USAID	1. “Regional Media Initiative” (RMI), implemented by Internews Established media houses in Matara, Ampara and Kalmunai to provide training and production support for provincial journalists.  Production of Real Voices Radio (RVR) programs aired on SLBC regional affiliates Pirai FM, Uva Community Radio, and Ruhunu Sevaya): <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Local issues, local voices</li><li>• Multi-ethnic cross production</li><li>• Small-grant support for local radio content production</li></ul> 2006 – 2007: US\$ 1.3 Million from Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI)  2. Conflict Mitigation and Reporting Program, implemented by Internews, continuing support for training and production through media houses  MoU with SLPI  Mentored production with coexistence & reconciliation focus  \$400,000 for 12 months ending Dec. 2008 from Office of Conflict Mitigation and Management (CMM)  3. “Lifeline” humanitarian information project, implemented by Internews, meeting info needs of IDPs in East and North-East  4 page insert into Veerakesari (Tamil paper) airtime on Sooriyan FM, 2 hours weekly  1/08 – 6/2008: 200'000\$ from Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA); extension request under review through end 2008	New activities under Supporting Regional Governance (SuRG), with Eastern Province focus.  Journalist protection, press freedom, support for local news and dialogue on issues of regional and national importance.  Prime partners: ARD Inc., with Equal Access.

<sup>13</sup> This information provided confidentially to CPA through Donor Peace Support Group Media Caucus. **It is strictly eyes only.** Though we cannot find any inaccuracies, CPA cannot guarantee the facts and figures included in this table. This table was compiled by SDC in July 2008.

	<p>4. "Transition Initiatives" small-grant program implemented by Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI), supporting local partners on activities related to peace process or tsunami recovery</p> <p>Content production Training Advocacy Small grants generally \$25- \$50,000; DAI media work ended 3/08</p>	
EU	<p>IFJ and FMM: <b>Human rights Journalism Award programme.</b> 82'000 Euro (2008)</p> <p>IFJ and CPA: <b>Promoting Human Rights in Sri Lanka by improving media reporting -</b> Human rights reporting handbook + training module 75'000 Euro</p>	<p>Media and Stabilisation: handing over of the Internews infrastructure and program (media houses) to SLPI 800'000 Euro</p> <p>Local Voices on Human Rights = continuation of Internews radio production formats ( 500'000 Euro) in partnership with SLPI</p> <p>Advertising campaign on dev coop.</p>
UK DFID	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Media projects through FLICT :</li> <li>BBC WST Training: Environmental Journalism in 2007: 100'000 \$ 20 journalists NGO for Communication</li> <li>Pilot project for radio with YA TV</li> </ol>	
Germany	<p><b>Media projects through FLICT:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2005-2006: BBC WST training: 'Bridging the Divide' in Colombo and provinces, 1 yr</li> <li>Since 2005: YATV Vilippu series (in Tamil, on TNL)</li> <li>Since 2007: YATV Palaama – bilingual program on cultural diversity</li> <li>Insert in 3 newspapers (Jaffna, Tamil weekly, Rave Sinhala)</li> <li>Radio: cooperation with regional media (SLBC) and women/peace NGO: talk show</li> </ul> <p>Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation: Youth program on Radio in tea plantation area</p> <p>Support to website: <a href="http://www.inlanka.org">www.inlanka.org</a></p>	<p>BBC WST terminated: needs analysis done, but no follow-up</p> <p>YATV Vilippu ends 2008- next phase?</p> <p>Palaama – ends 2008, next phase?</p> <p>Print media will continue</p> <p>Radio to be extended</p>
Switzerland	<p>Since 2003:</p> <p>YATV No War Zone Phase 4 (9/2005 – 8/2008: 1.14 Mio. CHF)</p>	
Japan	<p>Low focus on media:</p> <p>Funding for PAFFEREL and CPA Media Unit for Media Monitoring on Elections.</p>	
Australia	<p>Contribution to media projects FLICT</p> <p>2008: 60'000 \$ to the Centre for the Study of Human Rights, University of Colombo for 'training and capacity building on human rights for media personnel'</p>	
UNESCO	<p>Community Media in Kothmale</p>	

### Observations and recommendations for donors in Sri Lanka supporting media and communications initiatives

All the desk research of donor driven initiatives suggest that plans and initiatives that are adopted, not adapted, for the Sri Lankan context have resulted in huge expenditure with little or nothing to show in terms of enduring capacity of journalists in the Provinces. Furthermore, parachuted foreign experts, with no media background, who are themselves only familiar with the complex dynamics of media reform and strengthening in Sri Lanka through reports generated by other donors, contribute to this vicious cycle. There is another dimension, and it is the lack of imagination of donors to foresee media developments into the future. The emphasis

from 2003 through to 2008 has been on mainstream media, with little or no emphasis on the development of regional, provincial alternative media (print, electronic, web) or exploring and strengthening alternative means of communication – such as NGO / CBO / CSO networks on the ground. This results in a mindset, and project monitoring and evaluation guidelines and frameworks wholly unfit for the development of innovative new models of media and communication to deal with violent conflict, within cycles of violence, communal unrest and the legacy of protracted conflict such as one finds in the Eastern Province. This vitiates the reach and impact of projects. Local partners, keen to secure money adopt mechanisms unsuited to engage with the actors on the ground in a manner that develops buy-in and sustained interest. Piecemeal approaches, overlap, workshop fatigue and the terrible effects of a pay-for-participation model (participants at training workshops are paid relatively exorbitant sums of money to secure participation and attendance for the duration of the workshop) create more problems than they solve. Ironically, donors who call for collaboration, networking and sharing of resources and information on the ground and from their local partners are precisely those who are unable or unwilling to share their programmatic information with other donors.

As noted by Yasha Lange and Shastri Ramachandaran (writing in 2005)<sup>14</sup>,

- Most donors focus on peacebuilding, social cohesion and reconciliation and consider media an element in reaching these goals – this is evident from the number of courses on ‘conflict conscious journalism’ or the variety of television programmes and campaigns aimed to spread peace and understanding.
- Linked to this, most support is allocated to training and peace-casting, rather than structural reform of the media sector. It is likely that this has as much to do with the goals (peace), the timeline available to donors (not always long term, need to have short term impact) and the feasibility (structure reform is anything but easy).
- The partners chosen by donors are general NGOs, which share their goals and some friend media organisations. Cooperation with the mainstream media is – other than through inviting their journalists to trainings – quite rare.

Qualifying these observations in 2008 would be the fact that there is no longer any meaningful peacecasting. That which is done on a regular basis, for example by Young Asia Television, is limited to terrestrial broadcast on a single channel with a limited footprint. Most of the programmes it produces are those that will never be aired on State media, because of the nature of the incumbent regime.

Given, *inter alia*, the present context and a clear resistance to be seen to be supporting media institutions directly, donors have been guarded in their direct support to mainstream media capacity development. No large media institution gets support from any donor (to the best of our knowledge) for staff training, capital expenditure or projects to improve the quality of journalism – e.g. financial reporting. Accordingly it is vital to remember that media funding will continue to be channelled through NGOs and civil society organisations. The irony here is that precisely because they act as channels of support for independent media, NGOs and media freedom defenders have come under increasing attack – verbal, physical and now, virtual – in recent years. The emphasis on protecting those individuals and agencies that have demonstrated a commitment to media freedom, FOI / RTI and FOE has been somewhat lethargic on the part of donors, with many only realising this year that aspects such as information security go hand in hand with safety training for journalists on the ground.

HIVOS in this regard can help motivate more donors to recognise and address the challenges facing media development in Sri Lanka as an aspect integral to their mandate in Sri Lanka.

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<sup>14</sup> *Support to Media in Sri Lanka: An Overview of activities and proposals for the future*, Yasha Lange and Shastri Ramachandaran, December 2005, IMS

# Reach and effectiveness of the communications strategies of human rights and women's rights organisations

Five leading publications from civil society organisation's were looked at as part of this study to ascertain the practices and policies adopted by CSOs and NGOs to disseminate information and raise awareness on human rights and women's rights issues.

1. Eya magazine
2. *Vibhavi* Visual Arts magazine
3. *Samabima*
4. *Pravada*
5. *Da Bindu*

## **Eya magazine**

Published by the Women and Media Collective, *Eya* is published three times a year. One thousand copies are printed per issue. Sunila Abeysekara, a local and international award winning human rights activist is co-editor of the magazine. According to its managing editor, it has been tremendously difficult to sell *Eya* on the market. Demand is low and although subscription forms are included with every issue, few requests for new subscriptions come in. As the magazine is sold, it is not distributed for free. Target audiences are university studies, staff at NGOs and CSOs and civil society writ large. Even though there is a regular reader base in Colombo based women's rights NGOs and CSOs, Women and Media Collective don't know whether the magazine reaches the other target groups, since they have no way of ascertaining to whom the magazine is sold from booksellers and news agents.

The magazine sells for Rs. 40 and features a full colour design and layout. The cover features a critical perspective, usually in the form of a photo, of women's issues. The 3 issues published over 2007 and the single issue published to date this year deal with a range of women's rights issues. Issues of gender, female labour, HIV / AIDS, teenage pregnancies, inflation, rape, domestic problems and challenges faced by women in society and polity are often featured. There are also poems and short features by women authors. The editorial often looks at contemporary socio-political, economic and cultural problems through a gendered perspective and places women's rights and issue at the fore. However, content featured in the magazine rarely has such a broad perspective and are more constrained in their approach to and understanding of challenges facing women and rights issues in general. Because the magazine is published thrice yearly, it is a challenge to get articles, edit them, do the layout, print and distribute the magazine on time each quarter.

The style of submissions in the magazine is akin to that of a broadsheet newspaper – content is engaging and presented well. The language is simple and avoids jargon. There is clearly an effort made to present and include content that appeals to the target audience(s). Aside from content on gender and women's issues, there is also content on more general information. However, it would be useful to see more content that looks at the fallout of many social, political, economic and cultural developments in Sri Lanka that marginalise or undermine women's issues and rights. Even though it is unclear whether a university student or an employed woman would actually buy the magazine to read it, it is clear that men and women with an interest in gender would be interested in the content of the magazine if they were to read it.

The magazine shows potential for growth, though staffing and staff capacities at Women and Media Collective will need to be significantly improved if the magazine is to scale up (and also complement the print version with a web based version).

### ***Vibhavi* Visual Arts magazine**

*Vibhavi* is published by the Lalith Kala Academy as a monthly magazine. Looking at issues of culture and cultural production, a unique feature of *Vibhavi* within the Academy is that it is published without any funding specifically allotted for its production. HIVOS provides core funding to the Academy, and *Vibhavi* is producing using this core funding. However, since this funding has come to an end, the managing editor noted with concern that it would be a significant challenge to continue the production of this magazine. Even though the Academy could continue to function through tuition fees, it would not be enough to meet the production costs of *Vibhavi*. The recent price increases in newsprint forced the Academy to downgrade the production quality of the magazine from offset printing to duplo printing. Further, since postage costs have significantly increased, the Academy finds it increasingly difficult to distribute the magazine. Out of around 1,500 printed monthly, around 1,250 copies are posted and around 250 are kept by the Academy to distribute amongst organisations working with it and for display purposes.

Even though the magazine includes a subscription form and a request to send postage fees to the Academy, only around 100 have done so. The Academy has taken steps to email a PDF version of the magazine to those who wish to receive it in such a manner. Around 200 copies of the electronic version of the magazine are emailed, though the Academy has received feedback that the electronic version is less conducive for archival and research purposes. The full colour PDF is difficult to print out, and many of those who are emailed the electronic version access their emails through cybercafés – where printing costs are prohibitively expensive – or via PCs not their own. However, given the degraded quality of the print version, the PDF looks far better and is more easily readable on-screen.

Even though *Vibhavi* does not deal with human rights and governance, the cultural issues it deals with are extremely pertinent in Sri Lanka. Timely, well-researched and well-written cultural critiques are published in the magazine, which includes programmes, details and reviews of cultural productions in Sri Lanka and internationally.

The magazine has a special focus of gender, and has a section that highlights the work and creations of female producers and artistes. In the five issues CPA examined, there were a number of new and established male and female artistes featured in the magazine, and their works critiqued. What is equally noteworthy is the re-publication in Sinhala essays on culture written in English, given a vernacular audience access to opinions, theories, views and ideas from leading cultural theorists and artistes internationally.

At 20 pages, this is a short publication, but with content that is compelling to its target audience. It is unclear whether it will be able to continue in the future once HIVOS core funding to the Academy ends, or whether the magazine will fully transform into an electronic version (PDF) distributed via email.

### ***Samabima***

Published by Rights Now, *Samabima* is different to other civil society publications, in that it is published as a full page in the weekend edition of the *Ravaya* newspaper, a well-known alternative newspaper published in Sinhala. In this respect, Rights Now has no costs associated with the printing and distribution of *Samabima* and its content is guaranteed to reach all subscribers and consumers of *Ravaya*. The contents of the full-page insert are designed in-house and sent to *Ravaya*, which is remunerated for associated printing costs.

*Samabima* is produced by young activists at Rights Now. In comparison to the layout of the rest of the newspaper, *Samabima* is of visibly poorer quality. 34 issues have been published thus far, and Rights Now receives training and capacity building for the production of *Samabima* from a network of friends and colleagues in civil society.

Sexual rights, gay / lesbian / bisexual / transgender issues, human rights, HIV / AIDS are issues regularly featured on *Samabima*. There are around two feature articles per issue. The *Ravaya*



newspaper is known for incisive, progressive Sinhala writing on political, social, cultural and economic issues. Its readership extends to key political decision makers in Sri Lanka and members of civil society. Since *Samabima* is placed within this readership, it makes an effort to present content from a rights perspective that is equally engaging as the rest of the content in the newspaper.

Content ranges from articles written by Rights Now staff, feature articles written by others and interviews with prominent civil society personalities of various rights based issues. There isn't too much of depth to most of the articles published, but they are enough to place on record some of the pressing issues facing rights activists in Sri Lanka, and particularly those working on sexual rights. At a time when mainstream media does not, or cannot report on minority rights based issues, *Samabima* is a valuable voice and an example of an innovative communications strategy by a CSO to promote its advocacy, through mainstream print media, to a wide audience.

### ***Pravada***

*Pravada* is a quarterly publication of the Social Scientists Association (SSA). Even though the publication notes that it is a quarterly, issues are extremely late to hit the newsstands. The latest edition to date is the 2007 April – December issue, that combines 3 issues in one. The editorial committee says these delays are account of the time it takes to compile and edit survey data as well as accurately translate articles first published in English. Selling for 200 rupees, the publication has an educational value and useful for researchers. *Pravada* has had no problems with sales. The magazine is sold through newsagents as well as directly through its publisher – Soorya Publications. A few copies are mailed, including to the contributors of each issue. Social scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists and academics are its main audience. Since many in this audience are in University faculties, *Pravada* is mentioned in classrooms and is picked up by a number of students as required reading. This also means that *Pravada* does not need to, or seek to sell out all the copies of a particular issue as soon as it hits the market. The content in the magazine has an enduring value and consumers often pick up old editions.

Eschewing contemporary political, social, economic and cultural analysis, *Pravada* seeks to examine the overarching issues facing polity and society. This includes content sourced from local and international sociological and anthropological research studies and essays. As this is highbrow reading, University students often pick up copies to reference in exams, ensuring that *Pravada* retains a high appeal and marketability amongst the under-graduate and post-graduate student body (there is a special subscription rate for students). Since *Pravada* is in Sinhala, with content sourced internationally, it is especially valuable for the student body that communicates primarily in the vernacular. While most of the articles are extremely difficult to grasp for a lay audience, a few articles in some issues are written in a non-technical, easy to grasp language. However, as the intended audience is familiar with the jargon of the articles, this is not necessarily a problem. The articles, even in old issues, still read very well because the issues and the problems of they deal with are enduring.

Each issue is focussed around a central topic with an in-depth essay that explores this topic. From Derida to constitutionalism, the establishment of Buddhism in Sri Lanka to essays by University students, post-colonial studies to opinions on politics and rights, book reviews to articles on migration, socialisation, language and socio-political assimilation of minorities are examples of the issues and topics covered regularly in *Pravada*. This content is not just useful for academia, but also for policymakers.

It there is one criticism, it is that some of the content – particularly the social research findings – need to be communicated to a wider public in simpler language. These findings often contest the status quo and entrenched socio-political, religious and cultural ideologies and are therefore important to communicate to a broader audience to stimulate progressive dialogues. *Pravada* will always remain a niche magazine and what is unfortunate about this is that debates conducted on the same issues in mainstream news media, which stands to benefit from accessing content in the magazine, will find the language far too technical and turgid to understand and engage with.

### ***Da Bindu***

*Da Bindu* is a monthly publication of the Da Bindu Collective. This is one of the oldest newspapers published for free trade zone (FTZ) workers and other manual labourers in industry. Distribution is limited primarily to FTZs and the newspaper is handed out to workers in their lodging houses as well.

*Da Bindu* aims to empower female workers in the FTZs, organise them in trade unions, give them leadership skills, address issues and challenges facing them and seeks to dispel social stigmas associated with working in the garment industry. Published in the A4 format on a monthly basis, *Da Bindu* features 12 pages of content. Although established in 1984, *Da Bindu's* production quality is very poor and below the industry average. One explanation given is that it is a constant struggle to meet the costs associated with the production of the magazine.

Since garment sector workers have a low disposable income, attempts to sell the magazine have failed, which is why it is now distributed for free. Because the magazine also highlights issues related to various garment factories, factory owners and managers also show a keen interest to read its contents.

Although *Da Bindu* pitches itself as a magazine that promotes the interests and rights of women in the FTZs, there is little or no evidence that it addresses the needs of retrenched labour, or those who are unemployed and looking for labour. The magazine does not impart any soft skills, has little in terms of entertainment and does not feature content that encourages critical thinking amongst its readership. News published is generally limited in appeal and newsworthiness. Even the Editorial is amateurish. Content often features stereotypes of women and gender, and the magazine does not demonstrate any public service media values.

What is particularly telling is that representatives of the Da Bindu Collective, who are extremely knowledgeable and articulate, unfortunately do not seem to be able to communicate in writing what they speak, clearly indicating a need to develop their journalism skills. The result is a magazine that fails to live up to its promise of empowering women and workers in the FTZs. *Da Bindu* does demonstrate one thing – that there is a thirst for knowledge and information on workers rights, compensation, legal remedies, job vacancies et al in the FTZ sector. A magazine better able to communicate these issues stands a very good chance of being a commercial success amongst the tens of thousands of workers in the garment industry.

# The potential and space for community radio in Sri Lanka

The UNDP Human Development Report 2001 noted that Sri Lanka was “innovative and adaptive” in the use of new technology, and stated that a number of web and Information Communication Technologies (ICT) initiatives for community development, e-governance and peace building have taken shape over the past few years in spite of infrastructural limitations.

For example, the Kothmale Community Radio Internet project, implemented by UNESCO in collaboration with government ministries, the University of Colombo and a number of other organizations, uses community radio as an interface between the net and the community by introducing “Radio-browsing”, enabling indirect mass access to cyberspace through a daily one-hour interactive radio program. Located in the central hills of Sri Lanka, Kothmale Community Radio serves a population of approximately 200,000 Sinhala and Tamil listeners from sixty villages and three rural towns. The “Radio Browsing the Internet” program broadcast daily, enables listeners to request the broadcasters to surf the Web on their behalf and transmit information in response. This information is explained and contextualized with the help of studio guest resource persons. The information is also made available in printed form. Following in these footsteps, the Uva and Girandurukotte Community Radio Stations have also established three IT centres for the community in the Badulla District, with the support of UNESCO.

However, the hype aside, Sri Lanka unfortunately has no real community radio. All ‘community radio’ / regional services are accountable to the Head of Regional and Community Services at SLBC and have no financial autonomy. The regional broadcasters are however required to generate local funds to meet operating costs through commercial sponsorship from the regions - a task found to be difficult by all stations. The stations tend to focus predominantly on cultural programming, education and entertainment as opposed to documentary reportage, news, current affairs or the exploration of social realities of each region.

Examples of ‘community radio’ in Sri Lanka include,

- **North Central Province (Anuradhapura)**  
Rajarata Sevaya (SLBC) Transmission: 14 hours per day

The setting up of the Rajarata Sevaya in 1979 marked the beginning of decentralization of radio in Sri Lanka. Since then, the Rajarata Sevaya has grown to be one of the most popular provincial services. Broadcasting three news bulletins of their own (at 6.45am, 11.45am and 7.30pm), in addition to linking up the main news bulletins and certain political programs from SLBC, Rajarata enjoys some level of independence in programming. They also carry their own programming on agriculture, peace, poverty alleviation and development related issues, in addition to entertainment programs and has space for sponsored programs on gender, child rights, peace and governance related issues.

- **Ruhunu Sevaya (1980)**  
Language: Sinhala  
Location: Matara  
District Reach: Southern Province and some parts of the Uva, Sabaragamuwa and Eastern Provinces  
Transmission: 12 hours

Ruhunu Sevaya also links up the main news bulletins and some political programs from SLBC, while also carrying a few of their own bulletins. They too accommodate sponsored programmes, particularly on human rights issues. However, the Ruhunu broadcast is not up to the Rajarata mark in terms of professionalism or popularity.

- **Kandurata (Mahanuwara) Sevaya (1997)**  
 Languages: Sinhala and Tamil  
 Location: Kandy District  
 Reach: Kandy and Matale Districts and some parts of Kurunegala District (North Western Province) and Kegalle District (Sabaragamuwa Province)  
 Transmission: 13 hours

Kandurata also links up the main news bulletins and some political programs from SLBC. The station broadcasts programming in Sinhala from 7.00 am to 6.00 pm and in Tamil from 6.00 pm to 8.00 with special programming aimed at the Muslim community broadcast from 3.30 pm to 4.30 pm. Kandurata uses equipment which is over 20 years old resulting in weak transmission capabilities.

### **Critique of “Community Radio” in Sri Lanka**

Community radio is not a reality but only an aspiration in Sri Lanka. True, independent Community radio has never been allowed in Sri Lanka by successive governments of different political persuasion. There is currently no legal framework in the country to establish a community radio station that is in fact a community radio station—one that is owned and managed by the community. According to the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation Act, the Minister in charge of Media is empowered to issue licenses for the establishment of ‘private stations’. The Act does not make any reference to community radio or television services. Given that independent media is viewed as being a threat - particularly in a context where social concerns are likely to take precedence over the commercial - governments have been reluctant to interpret this term liberally to include community media. Noted media analyst Nalaka Gunewardene’s points in this regard are those that this report fully endorses<sup>15</sup>,

*When it comes to radio and TV broadcasting, private operators are completely at the government's mercy. The highly discretionary broadcast licensing system has always lacked transparency, accountability and consistency from the time private broadcasting was first permitted in 1992. Since then, several governments have been in office, and while election manifestos regularly promised the creation of a broadcasting authority, such a body has not yet materialised.*

*By default, broadcasting is still governed by the laws and regulations that were used to set up state-owned radio and TV stations decades ago. These laws allow state-owned stations to regulate their competitors in the private sector. In practice, Sri Lanka's broadcast liberalisation has been partial and lop-sided. Both the main political parties have given out radio and TV licenses to family members or friends -- licenses that are valuable political IOUs during crises or elections. Some broadcast licenses have changed hands for millions of dollars. But whatever the price, all licenses can be revoked or cancelled by the government at any time without reason. It's the Sword of Damocles that hangs over all privately owned radio and TV stations. No wonder, then, that self-censorship is widely practised.*

*Meanwhile, community groups are not being issued broadcast licenses. Senior officials have privately explained that they fear airwaves will be misused for anti-social or political purposes. They have not, strangely enough, voiced such concerns about profit-making companies, some of whose channels are openly aligned with political parties. A globally persistent myth holds that community radio has been thriving in Sri Lanka for two decades. In reality, these broadcasters are nothing more than rural transmissions of the fully state-owned and state-controlled Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC). Yes, these stations are located in remote areas, involve local people in programme production and broadcast to a predominantly rural audience. But the bureaucracy in Colombo tightly-controls content: nothing remotely critical of the government in office is permitted.*

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<sup>15</sup> *The Sri Lankan government's broadcast stranglehold*, Nalaka Gunewardene, <http://www.asiamedia.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=57939>

With its beginnings in 1981 as Mahaweli Community Radio (MCR), a government effort to assist hundreds of thousands of people in the process of resettlement and readjustment which resulted from the Mahaweli Development Project, community radio in Sri Lanka expanded in the late 1980s to include small community services set up to serve particular sectors of the project, namely Girandurukotte (1986), Mahailuppallama (1987), and Kothmale (1988). MCR's production techniques were participatory and involved settlers in planning, recording and editing programmes. Teams of producers, technicians and support staff were trained to work in the villages of the Mahaweli region using mobile production facilities. In 1998, Pulathisiravaya was started to cater to the multi ethnic war-affected areas of Polonnaruwa, Ampara and Medawachchiya. The Uva Community Service (started in 2002) is the most recent addition, as well as the most independent and dynamic amongst the community services.

However, as noted earlier, community radio in Sri Lanka is in fact not truly community radio, in that the stations are administered and run by the government and not the community. The government also exerts control over content (no criticism of the government is allowed, keeping community radio artificially non-political). In a comprehensive study of 'community radio' in Sri Lanka, it was observed that<sup>16</sup>,

*The research team is of the view that Sri Lanka's political culture might be described as having an antagonistic approach to community radio initiatives. In the specific case of the Uva Community Radio, the political attitude towards the initiative was apparently antagonistic. Specifically, their control destabilised the broadcasters, which eventually resulted in UCR's marked decrease in community-driven programming, ostensibly as part of an effort to stay on the air.*

### **Innovations in community radio**

Cognisant of these significant partisan political limitations to the establishment and promotion of true community radio in Sri Lanka, there are nevertheless initiatives that have been taken to expand downstream reach of community radio, as it exists today. In doing so, some of these initiatives also incorporate voices of the community in programming, thereby strengthening the essential idea of community radio as a voice by and for the local community.

The eTUKTUK (<http://www.etuktuk.net/>) is a community building initiative that aims to converge the technological benefits of digital communications and new media with community radio. The eTUKTUK is a self-contained mobile telecentre and radio-broadcasting unit housed within a three wheeled motorcycle. By taking access directly to the villages and presenting it to users in a familiar environment, trained intermediaries can help overcome the barriers of language and illiteracy and the benefits can be focused on the most disadvantaged in the community.



The eTUKTUK is a self-contained mobile tele-centre and radio-broadcasting unit housed within a tuk-tuk, or three wheeled motorcycle, a favoured form of transport common throughout South Asia. A laptop computer is located inside the vehicle as is a battery operated printer, camera, telephone and scanner. Internet is provided via a CDMA enabled wireless connection and electricity is provided via a 1000w generator. This in turn charges a deep cycle battery that is used to provide additional power for short periods of time.

A roof rack allows the vehicle to carry other equipment such as the Radio stations mobile broadcasting unit. Narrowcasting of radio programs is achieved via two loud speakers mounted

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<sup>16</sup> 'Community Radio' in Sri Lanka, Law and Society Trust, Vol 18 Issue 241, November 2007

to the roof rack. These are powered via an amplifier and CD player. This system is used to announce the tele-centres presence when it arrives in a village or designated location. The weekly route of the eTUKTUK is broadcast over the Radio to inform the listeners as to the location and time that it will arrive in their community. Modifications include the addition of a desk, roof rack and installation of a 240V power supply unit. The modifications were undertaken by local experts from within the community. Aside from the vehicle itself the equipment located within the eTUKTUK can be broadly defined into several categories.

#### *Telecentre*

The telecentre comprises of a basic laptop, battery-operated printer, scanner, digital camera and a CDMA wireless internet connection. Together the facilities provide access to a variety of government services including exam results and application forms requiring photographic ID. Further activities include creative applications including the digital storytelling format and basic ICT training activities.

#### *Narrowcasting*

The vehicle successfully narrowcasts both audio and video content. Live and pre-recorded programs can be disseminated in this way. Mobile operation of the narrowcasting equipment is an effective way to announce the vehicles presence and quickly disseminate a variety of information such as in response to an emergency situation. Aside from narrowcasting the equipment is also useful to facilitate workshops, seminars and other community events.

#### *Broadcasting*

The multipurpose nature of the eTUKTUK allows it to quickly and easily assemble a fully operational radio station. Broadcasting is achieved directly via the vehicles FM transmitter and antenna or through a live program link to the Kothmale Community Radio station through a hybrid circuit connected to the CDMA phone. In combination with a mixing desk the Telecentre component is effectively adapted to become a radio studio. The rear of the vehicle accommodates 2-3 people who can announce directly or interact with the audience via two wireless microphones.

#### *Power Supply*

Energy requirements are met by a deep cycle battery and 1000W sine wave inverter. For extended periods of operation an alternative power supply is provided by a low-noise 1000W generator and direct connection to mains power supply is possible where available.

## **Perceived and real working linkages between CSOs / NGOs and mainstream media**

Sri Lankan NGOs look at the mainstream media as an external concentration of power which they do not have any right to access. Although many NGOs are committed to strengthening human rights and democracy, few demonstrate the necessary allocation of time, energy and financial resources to allow for work with the media on these issues on a long-term basis.

In dealing with the mass media, Sri Lankan NGOs have not developed any creative strategies that consider ways and means of promoting the work done by them. For example, many NGOs publish periodicals with a limited circulation, and mostly to their own beneficiary networks. However, no efforts made to increase circulation and dissemination amongst a wider audience – in both ideological and geographic terms.

There is also little interaction between NGOs and mainstream media. In fact, in recent years there has been a hostile approach towards NGOs and their work in some sections of the mainstream media. There is little awareness of how the media works within NGOs, in terms of ownership structures, editorial bias, communications styles and deadlines. Lacking a strategic media plan, some NGOs resort to paid advertisements to promote their initiatives on TV, radio and in the newspapers. Few programmes within the NGO sector consciously aim to leverage media, without mercenary relationships, to promote their initiatives and support opinion-makers at the provincial as well as national level.

In this context, one some have argued that NGOs are imprisoned within their own subcultures. Given the lack of any significant effort to review and evaluate the communication needs of human rights NGOs, and to improve and strengthen their use of the media, it is extremely rare to see any NGO engage with the mainstream media in a mutually beneficial manner. This all the more critical when one considers the rapid changes taking place in the field of communication. In this era, where mass / mainstream media is being eclipsed by the emergence of new, web and internet based media that is as if not more powerful in reach, new knowledge is constantly generated and disseminated by citizens. Few NGOs in Sri Lanka have taken into account these developments and leveraged their potential to strengthen their advocacy and initiatives. As a result, the ideas debates in the commons (polity and society) are almost completely dominated by political parties, organisations and individuals whose aim is to capture political power. Ethnic bias and gender bias, as well as all forms of prejudice are blatantly visible in most sections of the media, and defeat efforts to depict and analyse situations using a human rights framework and approach. If civil society is to reclaim this public space, and actively promote the protection of all human rights for all through the use of the media, it is necessary to evolve a strategic vision for media use that will lead to the generation of creative and innovative solutions. Despite the deterioration of peace and human rights in Sri Lanka, there exists a space for civil society to promote peace and reconciliation. This space needs to be guarded against further erosion, and strengthened to continue to address tenets of conflict resolution that form the core of a just and sustainable peace agreement in Sri Lanka.

It is often asked of us what the impact of media and communications initiatives conducted by NGOs / media freedom organisations has been, given the ostensibly worsening conditions for peace and democracy in Sri Lanka. A simple yet effective response is that things can be much worse. The importance of CSO and NGO activism for peace is not seen until it too disappears. Yet in a context of anxiety, fear and a culture of impunity, CSOs and NGOs themselves are confused as to how to best respond to the violence and hate directed against them. There was a need expressed from all CSOs spoken to that they needed training and guidance on strategic communications and crisis communications, to deal with the immediate challenges, before they could think of a collaborative effort in the longer term.

The following ideas and opinions were repeated articulated during discussions the Media Unit has had with national, regional and grassroots level NGOs from 2004 - 2008:

- Work towards public service media values so as to make media sensitive to the issues of peacebuilding, reconciliation and human rights
- Deal with issues clearly and using simple language
- Don't be dismissive towards attacks against individuals and organisations
- Develop a media and communications strategy
- Write articles including op-eds to communicate one's goals and vision to a larger audience
- Criticizing non-transparent NGOs
- Convince NGOs to work more collaboratively
- Develop a common strategy
- Explain that having different view doesn't make one a traitor
- Ensure adherence to best practices within the organisation

From our fieldwork related to the present report, we were able to ascertain that the predominant request for training and capacity building for CBOs were in the form of;

1. Strengthening their media literacy
2. Helping them first understand the dynamics of mainstream media and then helping them to use it to promote their work
3. Awareness of web / online / Internet tools for communications and reaching audiences without having to go through the mainstream media
4. The role of media during disasters
5. The need for community media – not just community radio, but various media created by and for the local community covering issues relevant to their existential needs, livelihoods and problems on the ground.

When asked as to how the grassroots community could be encouraged to interact more with provincial journalists, and vice versa, the respondents predominantly articulated the following ideas;

1. Facilitate and sustain regular interactions between provincial media fora and organisations and local CBOs / NGOs / CSOs
2. Support “study tours” to get journalists to see what civil society is doing
3. Help build the capacity of journalists to capture and articulate the work of CSOs
4. Help build the capacity of CSOs to articulate their work succinctly to journalists
5. Leverage public infrastructure (schools during after-school hours, libraries or meeting halls) to hold informal interactions where journalists and civil society actors interact and challenge each other with problems

### **Voices of Reconciliation Programme – 2004 to 2006**

From 6 -7 October 2006, CPA organised a closed-door workshop that brought together 20 high-level representatives of leading Human Rights and Media Freedom NGOs at the national level to discuss and strategise media and communications plans<sup>17</sup>. Participants were asked to imagine that were a high paid communications consultant that has been hired by the CSO sector in Sri Lanka. Their job was to provide crisis communications advice to the sector to help them inoculate against the attacks that they were suffering. Using the flashcards, participants were asked to write down up to three of their best ideas. Each participant pitched their idea(s) to the group and posted it on the wall. The following ideas were generated:

1. **A national NGO awards ceremony.** Once a year the sector will recognize the work done by the NGOs. Judges would recognize the best campaign from the NGOs. Would span at least 1 or 2 months and would highlight things done by the NGO sector.

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<sup>17</sup> Report on strengthening civil society voices in Sri Lanka, <http://voicesofpeace.lk/?q=en/node/352#attachments>. A podcast on this roundtable discussion is available at VOR Radio - <http://radio.voicesofpeace.lk/page.php?0/v/197>



2. We need a **broader, marketing- based strategy that targets mass media**. Then we need a mass communication strategy based on inter-organisational elements (NGOs vs. government etc.) and inter-personal factors (NGOs vs. person).
3. Nobody has done a survey about **NGO contribution to GDP**. How much money is coming into the country for NGO work?
4. How do we **relate our work to the community in their own language**? Many NGOs who go to the village level find that there is always a cultural gap between NGO workers and the community.
5. **Formulate, implement, and publish a code of conduct for NGOs.**
6. We need to hear peoples' voices. **People who have benefited from NGOs – we need to get them out**, particularly at the district level.
7. The issue for the NGO sector is about resources for communications. Perhaps we can **create an integrated entity to engage in proactive communication for the sector**.
8. **Radio is the most popular media in this country**. If people can't read, or don't have access to newspapers, they rely on radio.
9. There are so many different activities that NGOs do. We should **highlight all the work done in one week**. What would happen if we stopped working for a week? It would highlight NGO activities in communities.
10. See the **gender aspects** of this. Women and men conceive information differently.
11. **Communicate in the vernacular**. Sinhala and Tamil first, English third.
12. **Develop a multimedia campaign** – using different arts e.g. radio and TV campaign. Have pictorial messaging. Pictures cartoons drawing to make it known to illiterate people. Use new media – mobile phone, web – cuts across disparities.
13. **Publish a list of common allegations against NGOs together with responses and publish this through alternate media**. Use electronic media as well. This applies to grassroots NGOs – they work with public, and the public's mind needs to be changed. When the project is completed, have meetings with the community and explain the benefits of the project.

Reaffirming the continued validity, indeed heightened need for these ideas to be supported, we propose them to HIVOS as those that can be integrated into media and communications programming in Sri Lanka, complementing initiatives with mainstream / alternative / web media.

### Quotes from the grassroots

Supporting these ideas were interviews we had with a number of grassroots organisations in 2006 to strategise means through which to support their media and communications capacities. The continued relevance and validity of these viewpoints underpin the findings of fieldwork conducted for the present report.

- *“Today there is no single media which address social development issues properly. There are lot of reports on several things. Those reports focus on only how to promote the paper through cheap emotions. They (media) do not do any investigative journalism. Media has to show suitable standards. Media can deliver a massage very effective and efficient manner for very big section of the society. It will produce results. National newspapers can play much bigger role than our monthly paper (Athwela) can”.*

Thilaka Herath, President, Women's Development Foundation, Kurunegala

- *“All media in Sri Lanka are Colombo based. They are not interested provincial matters. Peace is not their (media) priority matter. Instead of that they much more interested to report issues like disasters. Peace and reconciliation activities do not get sufficient media's attention. Main thing of the media today is looking for ways to increase their profit. The media give publicity only to those who have advertised with them. There is a division in the media here in Sri Lanka. Sinhala media think only their nation's needs and requirements. On the other hand Tamil media is focusing only matters related to their nation. We saw this in the recent tsunami catastrophe. This should be changed.”*

Samson Jayasinghe, National Secretary, Samasewaya, Sama Sewaya, Anuradhapura

- *“I can say today Sri Lankan media is terrible. None of them report the truth. They distort the truth as they wish. How can we believe the media? Every one wants to watch television these days. But what can we gain from watching TV? Newspapers are little better than the electronic media. But there is very little information on the papers too.”*

R.G. Podimenike, President, Eastern United Women’s Organization, Kanthale

- *“Mainly it is very doubtful whether there is any independent media in Sri Lanka. All of them try to build their images themselves. They have own agendas. State media have government agenda; private media have their own. How can we expect an independent view of them.”*

Siripala Hewabatage, Chief Coordinator, Devasarana Development Center, Kurunegala

- *“Papers like Divaina and Lanka are very nationalistic. They are trying to build an anti NGO opinion among the public. In that context it is very difficult to build public opinion, topics like Federalism.”*

Sunil Kahagalla, Assistant Coordinator, Devasarana Development Center, Kurunegala

### Survey of CSOs / NGOs and their use of media and communications strategies

11 CSOs and NGOs were rapidly surveyed as part of the HIVOS study to ascertain their competencies in the use of media and communications strategies in support of their work and advocacy. One to one discussions were conducted with key staff in these 11 NGOs. 3 Focus Group Discussions (FGD’s) were conducted with the beneficiaries of 3 of these organisations, without representatives of the organisation present. The three organisations from whom the beneficiaries were selected thus were the *Ruhunu Gemi Kantha Society* from Weera-Ketiya in the South, the *Maha Kantha Society* from Hambantota and *Upsak* from Dikoya, in Hatton. Discussions in one to one and FGDs were framed by structured questionnaires.

Organisation	Print	Electronic	Alternative	New Media	Other
Helpo, Galle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Dirimaga</i> newspaper</li> <li>• Newsletters</li> <li>• Posters</li> <li>• Magazines for specific projects</li> <li>• Photos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kadathurava programme on Ruhunu Sevaya</li> <li>• Samayata Winadiyak (A Minute for Peace) on Lakhanda radio</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Street plays</li> <li>• Devotional programmes during Vesak. Called <i>Sahajeevanayen Sabediyawa</i> the programme aims to build harmony between the Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala communities</li> <li>• Leaflets that were based on responses to scenarios</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Email updates</li> <li>• E-newsletter</li> <li>• <a href="http://www.help-o.lk">www.help-o.lk</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Billboards</li> <li>• FGDs</li> <li>• Community hall meetings</li> <li>• Awareness programmes / field tours for media personnel</li> </ul>
Manawa Shakthi Foundation, Galle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letters to mainstream media</li> <li>• Handouts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telephone campaigns, including mobile phone based advocacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Musical programmes (Sadu Janaravaya)</li> <li>• Street plays</li> <li>• Messengers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SMS</li> <li>• Email campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings</li> <li>• Notice boards</li> </ul>
Indecos, Matara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handouts</li> <li>• Posters</li> <li>• Books</li> <li>• Branded file</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programmes on Ruhunu Sevaya</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Street plays</li> <li>• Documentaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Email</li> <li>• <a href="http://www.indecos.com">www.indecos.com</a></li> <li>• E-newsletters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Billboards</li> <li>• Community hall meetings</li> <li>• Photo exhibits</li> </ul>

	covers (to promote specific messaging)				• Banners
Lanka Shakthi Nirmana Sansadaya (Lanka Shakthi Creations Consortium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Posters</li> <li>• Publications</li> <li>• “Shakthiya” tabloid newspaper</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Street plays</li> <li>• Low country dance</li> <li>• Gam-madu concept</li> <li>• Kolam</li> <li>• Stage plays</li> <li>• “Poda Vessa” musical programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.mataracity.com">www.mataracity.com</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Oratory competitions</li> <li>• Public speeches</li> </ul>
Ruhunu Gemi Kantha Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handouts</li> <li>• “Ruhunu Katha” newspaper insert</li> <li>• Publications</li> <li>• Posters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phone campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Street plays</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.rrwo.org">www.rrwo.org</a></li> <li>• Email campaigns</li> <li>• SMS campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public meetings</li> <li>• House to house awareness programmes</li> <li>• Public rallies on Women’s Day</li> <li>• Photo exhibitions</li> </ul>
Kantha Maha Sangamaya, Hambantota	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quarterly tabloid newspaper ‘Devi’</li> <li>• Handouts</li> <li>• Publications</li> <li>• Posters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short video programmes</li> <li>• Phone campaigns</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.wdf.lk">www.wdf.lk</a></li> <li>• Email campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• House to house awareness programmes</li> <li>• Banners</li> <li>• Small group meetings</li> </ul>
Uva Welassa Govi Kantha Sanvidanaya, Wellawaya (Uva Welassa Farmer’s Wives Association)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Posters</li> <li>• Handouts</li> <li>• Publications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telephone campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Viridu (folk song)</li> <li>• Street plays</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public meetings</li> <li>• House to house awareness raising</li> <li>• Publicity vehicles</li> <li>• Art / Photo exhibits</li> </ul>
Sinhala Tamil Gemi Kantha Sanvidanaya (Sinhala Tamil Rural Women’s Association)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Kadurata Eliya” newspaper published in Tamil and English</li> <li>• Handouts</li> <li>• Stickers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Gamdora Waruna” radio programme on Swadesheey a Sewaya, every Friday at 6.30pm</li> <li>• 4 TV programmes on Rupavahini</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Street plays</li> <li>• Folk songs</li> <li>• Poetry</li> <li>• Musical plays</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Email campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus Group Discussions</li> <li>• Rally’s</li> <li>• Photo exhibits</li> <li>• Public meetings</li> </ul>
Pem Vimochanam Gnanodaya, Hatton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handouts</li> <li>• Posters</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Street plays</li> <li>• Theatre</li> <li>• Poetry / Song</li> <li>• Thalayam</li> <li>• Drums (Raban)</li> <li>• Kolattam</li> <li>• Kummi</li> <li>• Villu Pattu</li> <li>• Karaham</li> <li>• Mayil Attam</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Email campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Photo exhibits</li> </ul>
Manava Sanvardana Sanvidanaya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handouts</li> <li>• Newspaper inserts (Vilippu)</li> <li>• Advertisements in newspapers</li> <li>• Op Eds</li> <li>• Posters</li> <li>• (Snail) mailing campaign</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Vidiyal” radio programme on the Kandura Rata (Up-Country) service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documentaries</li> <li>• Villu Pattu</li> <li>• Street plays</li> <li>• Kavadi</li> <li>• Thappu</li> <li>• Stage plays</li> <li>• T-shirts / Caps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emails</li> <li>• <a href="http://www.orgsites.com/ak/hdosrilanka">www.orgsites.com/ak/hdosrilanka</a></li> <li>• SMS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Photo exhibits</li> <li>• Public meetings</li> <li>• Group discussions</li> <li>• Picketing campaigns</li> </ul>
YRDG, Matale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handouts</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Movies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E-newsletters</li> <li>• Email campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group discussions</li> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Conferences</li> </ul>

*Helpo* puts out a monthly brief on organisational activities as well as publications on special issues, for example on governance problems related to local government. Voices of beneficiaries are also featured in these publications. There is a close relationship between the head of the organisation and media, and as a result, a lot of their work is featured in the media. For example, the Sri Lanka Newspaper Society led group of journalists who visited site locations studied their waste management project. Through this study, the project and the organisation got a lot of media coverage. The organisation is attempting to set up a provincial newspaper.

*Manawa Shakthi Organisation* uses messengers to strengthen their advocacy in regions where there are no telecommunications facilities / coverage. *Lanka Shakthi Niranmanawedinge Sansadaya* established a group called 'Vikalpana' to explore ways through which grassroots cultural practices can be adapted and leveraged to promote peace and good governance messaging. For example, to create discussion and debate around the civil conflict, they use a folk theatre technique called Gam-madu and adapt characters in the script to articulate social and political concerns. In addition, they also dive into the rich cultural practices of the Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala communities. For example, in the Muslim community, *Kohomba Kale* in the Tamil community and *Kalagedi Natum* (water vessel dances) in the Sinhala community are used in their advocacy. The Vikalpana group also works with other CBOs / CSOs in the area to support their work and use folk communication methods to promote mainstream media programming. For example, a programme broadcast on radio in the evening is promoted using drumming, street plays and *kolam* dances in the morning). It is difficult to measure the impact and reach of these innovative social communication and animation models. It is also the case that the organisation is facing a dire financial situation today. *Indecos*, set up to build the capacity of grassroots communities, uses street plays and roving documentary shows to promote issues such as sex safe and HIV / AIDS awareness programmes. The Ruhunu Gemi Kantha Foundation said that their most successful method of advocacy was door-to-door campaigns. The *Kantha Maha Sangamaya* in Hambantota said 'Devi', their newspaper, was their primary means of advocacy and communication. At its height, the paper was published monthly with a print run of 25,000. It is now published quarterly with a print run of 1,000. The *Uva Welassa Kantha Sanvidanaya* is a shoe-string operation. They do not even have a single computer and rely on small group meetings and vehicles (3 wheelers / vans) for their communications outreach. The *Sinhala Tamil Gemi Kantha Sanvidanaya* publishes a newspaper called 'Kadurata Eliya' in English, Sinhala and Tamil. Although the organisation has a membership of around 24,000, only 3,000 copies of the newspaper are printed. The *Pem Vimochanam* organisation operates in Hatton and concentrates on the welfare and upliftment and empowerment of women in the up-country estates. To explore and transform the social issues facing women, the organisation uses a number of cultural practices prevalent in the region and endogenous to the community. They feel that instead of using mainstream media, adapting these techniques help them reach women more meaningfully and with greater, longer-lasting impact.

**Organisations demonstrated huge variance when it came to human resources dedicated to media and communications strategies.** *Helpo* in Galle had very good relations with media. Yet, they didn't have trained media and communications staff, relying instead on the head of the institution and his connections with media to achieve a high media profile. Clearly, this was unsustainable. Others, such as the *Kantha Maha Sanvidanaya* in Hambantota had Media Units on paper, but no one in charge of the Units or working in them in reality. Few others had any training on media and communications skills.

Although 10 out of the 11 organisations surveyed had access to email and used it for email campaigns, they did so without any real understanding of how to target an audience and without the use of specialised email LISTSERV software. This made it difficult for them to keep up with additions, deletions and changes in their email lists and vitiated the impact of their email campaigns. Websites weren't updated and were largely static. Awareness of new media was abysmal.

All those surveyed said that the communications strategies they used had proved helpful in galvanising public opinion for whatever issue they wished to highlight. At the same time, they noted that capacity had to be built to more strategically design and implement communications

and media strategies – mainstream, alternative and new media based – to expand and consolidate their audience. This they said was vital in going beyond preaching to the converted and addressing new audiences. Interesting to note was that mainstream media was, overall, less effective than alternative media and communications strategies adapted for advocacy based on local cultural practices.

Organisations surveyed noted the following with regard to mainstream media,

- Mainstream media is not really interested in the work of civil society
- Provincial journalists, even if they are sensitive and file reports on the work of grassroots CBOs, are rarely published. It is noted by some that in certain regions, there weren't enough provincial journalists to capture the rich texture of civil society initiatives at the grassroots level
- The Colombo-centric nature of media tends to gloss over provincial and grassroots news and information
- Media is partisan and as a result, parochial. There is a resulting lack of trust in media as a vehicle of impartial, accurate information and news.
- No real information on human rights violations in Sri Lanka other than the regurgitation of propaganda by the Government, LTTE and other armed group
- Only events and processes that involve high-level politicians are covered.

All organisations surveyed noted that both mainstream and provincial media were important for the dissemination of information. However, they said that provincial media was more important to develop since it could, more than Colombo-centric mainstream media, focus more on social, cultural, political affairs at the grassroots level.

The key needs from the 11 organisations surveyed included (in no particular order),

1. Digital media (audio / video / photo) skills
2. Web and Internet basics
3. PC and peripheral equipment plus internet access
4. Media literacy (including digital media literacy)
5. Training on media and communications skills
6. Training on design and layout skills for publications and other printed, web output
7. Training on street theatre techniques

In general, the organisations surveyed had little or no understanding of media and communications strategies. Though they realise the importance of media (including new media) and communication skills for their advocacy, few have the financial and human resources to invest in those who can build up this capacity. Telecommunications infrastructure in some regions is poor, giving rise to challenges in the use of mobile, Internet and web media communications strategies. All organisations show an interest in using cultural practices and grassroots level communications practices embedded in communities, but these need to be more rigorously catalogued and examined for their potential to sustain interest in vital social, political and cultural issues.

A survey conducted by CPA a few years ago<sup>18</sup> of those who consumed NGO / civil society media noted the following,

- Almost all interviewed said they got information on current affairs from mainstream media.
- Nearly 60% said that they read civil society media (publications, handouts, newsletters, emails, e-newsletters and related communications) only because they receive them.
- Only 31% said that they would look for them and make necessary arrangements to receive them. Few said they would spend money to buy any publication from an NGO.
- Most were uncertain when they will receive the next publication. This was not looked upon as a problem because NGO newsletters rarely published current affairs. However, erratic

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<sup>18</sup> *Human Rights, Civil Society and Media*, Research paper on Sri Lankan situation, Sunanda Deshapriya, 2002, International Human Rights Institute

publication cycles were seen as bad communications, since it did not engage with the audience on a regular basis.

- 65% said that they would like to receive informative and analytical articles on current social, political and economic themes in easy to read format, which they felt was sorely lacking in mainstream media.
- Nearly 80% said that they would like more attractive layout in the publications, making them easier to read and understand.
- Nearly 90% said that NGO publications had not influenced their opinion on the current political situation in the country.

Some reflections for consideration by HIVOS arising out of the points enumerated above are,

- It is apparent that the NGO sector in Sri Lanka has not given enough thought to working with mainstream media and the development of media and communications strategies. Publishing a newsletter or magazine is considered an extension of other project activities.
- Mainstream media is looked at with a degree of apathy and hostility by most NGOs. Mainstream media views most NGOs, especially those working on issues of human rights, peacebuilding, governance and democracy, with a great degree of suspicion and animosity.
- NGOs do not sell their publications and because of this, they do not understand the need to attract the attention of readers by engaging content and layout. This is a significant reason for the poor quality of most of the NGO publications and lack of professionalism in their media sections.
- NGO communications will never match the reach of mainstream media. Publishing paid advertisements and buying radio and TV time can have some effect but it is, by design, unsustainable and episodic. In the long run it is not possible to spend large sums of money on a paid advertising model.

### **Mainstream media reactions to NGO / CSO communications strategies and initiatives**

During the course of the present study, the research team met with the following senior journalists from a range of leading newspapers, renowned alternative media as well as TV and radio broadcasters:

1. Sonali Samarasinghe, Editor, *Sunday Leader*
2. Shan Wijetunge, Senior Producer, *Swarnavahini*
3. C. J. Amaratunge, Senior Journalist, *Irida Lankadeepa*
4. Indrani Peiris, News Editor, *Daily Lankadeepa*
5. Sampath Deshapriya, News Editor, *Daily Lankadeepa*
6. Mayuri Abeysinghe, Director, Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation Commercial Service
7. K. Gunarasa, News Editor, *Thinakaran*
8. Sunil Jayasekara, News Editor, *Ravaya*
9. R. Bharathi, Features Editor, *Thinnakural*

Many felt that even though NGOs / CSOs did not directly give them information, the public statements of the heads of the institutions, sometimes well known peace and human rights activists in their own right, were enough to create a story on. Many said that the relationships with these organisations, including media freedom organisations such as the Free Media Movement (FMM), were on the basis of personal friendships. Many said that the Peace Confidence Index (PCI) by CPA, which they download or received via post, were useful in their analysis of peace, war and governance related issues in Sri Lanka. Organisations working on environmental issues they noted were better able to submit information to journalists when compared to other civil society organisations. Journalists sometimes follow up Press Releases, but those with (personal) contacts in civil society organisations often become the central conduit for information for other colleagues in the newsroom. During elections, civil society election monitoring agencies produce a lot of newsworthy information.

On the other hand, nearly all noted the difficulties they faced to obtain information from NGOs and CSOs. For example, one journalist noted that for a recent story on war related expenditure, the only information on the website of the National Peace Council was from 2002, and that calls to the Sahajeevana Centre and CPA did not result in any useful or updated information. Many felt that journalists were used, or seen as mere conduits to put press releases on broadsheets and on air. Critical analysis and critical engagement with programming was not looked upon too kindly by many NGOs and CSOs. The presentation of press releases was generally seen as poor – little or no usable content, no contact details for anyone in the respective organisation to follow up and many littered with unsubstantiated, personal opinions. Feature length articles submitted are often badly edited and poorly written, demonstrating little or no evidence of how to engage an audience and maintain the interest of a reader. There is little evidence of a culture of proactive engagement with media – announcements to press conferences are received on the day of the event, sometimes just hours before it begins. If one does not turn up, the accusation is then levelled at media that it is not interested in vital social and political issues, when in reality it is bad planning and communications on the part of NGOs that undermines their own advocacy.

Language was seen as another key issue that got in the way of civil society engagement. Many NGOs and CSOs sent their communications in English. Journalists working in the vernacular media do not comprehend English and do not have the resources to translate English communications into Tamil or Sinhala.

Emails sent to media institutions and journalists were seen as an inefficient means at best to communicate with them, since many we spoke to said they (a) did not check emails regularly and (b) were coping with information overload and had little time to follow up a myriad email communications. It was also noted, especially by those working in the vernacular media / press, that they used computers infrequently and that this impeded their ability to electronically communicate with NGOs and CSOs who were generally more proficient in their use of electronic (email / web) communications.

Many requested short, succinct intimation of new information on NGO / CSO websites, stating that they did not have time to peruse through individual sites or read through long PRs<sup>19</sup>.

Some journalists also said that some NGOs were fearful and hesitant, for whatever reason, of journalists and requests for more information on certain issues or initiatives an organisation was engaged in. Journalists felt that a mutual distrust and lack of respect for the challenges faced by each sector undermined efforts at constructive engagement.

The perception that NGOs were driven by mercenary interests and that to feature their work was to give into foreign influences respondents felt was a dominant opinion amongst journalists, especially working in the Sinhala media. The perception was that through foreign trips and workshops in exotic locations, journalists stood the risk of being bought over, or be seen to have been bought over by parochial interests of NGOs. This perception was an impediment to better collaboration and understanding between journalists and NGO activists.

Journalists interviewed for the study had a number of proposals and ideas they thought could establish more cohesive, professional relationships between civil society and mainstream media.

#### 1. Training

- Provide training for CSOs and NGOs on effective communications, including professional ethics and guidelines of reporting.
- Help CSOs and NGOs understand and select target audiences, and develop communications strategies that effectively communicate their initiatives to these audiences.
- Training on writing press releases and editing (including web editing)
- Training on layout and design of communications material (e.g. newsletters, websites, flyers)

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<sup>19</sup> **Editors note:** Not a single journalist interviewed knew of RSS readers and how they could subscribe to information from websites featuring RSS feeds. There is also a generational issue here – senior journalists are more averse to new media and ICTs than younger scribes and producers.

- Training on ICTs and web media
2. Raising awareness
    - Encouraging NGOs and CSOs to pitch their initiatives as those linked to and framed by larger social, political and economic transformation
    - Raise awareness on the need to share and disseminate information, and the means of delivering such information to local and international stakeholders
    - Identify journalists who write regularly on issues central to the organisational mandate, vision and mission and cultivate relationships with them
  3. Create e-media
    - NGOs and CSOs need to avail themselves of developments on the web and the Internet that make it easier to promote their message
    - Organisations with websites need to update information on them regularly and further, upgrade back-end technical frameworks to leverage new delivery mechanisms for information such as RSS (along with better integration with mobile phones)
    - Use mobiles and SMS to promote initiative amongst key stakeholders and core audiences (opt-in messaging works better with telcos who frown upon customers who send out bulk SMS messages)
    - Language training on UNICODE standards for Sinhala and Tamil content generation on the Internet and web
    - Also fax content to journalists who say they are averse to using e-media / emails
  4. Ascertain how NGOs and CSOs can share information on recipient lists / beneficiaries, so that information dissemination on shared goals can occur in a more systematic manner
  5. Engage with journalists to dispel the negative connotations of 'NGO'. This is a long term process and NGOs / CSOs must not expect short term results or a dramatic change of heart amongst journalists who feel deeply suspicious of their activities in Sri Lanka.
  6. Teach journalists ICTs tools, tips and techniques that can help them in their work. The excuse that they have no time to use the web and Internet to get access to and search for information is largely on account of a lack of training on how best to leverage tools and services that can automatically get information from multiple sources and deliver it to the desktop or mobile.



# Media bottlenecks and challenges in reporting human rights issues

In a study of human rights reporting by the mainstream media conducted by Sunanda Deshapriya in 2001, points articulated by Editors of mainstream print media included challenges and ideas that are, tellingly, hugely pertinent even today. They noted that,

- We do not have a separate desk for human rights. There are no journalists assigned specially to cover human rights issues. Human Rights are covered when we report the war, police atrocities, sexual violence, child abuse and related issues.
- We do not have journalists who are trained specially to cover human rights issues.
- Training on human rights and covering human rights has to be a part of journalism training. Most of our journalists are not trained professionally. A professional training on covering human rights would be an add advantage.
- We carry human-interest stories more often than human rights stories. Human Rights are mentioned specially when we report on fundamental rights cases as Supreme Court proceedings.
- We all know about human rights but no discussion takes place on how we can improve human rights situation by our coverage. The main discourse in the country at this time is on the war and partisan politics.
- There is no special emphasis on rights based approach to our reportage.
- We note there is some bias against the minorities in journalism. We are open to criticism but rarely we get corrections on those reports. There is definitely a language/ nationality bias in Sri Lankan newspapers. We try our best to minimize it.
- Reporting war always has been problematic. Most of the newspapers take sides in the war and their reporting depends on that position. Ours is a very polarized society and polarization has taken place on the language lines as well. Sinhala language newspapers do not have Tamil journalists and Tamil Language newspapers do not have Sinhala journalists. No newspaper has a multi-cultural desk. English press has a different situation, where English educated people from both communities read them. If there is any difference in reporting the war in English language press that is the reason for that.
- Sri Lankan mainstream media are working on tight budgets. This is a small country with lots of taxes. Newsprint prices have skyrocketed during the last few years. Economy is shrinking so is the market. We do not have enough resources to diversify our coverage. At the moment we are market driven.
- We do not get contributions from civil society organizations or leaders regularly.
- It is very seldom we get contributions from public intellectuals. Even when they do write they are too long and they do not like us to edit their articles. So we do not publish them. Some times we get 10-15 page article, which should be published as separate papers!
- Even to write a weekly column it is very difficult to find a committed intellectual or a civil society leader. Political party leaders and members of the parliament offer to write columns and quite a few of them do write to most of the mainstream newspapers.
- When we get a press release from a civil society organization and if it is relevant we publish them.
- We have a tendency to cover political parties mainly when it comes to political debates. We understand that civil society should be given more coverage and voice in governance matters.

In a comprehensive survey on media and human rights conducted by CPA last year involving a number of leading Editors, senior journalists and media personnel in Sri Lanka, the following points were observed<sup>20</sup>,

- The main human rights issue facing Sri Lanka was discrimination against minority groups, according to about half of the respondents in both groups. Many (civil society 71.8%; media

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<sup>20</sup> The full results of this survey, pertinent to a broader understanding of human rights and media, can be found in Annexure 4 of this report.

46.4%) respondents thought the issue was underreported and commonly misreported. Almost two-thirds of civil society respondents thought the issue did not receive prominent media coverage (64.5%), while only about two-fifths of the media workers thought this was the case (38.9).

- The media workers highlighted problems in reporting discrimination against minority groups, noting that the issue was most likely to be reported in the context of conflict and terrorism. Almost all said they would aim to interview a person belonging to a minority or disadvantaged group (95.5%) and many would seek to use more than one source. However, almost three-quarters of the journalists (73.6%) believed sources from various sides were not reliable and accurate in their provision of information.
- Almost all the civil society respondents thought media coverage of disadvantaged groups and minorities was very poor (97.4%). Their views were similar with regard to gender issues (87.2%) and children's right (87.2%). Across the board, children, women and other people in disadvantage groups were not seen to be given a voice and nor was information made available in media reports about relevant organizations and assistance.
- More than three-quarters (76.8%) of the media workers thought the media was generally biased to one side of the conflict, and this was due (in descending order) to commercial considerations (31.1%), safety considerations (17.8%), editors' political interests (15.6%), a lack of training (15.6%) and the parochialism of media owners and a lack of standards (8.9% respectively). Only a few thought self-censorship or editors had a significant negative impact on accuracy, balance and fairness. Instead, they pointed to censorship applied by the Government (official and unofficial), the Army and the LTTE.
- However, all the civil society respondents saw government censorship and the media's self-censorship as key contributing factors to their view of the media's weakness on accuracy, balance and fairness. They also noted their awareness of the media's problems in accessing sources violence and threats, bias, and a lack of knowledge among media workers.
- Almost all the civil society respondents (94.7%) believed the media had not taken adequate steps to provide accurate, balanced and fair information about all parties in Sri Lanka's conflict. Less than a quarter of the media respondents (22.1%) agreed, but a surprising 58.8% of journalists answered that they "do not know".
- Civil society respondents thought the media's role in the peace process and conflict reporting should be to inform (71.4), to be objective, neutral (65.5) and, to a lesser extent, to facilitate a resolution (57.1%) and almost 70 percent suggested the media should not promote the issues of one side.
- The media respondents took a stronger position on the media's role in covering the peace process and conflict, with a much higher proportion thinking the media should inform (94.8%), remain objective and neutral (86.4), and should not promote the issues of one side (86%) and facilitate conflict resolution (83.9). A high proportion, 91.7 per cent, thought the media should defend democracy. Almost half (45.2) of the media respondents regarded themselves as independent in the context of the conflict and more than a third saw themselves as defenders of democracy (37%). Just 8.2 per cent saw themselves as human rights campaigners and very few as patriotic citizens or defenders of the liberation struggle.
- A high proportion of the civil society respondents thought reports on the peace process and conflict lacked sufficient analysis (88.9%) and balance (86.5%) and rather were generally emotional (75.7%), sensational (89.5%), inflammatory (89.5%), derogatory (70.6%), stereotypical (76.7%), and lacking in sympathy and optimism (70%).

Clearly, the challenges of adequate coverage on human rights issues by the media in within cycles of violence and a context of war is not one that can be addressed by media or civil society alone. Government needs to encourage and strengthen independent investigative media, but this is not likely with the Rajapakse regime. The International Council on Human Rights Policy in 2002 came out with some recommendation that CPA feels could be adapted to the local context<sup>21</sup>. These were,

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<sup>21</sup> *Journalism, Media and the Challenge of Human Rights Reporting*, International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2002

# Recommendations

## To journalists, editors and media organisations

Journalists should be given opportunities to become better informed about international human rights instruments. This can best be done through a range of awareness raising activities including:

- Specific pre-entry courses on human rights issues for individuals attending journalism schools (as part of the curriculum);
- Mid-career and in-house training on international human rights standards, including national perspectives on human rights law and policy;
- Internal editorial programmes to review coverage of human rights issues; e.g., refugee and asylum matters, rights of children, racism and racial discrimination, gender policy, health issues; and actions to promote exchanges of views between journalists and human rights organisations at national, regional and international level. Such meetings, briefings and seminars should be organised by journalism schools, media organisations and journalists' professional groups.
- Media organisations and journalists' groups should promote higher standards of diversity within the newsroom while strengthening the capacity of journalists to work professionally and in secure conditions. Media should build public confidence in the quality of information they circulate. Practical steps could include:
  1. The adoption of employment and recruitment policies that promote ethnic and gender balance in the newsroom;
  2. Actions by media organisations to improve the safety of media staff, including freelance employees, through appropriate forms of hostile environment and risk-awareness training and provision of appropriate technical equipment;
  3. Regular updating of editorial reporting, editing and style handbooks and materials to familiarise journalists and editing staff with human rights terminology and to reinforce ethical principles in reporting human rights issues. These should take account of guidelines from professional groups of journalists on rights issues, such as reporting on children, intolerance and hate speech;
  4. Encouragement of professional co-operation between reporters and correspondents working for different media in different regions to better understand local conditions and to develop a more informed, diverse and reliable network of information sources; and
  5. Forms of self-regulation strengthened to build public confidence and to help journalists to examine critically their practices and frameworks for covering human rights. Structures for self-regulation must be independent and must provide an accessible bridge between media, journalists and the people they serve.

## To human rights organisations

Journalists, the media and human rights organisations play distinct and different, but equally, vital roles in creating open societies that are able to defend and promote fundamental rights. To play their parts effectively, journalists groups, media and human rights organisations need to better understand their different roles and responsibilities. Human rights organisations can contribute to this process by:

- Promoting internal discussion among human rights activists on the work of media and journalists;
- Establishing direct contact with journalists' groups and media organisations to discuss media-related rights issues and ways in which both groups can co-operate to create better legal, political and social conditions for the exercise of journalism;

- Organising joint meetings with media organisations and journalists to discuss concerns about human rights coverage and how to co-operate in providing accurate and reliable information on human rights questions; and
- Suggesting confidence-building measures to promote better understanding of the human rights agenda through, for example, the sponsorship of national journalism prizes and research grants to journalists working on human rights stories.

In addition to this emphasis on mainstream media and traditional media techniques by civil society, CPA also strongly emphasises the need for HIVOS to look at new media – in the hands of media, civil society as well as citizens – to promote good governance, democracy and peace in a country that in South Asia demonstrates a higher than average development of telecommunications infrastructure including wired and wireless broadband internet access as 3G mobile phone services.

### **Raise awareness on the Right to Information at the national and local level**

In 2004, the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka held that the freedom of speech and expression, including publication, guaranteed by Article 14(a) of the Constitution, to be meaningful and effective, should carry within its scope an implicit right of a person to secure relevant information from a public authority in respect of a matter that should be in the public domain and that it should necessarily be so where the public interest in the matter outweighs the confidentiality that attaches to the affairs of State and official communications. However, denial of the right to freedom of expression has been at the core of the political and social tragedy that has beset Sri Lanka for decades. Successive governments have flagrantly trampled upon all Media freedom, the public's right to know and the individual's fundamental right to freely hold and express opinions. The consequences for Sri Lankan society have been both marked and severe, and their legacy will almost certainly be felt for many years to come.

Governments of Sri Lanka have used a wide range of methods — both formal and informal — to impose censorship. Many obstacles to freedom of expression exist in law. Emergency regulations, for example, have been used by governments to close newspapers, seal printing presses, imprison political opponents without charge or trial, and even to enable security forces to destroy evidence of extra-judicial executions. Other methods of censorship, however, are informal, arbitrary and concealed from the public. These informal methods have in recent years included widespread threats and attacks — sometimes lethal — upon journalists, other media workers and writers for expressing views or publishing material that the authorities preferred to repress.

Lack of access to a wide range of information, including official documents on governmental policies, medical records, poverty alleviation programmes, legal aid and education, affects the enjoyment of other human rights, including economic and social rights. Furthermore, people's ignorance of the full range of human rights to which they are entitled under the Constitution and international human rights treaties which Sri Lanka has ratified is a serious impediment to their enjoying those rights and, importantly, to their seeking redress when these rights are violated. This is compounded by a general lack of awareness of the mechanisms available or procedures to follow to obtain legal redress.

Reporting of the conflict in Sri Lanka has been hampered by, among other things, restrictions on access to the conflict zone and censorship regulations. Sri Lankan citizens have to rely on, and form opinions on the basis of, statements issued by the government, the military and the LTTE, much of which is propaganda or misinformation. The outcome of military operations, as well as the plight of the thousands of civilians in the north and east, remains largely unreported. Even the number of those killed, wounded or missing in action is a matter of speculation, as are the living conditions and needs of the population in areas under LTTE control. The lack of information on the conflict has far-reaching implications for the right of the Sri Lankan people to know what is happening in the conflict zone and to participate in the shaping of their own future. The ongoing war effort, and matters arising from it such as defence procurements and humanitarian displacement are veiled in secrecy. Recently, the Defence Secretary noted in the

media that all those left in Killinochchi were terrorists<sup>22</sup>, which begs the question as to where and to whom lorry-loads of emergency rations were being sent to by the Government and the UN. Sadly, mainstream media is unable and unwilling to ask these vital questions and citizens are debarred from necessary answers because of the absence of enabling RTI legislation. Lack of independent reporting on the process has led to situations verging on the absurd. As noted by Global Trends in the Right to Information: A Survey of South Asia<sup>23</sup>,

*The Sri Lankan people bear the human and financial cost of the conflict, but government and military policies and practices regarding the conflict are inaccessible to the public and remain largely shielded from public scrutiny and challenge, precluding citizens from participating in a meaningful way in promoting a solution to the conflict. The Sri Lankan people are thus unable to pursue their legitimate right to monitor the peace talks, challenge either party for lack of political will or commitment to peace, or even to form opinions and political loyalties in an informed manner.*

Accordingly, there is a need to:

- Raise awareness amongst local government authorities, professionals in various fields, policy makers and local community based organisations on the public's Right to Information as a fundamental human right.
- Raise awareness amongst local communities on their right to information, thereby instilling the practice in the community of seeking out information and putting pressure on local government authorities to provide the same, in place of the current practice amongst the general public, which is to 'do without' the information denied.
- Incorporate the need for information into the Work Programs of local Community Based and Non Governmental Organisations.
- Encourage local communities, CBOs and NGOs to work together on litigation and fundamental rights cases, in order to overcome the current lack of Right to Information legislation.
- Encourage local CBOs and NGOs to take on an intermediary role, representing and assisting members of the community in obtaining required information.
- Encourage provincial arms of media organisations to take up causes of the community and highlight the need for and lack of information in each area.
- To develop networks of aware and informed CBOs, NGOs, groups, partners and individuals for engagement on future activities to expand information access / awareness.
- To gather data on information provision from workshop participants (CBOs, NGOs etc) to inform future project design for access to information activities.

### **For media development: Building capacities of NGOs / CSOs as well as mainstream media**

Support for media development in Sri Lanka grew exponentially during the time of the Ceasefire Agreement, from 2002 – 2005. Over these three years a number of donors partnered with local non-governmental organisations to conduct a range of media capacity development initiatives, ranging from training to equipment and infrastructure provisioning, in the Western and at the time the merged North-East Province.

With regard to legal and regulatory reform, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Free Media Movement (FMM) along with the Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association (SLWJA), Federation of Media Employees Trade Union (FMETU), Sri Lanka Tamil Media Alliance (SLTMA) and the Sri Lanka Muslims Media Forum (SLMMF) have spearheaded a number of initiatives related to public service broadcasting, the Freedom of Information and ethics and professional codes of conduct.

The emphasis of media development in Sri Lanka has been weighted towards independent media, and with good reason as enumerated later in this report. Donor and NGO driven media

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.dailymirror.lk/DM\\_BLOG/Sections/frmNewsDetailView.aspx?ARTID=30368](http://www.dailymirror.lk/DM_BLOG/Sections/frmNewsDetailView.aspx?ARTID=30368)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/publications/south-asia-foi-survey.pdf>

development programmes that are detailed later in this report over the past 2-3 years have helped expand and strengthen independent media in Sri Lanka. These initiatives have, inter alia, helped establish citizen journalism initiatives, reform legal and regulatory regimes governing media, and promote media organisations and associations committed to fostering a free press and democracy. However, media projects have not always been effective and they have often faced political and operations problems, including unrealistic targets, failures to produce outputs and desired outcomes, meet deadlines, have had an undue reliance on foreign expertise, have been driven by donor driven goals instead of those that can be sustained in the local context, have been short term, have incurred cost overruns and overall, demonstrate little appreciation of the need for long-term and sustainable initiatives to change the systemic problems associated with the media industry. Media development in Sri Lanka has also focussed on training journalists and media professionals, building media business capacity, supporting the development of a legal enabling environment, creating journalists association, trade unions (as well as strengthening existing ones financially as well as through training and capacity building). Less emphasis has been placed on media literacy.

As noted by Lange and Ramachandaran<sup>24</sup>, The cumulative effects of the numerous national and international interventions in support of the media over the last three years include:

- The widening ripples of media development (including for peace) activities generating rapid numerical growth of skilled and trained individuals in Colombo, the North and the East. The output, quality, performance and employability – also in non-media organisations – of these individuals is much better.
- Noticeable improvement in content and variety of productions, especially for the electronic media; and also more opportunities.
- Greater awareness of media rights and issues, and the need for reforms, codified regulations and empowering laws.
- Less deference to the authorities and a confidence that there are professional bodies and lobbying and advocacy groups to come to the aid of those who are attacked or targeted by the government or political forces. This confidence is also evident among media leaders in the private sector who, despite their business interests, identify with media campaign movements on issues of public and industry interest.
- The growth of new and inclusive professional alliances, forums and platforms for defence of media rights as well as campaigns for reforms.
- Mainstream media increasingly compete to employ the more educated and skilled media persons and wish to create provisions and facilities for in-house training and education of their journalists.

However, the development of individuals into more informed and skilled practitioners and the awareness within the industry of the need to reform has not brought about any perceptible institutional change in mainstream media organisations. The media remains as ethnically and politically polarised as before these interventions and not all those who are educated, trained and equipped by the new initiatives of recent years aspire to or work in mainstream or public service journalism. Therefore, the deficiencies and weaknesses remain in many institutions despite their desire to reinvent themselves as adequately professional examples of the modern media that Sri Lanka requires.

In summary, it will be necessary to:

1. Consolidate the efforts put into the establishment of the training institutions and ensure their future survival and integration into the media industry
2. Initiate the efforts needed to move from research and monitoring to successfully lobbying for legal and regulatory reform
3. Continue the efforts to diversify content through support for television programmes or print material aimed at peace and reconciliation
4. Step up efforts to forge cooperation between different language media

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<sup>24</sup> *Support to Media in Sri Lanka: An Overview of activities and proposals for the future*, Yasha Lange and Shastri Ramachandaran, December 2005, IMS

5. Initiate activities to remedy certain specific problems (lack of sources, safety, in-house training and possibly a resource centre in the East).

HIVOS can complement the work already done by following these recommendations:

### **Localised design, planning and implementation of media development initiatives**

Some media development programmes have been overly donor-prescribed or framed by conditional funding. For example, HIVOS cannot fund any initiative that engages the LTTE in any way, given US State Department regulations. There is a need to be up-front about such funding limitations and partner with NGOs and other actors to build their capacity as nodes able to carry on and expand training programmes.

Our experience suggests that HIVOS needs to aware that:

- Media development programmes are successful when tailored to local (national / regional / provincial / community) needs.
- There is no one size fits all solution.
- Media development programmes will only be sustainable if there is local ownership and buy in. Donor driven programmes may get participation on the basis of remuneration, accommodation and other incentives, but will fail to engender long-term impact.
- The lessons of the BBC World Service Trust's Bridging the Divide project from 2004 – 2006 are pertinent here. This was a multi-million rupee project largely funded by DFID that focussed on radio journalism. Contrary to the Trust's own reports<sup>25</sup> however, the project failed to develop lasting media capacities in the (then merged) North-East provinces. Further, the model of training adopted by the WST – to give participants exorbitant *per diems* for participation in workshops – ruined relationships between those 'trained' and local media development organisations, since no one could afford to pay the same *per diem* participants demanded after attending WST workshops.

### **Media Literacy and Media Development**

A public educated about the roles and responsibilities of media and their function in society and polity can offer a powerful voice for change that comes from consumers, addressing the argument often made in Sri Lanka that media (standards) reflect what the consumers wants. However, media literacy and media education have been often overlooked in media development programmes in Sri Lanka.

HIVOS must be cognisant of the following in their media development agenda in Sri Lanka:

- The Internet, satellite television, mobiles, MP3 players, email, social networking, blogging and related products, services and technologies (ICTs) give consumers at all economic, social levels access to a range of information hitherto unavailable, or prohibitively expensive. They need to be educated on how best to understand and respond to this exponential growth of information.
- Strengthening media literacy, beginning from schools, will inspire generational change and over time strengthen public support for independent media
- Media literacy training must include ways through which messaging can leverage new media technologies to foster political, social, economic and cultural development.
- Many university degree programmes on journalism in Sri Lanka are woefully outdated in terms of teaching methodology and curricula. They offer little or no practical experience and not a single degree programme addressed the new communications paradigms engendered by new media.

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[http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/mediadevelopment/story/2006/12/061218\\_srilanka\\_bridging.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/mediadevelopment/story/2006/12/061218_srilanka_bridging.shtml)

## **Long-term vision**

Donors are often impatient and want instant, demonstrable, independently verifiable results and outcomes. Often, this is not possible with media development, especially in Sri Lanka where the entrenched culture of violence requires systemic change that may well be generational. This applies to media development as well – while short-term progress within the duration of a project can often be measured, for the donor's benefit, the long-term impact of projects is rarely considered as an element of engagement.

Though brought out in the section on donor funding towards media development in Sri Lanka, the following observations are pertinent here:

- Most donor funding towards media development in Sri Lanka is short-term and uncoordinated
- Sustainability, **within** cycles of violence is impossible for many media initiatives. Donors can't, or don't want to, recognise this. Ergo, not every worthwhile media project can, or arguably should achieve sustainability.
- Development of sustainability skills, including business and marketing skills for independent media, must be an integral part of any media development and exit strategy
- Leveraging new media may lower costs and offer opportunities to service niche audiences, especially those at the regional and provincial levels
- Private investment, public private partnership and business supporting independent media initiatives are problematic in Sri Lanka, especially in a context where all telcos are supinely subservient to the incumbent regime.
- Almost all MSM is inherently, and deeply, partisan. The same can be said of many CJ's. Developing community media that is, to greatest degree possible, free from commercial and party political interests will take time, money and a great deal of effort.

## **Cross cultural / inter regional approaches to training and capacity building**

Capacity building of media professionals, journalists and others involved in media must incorporate non-traditional media, news products and producers, and seek non-news participants, especially in conflict regions.

- Insufficient training is available for local watchdog groups that monitor press freedom and provide protection for journalists.
- Although many donors are interested in niches such as investigative, health of business reporting, the need for basic journalism skills, ethics and professionalism (accurate, impartial and responsible journalism) is central.
- Public service values and ethics training are more effective when combined with practical, technical training (incl. on new media), rather than taught separately.
- Initiative are needed to education journalists on covering process and events related to, or may incite or exacerbate, religious, ethnic and other types of violent conflict.
- Music (VJ's), radio (DJ's) and talk show hosts (in English / Sinhala / Tamil), amongst others, who command massive audience reach and interest, should be included in training on conflict reporting / conflict sensitive journalism.

## **Establish and strengthen a legal environment supportive of independent media**

Sri Lanka does not have any Right to Information legislation. The incumbent government is unwilling to introduce such legislation. This impacts media development because information as a public good and in the public domain will always be curtailed, undermined or blocked by the violent parochialism of a repressive regime. Going by past experience, we know that:

- Donors and NGOs have encountered numerous obstacles in promoting legal and telecoms regulatory reforms. Government are reluctant to introduce reform that undermines their control over media (e.g. PSB). The process to revise legislation requires time and political capital. Political capital is almost non-existent today.



- Even when reforms have occurred, poor implementation and the introduction of other repressive legislation has limited their impact (e.g. the removal of criminal defamation was a positive outcome of the 1998 Colombo Declaration on media freedom, but the re-activation of the PTA after the demise of the Ceasefire Agreement and the PPSTAR legislation at the end of 2006, combined with Emergency Regulations, have severely eroded media freedom and the freedom of expression).
- Donors and many NGOs lack access to reliable and updated information on media laws, other strategic partners including key influential figures in government.
- Pooled resources (emergency funding) for the legal defence of journalists exist in an embryonic form and under wraps. More support is needed to ensure that when faced with more repressive, these support mechanisms are widened and deepened. Risk spread across donors can create a vital support structure for journalists under threat in Sri Lanka.

### **Research and independent evaluations**

There are few independent evaluations of media development in Sri Lanka. In a context where donor funding is drying up, it cannot be ignored that the NGOs engaged in media development are increasingly possessive over their networks, as well as innovations. With this in mind, we note that:

- Effective, impartial research methods are needed to evaluate media development project, document successes, assess scalability and transferability (local ownership) and understand causes of failure (as important and valuable as documenting successes).
- Rigorous, independent research (incl. media monitoring / surveys and polls on media / market research) is needed to provide policy and operational guidance to decision-makers in donor agencies, and to suggest areas where donor and inter-agency collaboration could accelerate progress.
- Examples of such research are: impact of media development programmes on governance mechanisms and reform, comparative analysis of various legal and regulatory systems on media growth and journalistic independence, effects of public service media agitation, creating economically viable independent media models, media as a tool for conflict transformation, impact of new media to address cycles of violence and bear witness to human rights abuses.

### **Propaganda versus media development**

Strategies are needed to address the growing perception that donors and NGOs are in the business of anti-government, pro-LTTE / terrorist propaganda. Manifestations of this perception range from hate speech against donor funded, NGO driven initiatives to strengthen independent media to physical harm against those involved in such initiatives, including journalists. While donors haven't been directly targeted for physical harm, it would be foolhardy to think they are not in the line of fire. CPA as an organisation and constituent members of the Media Unit have repeatedly faced a language of hate and harm, which has increased significantly over the past 2 years. All NGOs with active programming emphasis on peacebuilding, democratic governance, anti-corruption, elections monitoring and electoral reform, right to information, media freedom and freedom of expression advocacy have faced attacks from government and other armed groups. It is vital that media development support is cognisant of the challenge of addressing the real divide between perception and reality, and undertake media support initiatives in a manner that does not place at risk personnel – both local and foreign – and the larger goal of the initiative, which is to develop credible independent media. To this end, we encourage HIVOS to note that,

- Foreign donor funded media assistance programmes in Sri Lanka have generally resulted in doubts and outright hostilities amongst actors in Sri Lanka, including those within the media community. The absence of trust with regard to perceived donor agendas results in a credibility gap that is not addressed through capacity building and training alone.

- Media development assistance is often confused with the development of partisan propaganda and efforts to sway public opinion towards, for example, NGO perspectives on power-sharing.
- Donors have been largely insensitive at best to the perceptions of their support and involvement in media development, believing as they often do that their support, in and of itself, will be accepted as impartial, beneficial and useful.
- Donors should do all they can to support the independence of local partners and media voices and avoid political bias that undermines long-term credibility.

### **Develop and raise awareness of new media, including the development of citizen journalism through mobile phones**

As Sri Lanka enters, once more, a stage of protracted violent conflict after the failure of the Ceasefire Agreement signed in 2002 to engender a just and lasting peace, the need to keep the idea of peace through peaceful means alive in public discourse is significant. Especially during war and increasing human rights violations, citizens bearing witness can be a powerful force to strengthen democracy and peacebuilding if their voices are encouraged, captured, strengthened and disseminated widely. Recognizing the potential of new media and citizen journalism to produce engaging and critical content and augment the capacity of citizens to engage with governance mechanisms, CPA made a serious commitment to foster citizen journalism and new media over two years ago by making it a core activity of all its programming in Sri Lanka. Our experience suggests that even with increasing levels of violence and the systemic breakdown of democratic governance, citizens remain committed to values of democracy and require little motivation to use any media available to articulate their ideas and aspirations. The condition of anonymity is necessary and requested on occasion, but the conversations engendered through our path-breaking citizen journalism initiatives in Sri Lanka, the first of their kind and to the date the only examples of citizen journalism in the island, suggest that more can and should be done to promote new media and citizen journalism as a means through which democracy and peace can be strengthened and the narratives in support of war interrogated. There are a significant number of citizens in Sri Lanka who continuously contribute to the online websites. But the bulk of them are either professional journalists or prominent intellectuals in different fields. Ordinary citizens barely tend to report or write on their own, though they are adept at using mobiles and PCs. Existing CJ initiatives have succeeded in attracting contributions from general public, including those from outside the Western Province. However, we strongly feel the need for a continuous campaign to highlight the effectiveness of citizen journalism as a means to address a range of social, political and cultural issues that bedevil peacebuilding and democratic governance in Sri Lanka.

Other recommendations for the development of citizen journalism from those the study spoke with include:

- The ability to translate submissions into three languages
- Encouraging submissions of the three languages from the ground who do not have access to the web
- No restrictions of posts based on content, no matter how provocative with the sole purpose of facilitating debate and sculpting perceptions.
- Convince traditional media outlets to hire bloggers for content
- Content aggregating sites for certain niches
- Avoid stigmatisation with NGOs due to negative perception of the former and encourage private content.
- Reflect simple issues and the needs of the people
- Responses by the government to issues raised
- Surveys on services, promises and institutions of the government
- Sinhala and Tamil version of Groundviews.org, as English is not the medium to reach the masses
- Greater network of journalists
- Greater outreach and promoting awareness as well as the critical ability to engage.

- Greater platforming so as to increase reach of varying audiences.
- Improving accessibility
- Adequate funding
- Establishing a network of sources through the country
- Creating more electronic outlets more citizen journalism, for example radio which has brilliant reach as well as print media.
- Broaden the base of contributors
- Creating a demand for citizen journalism space in cooperation with the national media.

### **Strengthen new media initiatives in support of conflict transformation**

Not a single media development programme in Sri Lanka to date has demonstrated any significant emphasis on new media. The rare initiative that has utilised digital media technologies (such as the BBC World Service Trust's online training for radio journalists and Internews programming in Sri Lanka) have not engaged with the true potential of the web, internet and mobile phone technologies and instead have chosen to limit training to a specific range of products, services and competencies (e.g. digital audio editing *sans* an emphasis on pod-casting, or digital video editing *sans* any training on online video advocacy and publishing).

Through CPA's experience, we know that:

- New media has an increasing impact on news – including content produced by CPA's own citizen journalism initiatives as well as User Generated Content (UGC) in general. Mobiles, bloggers, citizen journalists, social networking, viral news distribution via the web and mobiles, online censorship and mainstream media's (MSM) metamorphosis into interactive news sites are all aspects of the media industry's rapid change that media development in Sri Lanka has not yet addressed.
- The low cost, portability and anonymity of new technology offer journalists better mobility, more protection from government oppression and a better chance for sustainability.
- New technologies also support distance learning for journalists, news production online and other operational changes.
- In some regions, 'sojos' or 'camjos' (solo journalists and mobile camera phone journalists) are the only ones bearing witness to gross human rights abuses and the under-reported human fallout of the on-going war
- Some regions and provinces demonstrate an underlying technical infrastructure (wired / wireless / mobile internet and web access at low cost) that can help leap-frog media development and help establish viable, sustainable community driven independent media
- Measures that develop the capacity of MSM journalists to deal with the challenges of new media, and professional training to citizen journalists are both needed to develop independent media in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lanka Press Institute (SLPI) training programmes need to be looked at in this regard, along with their (as yet unconfirmed) offering of citizen journalism training programmes (as a Diploma programme on weekends) beginning 2009 based on a comprehensive new media syllabus developed via Microsoft funding<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Disclosure – The author of this report wrote the new / digital media training syllabus for Microsoft that has been adopted by SLPI.

## Conclusions

There is a flip side to attempts made to strengthen formal and information media and communication networks especially at a provincial level in particular. We know there are rich sources of information on the ground that bear witness to events and processes that are analysed and reported through reports such as those published by the UTHR (J)<sup>27</sup>. Yet individuals and NGOs in the North and East provinces in particular (but also NGO activists working on human rights and peacebuilding in general) are extremely guarded about the nature of the work they do, and who is involved to what degree. It is impossible to get this information given the context of war and a fear psychosis in the country. Obviously, this severely impedes the design and implementation of programmes meant to support such actors and activities in Sri Lanka.

This catch-22 situation extends to buttressing the work of organisations and individuals who use traditional, community based cultural techniques to foster dialogues on peace *et al.* Cultural practices exist because they are, and are seen to be rooted in the local community *sans* any foreign influence (foreign seen here to be influences that are not local, including those from, for example, Colombo based organisations). Accordingly, financial support, training or any other capacity development that is seen to come from outside could well undermine the community's interest in and support for these cultural practices. Put another way, the best intentions to strengthen local cultural communications could lead to the unintended consequences that undermine their appeal and effectiveness at the grassroots level.

HIVOS needs to keep this delicate balance in mind when designing media and communications programmes that seek to strengthen local cultural practices, introduce new alternative media and strengthen actors on the ground already engaged in media capacity development.

Also to be underscored is the need to look at the potential of new media to support and strengthen existing communications initiatives of civil society and indeed, create new initiatives that engage audiences through the web, Internet and mobile phones in English, Sinhala and Tamil.

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.uthr.org/>

# Annex 1: National level overview of the media

2007 saw a dramatic decline in media freedom, the freedom of expression and the safety and security of media workers, journalists and media rights activists in Sri Lanka. Reporters without Borders (RSF) flagged Sri Lanka as the 4<sup>th</sup> most dangerous country in the world for journalists and Press Emblem Campaign (PEC), based in Geneva, flagged it as the 3<sup>rd</sup>. These were, respectively the worst rankings Sri Lanka had received. Journalists were openly and viciously threatened, called terrorists and traitors, physically abused and killed, forcing many into self-censorship and prompting others to leave the country. Media establishments were raided, closed, taken off-air or burnt down. Verbal attacks by political and armed actors, coupled with the overall culture of violence, impunity and censorship, have made the overall environment increasingly insecure and hostile towards the media. A total lack of meaningful emphasis on constitutional and legal mechanisms such as the Right to Information (RTI) to strengthen professional media in Sri Lanka and through it, accountability and transparency in government, contributed to a media environment in the South as well as in the North and East of Sri Lanka hugely detrimental to media freedom and the freedom of expression.

This trend continued its downward spiral in 2008.

The censorship of news and information on the conflict in the embattled North and East on account of the Prevention and Prohibition of Terrorism and Specified Terrorist Activities Regulations No. 07 of 2006 and Emergency Regulations was exacerbated by an extraordinary gazette notification that banned reportage of all defence procurements. Though this gazette notification was rescinded when it met with vehement local and international opposition and condemnation, it was a telling indicator of the Government's understanding of and approach to media freedom.

In terms of legislation related to and affecting media freedom, on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2007, the Sri Lankan Ministry of Mass Media and Information released a Proposed National Media Policy (draft Policy) for consultation. In a detailed critique of the draft policy, CPA and Article 19 averred, *inter alia*, that:

*An equally serious and related problem is the almost complete failure of the Mission, Objectives or substance of the draft Policy to recognise the obligation of the government to take measures to create an enabling environment in which a free, independent and pluralistic media can thrive... The present legal and regulatory framework in Sri Lanka, as well as government practice, fails to conform to international and constitutional standards in all of these areas. Unsurprisingly, there is little or no mention of this in the draft Policy.*

What is more, the document essentially attempted to pull wool over the eyes of those concerned about media freedom in Sri Lanka, given that the very Government that proposed the national media plan in support of professional media standards was the one responsible for its significant deterioration.

The regime is vehemently opposed any Right to Information legislation on the grounds that it would be detrimental to its on-going war efforts.

Government ministers, members of the Opposition, paramilitary groups and public officials launched unprecedented and often venomous verbal and physical attacks against journalists and with complete impunity. The parochial and all consuming imperatives of regime stability in the South led by a hawkish President and Government, mirroring the intolerance of media freedom

in the LTTE controlled areas, were essential features of the Sri Lankan media landscape. This is particularly evident in the Sinhala Southern media. Human rights and humanitarian actors were deeply and often rabidly attacked in the State owned media and through political party propaganda such as Lanka, a Sinhala newspaper published by the JVP. Journalists partial to strengthening democratic governance and human rights were openly named and shamed as being supportive and in the pay of the LTTE. The dominant idiom used by the Government and other allied groups against journalists and media freedom was one that simply portrayed them as “traitors” and “patriots”. All investigative journalism and anyone critical of the Government were traitors. To a large degree, this message was effective. Journalists were unable to make any significant impact on the Government’s deplorable human rights record, corruption and its abuse of power.

While it is natural that any media has to keep its language audience in mind, the three language streams pursue varying agendas to an extent that further widens the existing chasm amongst the mainstream media. As CPA’s Media Monitor points out:

*“Sri Lankan newspapers of the three language media cater to sets of individuals who inhabit different worlds and espouse different worldviews. Though the island is small, yet the gulf that separates these language groups appears to be ever-widening, particularly between the Tamil readership and the rest. An analysis of the reportage of the North-East war demonstrates that these differences are not accidental or innocent, but rather, a reflection of deep ideological divergences that need to be brought to the surface and addressed directly for any lasting solution to the ethnic crisis to be meaningful and just.”*

With regards to electronic media, both state and private radio and television stations run programmes in all three languages. However, as the Report of the Committee to Advise on the Laws affecting Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression noted, there is currently no equitable balance between the three language services. The report notes:

*“Disparity in the service provided in the two official languages, is no mere technical denial of the constitutional rights but a serious deficiency in the process of trying to build a just and harmonious society. It is necessary that the law also articulate the principle that the state-run or public funded media should at every level of its activities recognise and reflect the multi-ethnic, plural nature of our society and the issue of language rights.”*

### **Web and online media**

With the introduction of wired and wireless broadband, WiMax and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation mobile telephony (3G) introduced by the State as well as a leading private telecommunications service providers, Sri Lanka is increasingly well poised to take consume and leverage Internet and web based media. In addition to State investment, private telecommunications companies have setup wireless mobile phone Internet access around the country. Public – private partnerships have established cyber-centres in rural areas to complement the hundreds already established by the State. With the cost of access continually coming down, access to and ownership of PCs improving and the ubiquity of mobiles (11 million registered SIM cards in a population of 20 million) our proposal leverages the rapid growth of ICTs in the country to strengthen democratic governance and facilitate peacebuilding through the generation, dissemination and archival of content generated by citizens, for citizens.

The growth of Internet and web based new media shows no signs of slowing down. Traditional media such as the Daily Mirror completely revamped their websites in light of the increasing use of the internet by those in Sri Lanka as a source of news and information – the Daily Mirror site now gets over 32,000 page views a day. CPA recognises that media consumption patterns in Sri Lanka amongst younger and more politically engaged and opinionated audiences have radically changed with the advent of broadband and cheaper, pervasive wireless and mobile Internet and web access. Given the unprecedented violence directed against the independent traditional print and electronic media, the Internet and web today are increasingly the only means through which civil society voices find expression and gain traction amongst audiences, local and international, key to Sri Lanka’s future. CPA’s path-breaking new media and citizen journalism initiatives

Groundviews ([www.groundviews.org](http://www.groundviews.org), winner of an international award for excellence for its content), Vikalpa ([www.vikalpa.org](http://www.vikalpa.org)), Vikalpa Video ([www.youtube.com/vikalpasl](http://www.youtube.com/vikalpasl)) and Voices of Reconciliation Radio (<http://radio.voicesofpeace.lk>) registered significant growth in readership in Sri Lanka and internationally over the past two years. This suggests, along with the feedback and accolades we continue to receive that the impact of citizen journalism is rapidly growing along with the awareness of new media as a means through which citizen can interact with independent news and information.

It is not as if the Government is oblivious to the power of the web and Internet to increasingly shape public opinion domestically and internationally. In June 2007 and again from December 2007 to date, the Government blocked access to the noted Tamil news website Tamilnet. Though accessible through proxy servers, what was more disturbing was that the government openly admitted that it was on the look out for hackers to disable the site. What all this suggests is a nascent yet significant revolution in the manner alternative news and information that critiques the status quo is produced, disseminated and consumed in Sri Lanka.

Over 2007 and 2008, a majority of mainstream media institutions revamped or created websites for their publications and productions. The quality of these media websites span a broad spectrum, ranging from those riding the wave of new technology offering e-editions, access via mobile phone and dedicated blogs to the more basic site which have minimum user interfaces.

As noted in ***Explosion: Recent Expansion of the Media in Sri Lanka*** by Minelle Fernandez,

*Virakesari broke new ground with the introduction of Sri Lanka's first e-paper – a full version of the printed paper available online in an interactive format where the reader can click to open any article. The Wijeya Group's Lankadeepa has followed suit with its own e-edition. Both papers are available to registered users free of charge for an initial period. The Virakesari website is a good example of a media company which has embraced the full potential of new technologies offering video and audio updates on its site. It has also created a social space for its readers with blogs and other interactive areas. Kumar Nadesan says "The overseas market is where the future lies," and this approach - creating an informative and entertaining space for the Tamil diaspora in addition to local readers has seen the number of registered users increase to 12,000 with an average rate of 280,000 hits.*

*Most radio stations offer a live stream of their broadcast online but offering a live television stream is a bigger challenge given the volume of data involved. But television stations have been packaging popular programmes, i.e. news, tele-dramas and game shows that have proved to be popular especially among the Sri Lankan diaspora.*

*There has been an ongoing debate within the newspaper industry about introducing a subscription-based service for online editions. With the development of online editions, Sri Lanka's publishing companies took a group decision to introduce a subscription-based access. But Ranjith Wijewardena says after this system had been in operation for 6-10 months, there was a rethink. As a result we have seen almost all newspapers going back to a free service.*

*The Daily Mirror offers access to the paper via GPRS enabled mobile phones and has also ventured into the 'blogosphere' with a space titled 'My day.' Blogging has taken off among computer users and there has been explosion of blogs among locals and expat Sri Lankans. Kottu is a Sri Lankan blog aggregator that carries a summary of Sri Lankan blogs and makes interesting reading providing a useful insight in to the diverse subjects covered by blogging.*

### **Existing Citizen Journalism initiatives**

Groundviews, Sri Lanka's first CJ initiative, got over 144,280 page views and close to a million hits in 2007. It now gets on average 700 page views a day. In December 2007 the site was awarded an Award of Excellence in New Communications from the Society for New Communications Research (SNCR) based in Boston. "Groundviews exemplifies the mission of this awards program: the successful and innovative use of new communications solutions and social media practices to enhance communications and relationships" commented Mike Manuel, SNCR

Best Practices Committee Chairman (see <http://www.groundviews.org/2007/12/05/groundviews-wins-2007-award-of-excellence-in-new-communications-from-society-for-new-communications-research/>).

Groundviews is currently referenced on 48 other blogs globally and has a Technorati (<http://www.technorati.com>) rank of 144,251 out of the over 70 million blogs Technorati indexes and ranks. Further, Groundviews is the only citizen journalism website in Sri Lanka to be directly indexed on Google News (<http://news.google.com>) and ranked Number 1 on Google itself by keyword. Articles on the site are regularly republished in other local media, including media websites such as InfoLanka News, Tamil Canadian and Tamilnet. *"For ongoing analysis of the conflict, the citizen journalism site groundviews.org provides interesting and often tragic reporting,"* says the renowned press freedom organisation Freedom House of Groundviews on its blog (<http://blog.freedomhouse.org/weblog/2008/02/weekly-governan.html>). The videos on CPA's Vikalpa YouTube Video Channel (<http://www.youtube.com/vikalpasl>) have been viewed tens of thousands of times. Vikalpa Video was the first and is still to date the only example in Sri Lanka of using short videos filmed using a mobile phone and distributed through the web on alternative perspectives on war, peace and governance. Some of these videos have highlighted the ground situation in the embattled North and East of Sri Lanka, a rarity even for mainstream media (e.g. this video on life in Jaffna <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwmjYWTOrRU>).

These videos complement original writing in the vernacular on the Vikalpa website (<http://www.vikalpa.org>), Sri Lanka's first and to date only Sinhala and Tamil citizen journalism website that now registers over 200 pageviews a day, mostly from Sri Lanka. Voices of Reconciliation Radio (<http://radio.voicesofpeace.lk>), Sri Lanka's only pod-casting aggregation site already archives over 400+ hours of mostly vernacular pod-casts on peace, reconciliation, human rights and democracy, including voices and perspectives from the embattled North and East of Sri Lanka.

**There is no comparable set of examples in NGOs / Civil Society in Sri Lanka of the web, Internet (and to a lesser degree to date, mobiles) to engender conversations that cannot be featured on or found in mainstream print and electronic media.**

### **Traditional / Mainstream media**

The media can be broadly divided into two main categories - state and private media. The state media comprises print and radio and television and has traditionally enjoyed wide viewership, listenership and readership, not necessarily for gripping content but more for the best frequencies and also having a certain degree of the public's trust in the old, established 'brands'. But the advent of private players into the field particularly in the electronic media sphere has seen state operators face stiff competition and eroding market share<sup>28</sup>.

The State controls Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited (ANCL), the largest newspaper operation in the country, publishes approximately 20 titles covering all three languages. It has the widest distribution network and benefits greatly from advertising revenue from state institutions. The Government also controls the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (radio) and Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (television) as well as Independent Television Network that account for 13 radio and 3 television channels.

There are 10 private newspaper companies that publish the main of daily and weekly newspapers in all three languages. These include large publishing houses like the Wijeya Group as well as smaller operations like Ravaya Publishers. The private sector has consolidated its place within the media since it was allowed to enter the fray in the late 80's. There are 21 radio channels operated by 12 privately owned radio stations while 8 television stations broadcast 11 television channels. The transmission capacity and reach of the private stations still remain far more limited than that of the state-owned electronic media. Thus, State owned electronic media

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<sup>28</sup> As indicated on the Ministry of Mass Media and Information website. <http://www.media.gov.lk>. These figures are based on channels currently in operation. There are a number of radio and television channels that have obtained licenses and frequencies but are yet to commence operations.



both radio and television remains the electronic media with the widest reach (approx 95% of the country)<sup>29</sup>.

### Overall Media Reach<sup>30</sup>

	2004	2006
Press	55.4%	52.75%
Radio	70.12%	66.23%
TV	81.06%	83.38%

### Newspaper readership (Overall)

Description	Name and circulation
Sinhala Dailies	Divaina - 219,896 Lakbima - 198,559 Lankadeepa - 180,255 Dinamina - 60,000
Sinhala Weeklies	Irida Lankadeepa - 361,722 Irida Divaina - 350,937 Irida Lakbima - 335,089 Silumina - 150,000 Irudina - 150,000 Rivira - 120,000 Ravaya - 45,000
Tamil Dailies	Virakesari - 97,270 Thinakkural - 65,600 Sudaroli - 36,000 Udayan - 31,500 Thinakaran - 13,000
Tamil Weeklies	Sunday Virakesari - 145,090 Sunday Thinakkural - 96,675 Sudaroli - 63,000 Udayan - 36,200 Sunday Thinakaran - 18,000
English Dailies	The Island - 69,580 Daily News - 50,000 Daily Mirror - 42,093

<sup>29</sup> *A Study of Media in Sri Lanka*, CPA, April 2005, [http://www.cpalanka.org/research\\_papers/Study\\_Media\\_Sri%20Lanka.pdf](http://www.cpalanka.org/research_papers/Study_Media_Sri%20Lanka.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Source: LMRB NMS 2004 & 2006

## Newspaper readership<sup>31</sup>

Newspaper	Readership (in millions)	%
Irida Lankadeepa	3,116.20	24.7
Lankadeepa (D)	1,672.07	13.25
Irida Divaina	1,537.55	12.19
Silumina	1,492.83	11.83
Irida Lakbima	1,001.55	7.94
Sirikatha	736.71	5.84
Dinamina	657.83	5.21
Divaina (D)	598.89	4.75
Sunday Observer	496.32	3.93
Bawana	362.69	2.87
Lakbima (D)	356.11	2.82
Virakesari	338.03	2.68
Budusarana	304.27	2.41
Mavbima	292.48	2.32
Wijaya	274.3	2.17
Tharuni	259.73	2.06
Rivira	241.56	1.91
Virakesari	228.86	1.81
Eae	214.3	1.7
Wandana	195.15	1.55
Nirmala	194.51	1.54
Sunday Times	193.86	1.54
Tharunaya	179.73	1.42
Daily News	167.72	1.33
Sandarajni	167.09	1.32
Thinakural (W)	158.48	1.26
Lanka	156.67	1.24
Muthuhara	156.49	1.24
Birinda	149.38	1.18
Irudina	127.99	1.01
Navaliya	127.45	1.01
Thinakaran Vara Manjari	120.09	0.95
Thinakaran (D)	118.86	0.94
Mihira	116.84	0.93
Kreeda	110.71	0.88
Diwamina	110.6	0.88
Wijaya Pariganaka	107.13	0.85
Sunday Island	103.04	0.82
The Island (D)	102.63	0.81
Irahanda	92.98	0.74
Daily Mirror	90.98	0.72
Rawaya	89.42	0.71
Sunday Leader	85.66	0.68
Vidusara	85.18	0.68
Nawayugaya	82.4	0.65
Mithran Vara Malar	76.83	0.61
Ragina	76.6	0.61
Desathiya	70.28	0.56
Pariganaka Athwela	68.87	0.55
Sudar Oli Mag	65.82	0.52
Manahara	63.89	0.51

<sup>31</sup> Source: LMRB NMS 2004 & 2006

Thinakural (D)	63.69	0.5
Subasetha	60.07	0.48
Sarasaviya	55.75	0.44
ThinamurusuVaaramalar	54.3	0.43
Sudar Oli (D)	54.2	0.43
IT Times	53.17	0.42
GO	52.55	0.42
Business Today	52.49	0.42
Siwdesa	51.94	0.41
Sampatha	49.15	0.39
Style	47.71	0.38
Suwanda	47.13	0.37
Lanka Monthly Digest	46.19	0.37
Manaliya	42.54	0.34
Femina	42.37	0.34
Sisubima	42.05	0.33
Explore Sri Lanka	31.86	0.25
Esteem	31.63	0.25
Lanka Women	30.48	0.24
Wijey	28.96	0.23
Metro News	23.57	0.19
Sathdina	20.96	0.17
Hi	20.65	0.16
Prayogika Pariganaka	20.52	0.16
Satyn	18.97	0.15
Business Standard	14.39	0.11
Morning Leader	14.24	0.11
Jey	13.94	0.11
Janani	12.05	0.1
Siththara	12.03	0.1
Sunday Standard	11.27	0.09
Motor Mag	9.62	0.08
Kala Rasa	9.56	0.08
The Nations	9.45	0.07
Navamani	8.97	0.07
Friday	6.56	0.05
Udayan (D)	5.66	0.04
Adoh	4.18	0.03
Machan	2.05	0.02
Linc	1.75	0.01

### Radio listenership<sup>32</sup>

Channel	Total (in millions)	%
Shri FM	2,834.54	22.47
Sirasa FM	2,824.39	22.38
Hiru FM	1,635.42	12.96
Sha FM	1,364.25	10.81
Lakhanda	1,244.18	9.86
SLBC Swadesheeya	1,174.26	9.31
Raja FM	1,107.84	8.78
Sooriyan FM	707.34	5.61
Neth FM	690.69	5.47

<sup>32</sup> Source: LMRB NMS 2004 & 2006

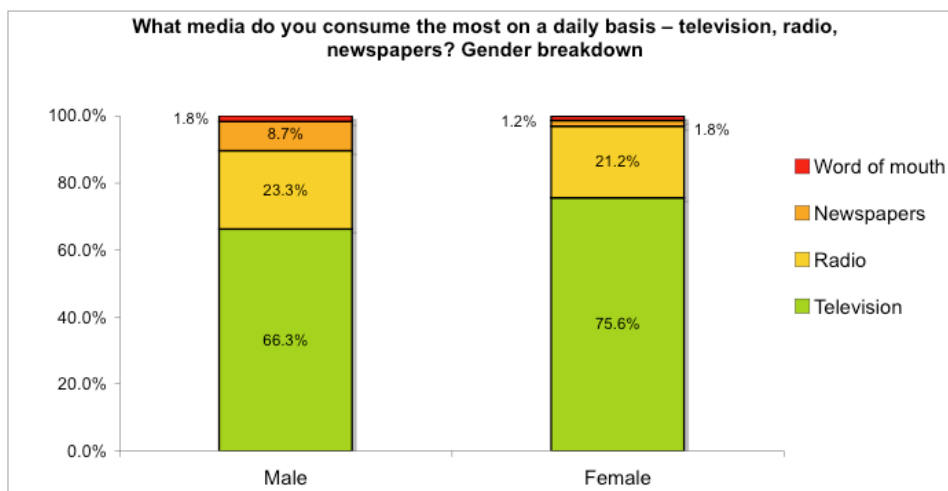
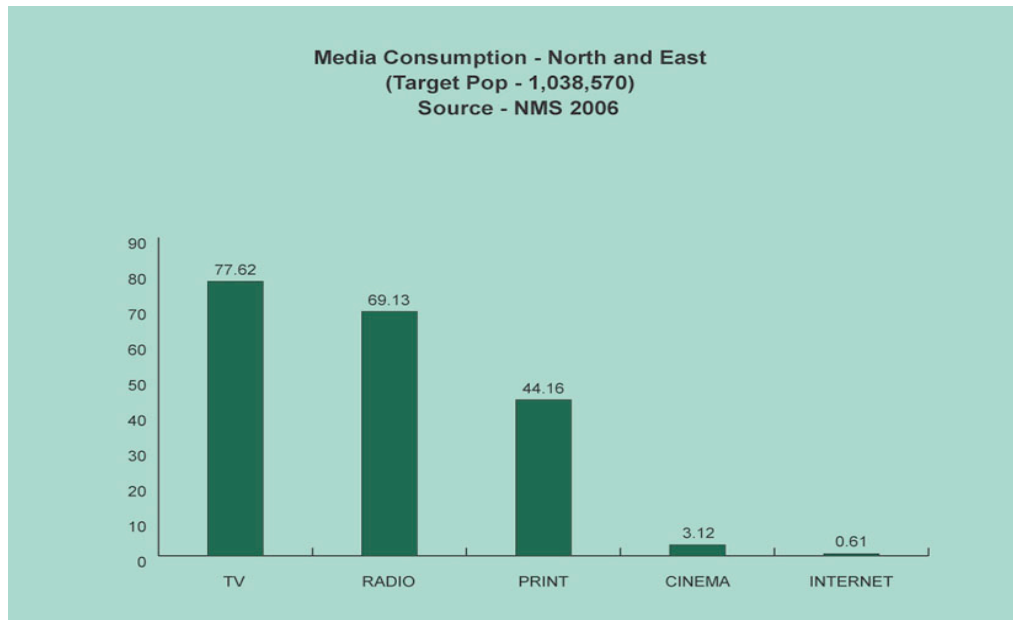
Shakthi FM	679.49	5.39
SLBC Sinhala Commercial Service	667.63	5.29
Threndal	282.49	2.24
Ruhuna	275.44	2.18
Rajarata	225.55	1.79
Tamil Theseeya	170.84	1.35
Sun FM	150.1	1.19
City FM	144.51	1.15
Y FM	142.01	1.13
Yes FM	140.68	1.11
Asura FM	131.34	1.04
Gold FM	111.56	0.88
SLBC English Commercial Service	68.43	0.54
Lite 89.2	55.89	0.44
E FM	52.79	0.42
TNL Radio	52.16	0.41
Isura FM	47.7	0.38
Vidula	46.87	0.37
Kadurata	34.37	0.27
SLBC RNN	34.26	0.27
Isira FM	25.63	0.2
SLBC Uva	11.35	0.09
Max FM	10.79	0.09
SLBC Jaffna Service	5.18	0.04
Voice of Tigers	1.12	0.01
Therai	1.04	0.01
Rishala	0.58	0
Other Stations	9.92	0.08

### Television viewers<sup>33</sup>

Channel	Viewers (in millions)	%
Rupavahini	6,558.91	51.98
Sirasa TV	6,154.54	48.78
Swarnavahini	5,708.32	45.24
ITN	5,200.14	41.21
Shakthi TV	1,242.10	9.84
Channel Eye	1,044.48	8.28
Derana	779.4	6.18
TNL	335.84	2.66
MTV	240.56	1.91
TV Lanka	166.93	1.32
ART TV	146.65	1.16
ETV	90.37	0.72
Max TV	29.68	0.24
Sun TV	27.22	0.22
CBN Sat	17.12	0.14
Comet	7.99	0.06
SAT Net	7.53	0.06
KTV	5.91	0.05

<sup>33</sup> Source: LMRB NMS 2004 & 2006

Jaya TV	5.9	0.05
LBN	4.19	0.03
Teledasun	3.2	0.03
Other Channels	32.23	0.26
Other Cable & Satellite	19.24	0.15



CPA Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Survey, 2003

- It is evident from market research statistics that television has a very high penetration in the East as well as nationally.

# Annex 2: Survey on Human Rights and Human Rights Reporting in Sri Lanka<sup>34</sup>

## Introduction

Surveys were conducted to assess the views of 101 local journalists and representatives of 40 civil society organisations on minority rights issues and reporting on human rights issues in Sri Lanka. Most of the media respondents were print journalists working in a Sri Lankan medium based in metropolitan areas. Two-thirds were male and a few were editors. A quarter said they had experienced a violation of their rights (25.5%). Civil society respondents mostly worked with national rather than international non-government organizations (NGOs), as well as some UN or intergovernmental agencies. Their work was focused on human rights issues, including children's rights, women's rights and peace building.

Media Monitoring of twenty-two Sinhala, English and Tamil newspapers and the main news bulletins of four leading television stations from May-June 2007 showed that reporting on issues related to children, women minorities accounted only for around 4% of all news reports in the print media 10 % on television.

More than a one third of the journalists (38.3%) surveyed considered themselves very well informed on basic human rights and related violations in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, a large number (71.25%) identified a lack of sufficient awareness of international human rights laws and standards, as the main gap in their knowledge about human rights. A smaller number felt the main gap for them was knowledge about different minority groups (15%) and the root causes of Sri Lanka's ongoing conflict (10%).

## Main human rights issues: Discrimination

The main human rights issue facing Sri Lanka was discrimination against minority groups, according to about half of the respondents in both groups. Many (civil society 71.8%; media 46.4%) respondents thought the issue was underreported and commonly misreported. Almost two-thirds of civil society respondents thought the issue did not receive prominent media coverage (64.5%), while only about two-fifths of the media workers thought this was the case (38.9).

The media workers highlighted problems in reporting discrimination against minority groups, noting that the issue was most likely to be reported in the context of conflict and terrorism. Almost all said they would aim to interview a person belonging to a minority or disadvantaged group (95.5%) and many would seek to use more than one source. However, almost three-quarters of the journalists (73.6%) believed sources from various sides were not reliable and accurate in their provision of information.

Within the context of their own workplaces, most of the journalists thought there was no religious, caste, gender, race, ethnic and political diversity in their newsrooms. Most (72.8%) media organisations represented did not provide strategies or campaigns to raise staff awareness about nondiscrimination at work.

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<sup>34</sup> Media monitoring for this survey conducted from 13<sup>th</sup> May to 12<sup>th</sup> June 2007 and face to face surveys conducted in August 2007

### **Other human rights issues**

Civil society respondents thought freedom of expression violations (13.2%) were important. Media personnel though internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the torture allegations were the second major concern (7.5%). Other issues prioritised as human rights concerns were missing persons (NGOs 10.5%), pollution (NGOs 7.8%). Less priority was accorded to gender discrimination, child soldiers, access to employment, access to food, access to clean water and landmines.

Respondents from both groups diverged on the most underreported issues after discrimination against minority groups. For civil society it was gender discrimination (10.3%) while for media it was torture (14.4), followed by gender discrimination (9.3). Journalists thought gender inequality (46.2) was the most common angle in reports on disadvantaged groups and minorities, followed by caste (15.4), prostitution (15.4), homosexuality (17.3) and, to a much lesser extent, street children (1.9%).

### **Coverage: Disadvantaged and minority groups**

Almost all the civil society respondents thought media coverage of disadvantaged groups and minorities was very poor (97.4%). Their views were similar with regard to gender issues (87.2%) and children's right (87.2%). Across the board, children, women and other people in disadvantage groups were not seen to be given a voice and nor was information made available in media reports about relevant organisations and assistance.

However, journalists (72.5%) felt their institutions generally gave people from diverse religious groups and minorities a voice or an opportunity to speak to the media. But this contradicts with the findings of the above mentioned media monitoring exercise. A high proportion (83.1%) thought media reports did offer useful information on organisations or avenues for help. But many of the media respondents thought coverage of disadvantaged groups and minorities was sensational (76.9%) and stereotyped (64.4%). A quarter though coverage was derogatory.

More civil society respondents thought coverage was low rather than moderate or high in relation to IDPs, refugees, gender discrimination (50%), labour rights, pollution, child soldiers, child malnutrition, missing people, people with disabilities and access to education and employment. Issues such as access to food, clean water and health care were thought overall to receive more moderate to low coverage, while landmines, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of association received generally moderate coverage. Torture allegations were regarded by equal thirds as receiving high, moderate or low coverage.

More media respondents thought coverage was moderate rather than low in relation to IDPs, poverty, gender discrimination, labour rights, pollution, child soldiers, child malnutrition, landmines, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, and access to food, clean water, health care, education and employment. They thought low to moderate coverage applied to refugees, missing people and freedom of expression, while coverage of torture allegations was low to high and mostly low for people with disabilities.

Most of the media respondents thought the most common angle when reporting on human rights violations was reports on missing people, landmine victims, torture allegations, violations of freedom of expression and unequal pay for women.

### **Peace process and conflict**

More than three-quarters (76.8%) of the media workers thought mainstream media was generally biased towards one or the other side of the conflict, and that this was due (in descending order) to commercial considerations (31.1%), safety considerations (17.8%), editors' political interests (15.6%), a lack of training (15.6%) and the parochialism of media owners and a lack of standards (8.9% respectively). Only a few thought self-censorship or editors had a significant negative impact on accuracy, balance and fairness. Instead, they pointed to censorship applied by the Government (official and unofficial), the Army and the LTTE.

However, all the civil society respondents saw government censorship and the media's self-censorship as key contributing factors to their view of the media's weakness on accuracy, balance and fairness. They also noted their awareness of the media's problems in accessing sources violence and threats, bias, and a lack of knowledge among media workers.

Almost all the civil society respondents (94.7%) believed the media had not taken adequate steps to provide accurate, balanced and fair information about all parties in Sri Lanka's conflict. Less than a quarter of the media respondents (22.1%) agreed, but a surprising 58.8 per cent of journalists answered "do not know".

The civil society respondents thought the media's role in the peace process and conflict reporting should be to inform (71.4), to be objective, neutral (65.5) and, to a lesser extent, to facilitate a resolution (57.1%) and almost 70 percent suggested the media should not promote the issues of one side.

The media respondents took a stronger position on the media's role in covering the peace process and conflict, with a much higher proportion thinking the media should inform (94.8%), remain objective and neutral (86.4), and should not promote the issues of one side (86%) and facilitate conflict resolution (83.9). A high proportion, 91.7 per cent, thought the media should defend democracy. Almost half (45.2) of the media respondents regarded themselves as independent in the context of the conflict and more than a third saw themselves as defenders of democracy (37%). Just 8.2 per cent saw themselves as human rights campaigners and very few as patriotic citizens or defenders of the liberation struggle.

### **Conflict coverage**

A high proportion of the civil society respondents thought reports on the peace process and conflict lacked sufficient analysis (88.9%) and balance (86.5%) and rather were generally emotional (75.7%), sensational (89.5%), inflammatory (89.5%), derogatory (70.6%), stereotypical (76.7%), and lacking in sympathy and optimism (70%).

In contrast, more than half the media respondents - most of whom file regular reports on the conflict<sup>1</sup> thought the language used in the coverage of the peace process and conflict was analytical (59.6%) and balanced (52.8%).

Access to information from diverse sources was a critical problem noted by the media respondents. Almost all said they aimed to use sources from every side (94.2%) but many felt that sources were unreliable (70.1%) and also that geography, access (76.2%) and safety (60.9%) were significant barriers. Even as they noted that the quality of information provided by state institutions was limited (54%) or biased (40.4%), they still depended on such sources, notably the police (30.1%), the Sri Lanka Army and the LTTE (both 15.1%), the Government (8.2%) and the Defence Ministry (5.5%). Ordinary people accounted for just 1.4 per cent of sources in conflict and peace reporting. In the same time they noted that the quality of the information provided by NGO's and UN agencies working on minority and human rights issues was limited (45.7%) and biased (13.8%).

The experience of the media workers is that official and unofficial censorship is the most critical factor affecting accurate and impartial reporting on disadvantaged groups and minorities within the context of conflict.

### **Media's role**

A high number of the civil society respondents thought, reporting has improved with regard to human rights (54.5%), children's rights (63.6%), women's rights (52.9%), minority rights (40%), disadvantaged groups (46.9%) and the conflict (59.4%) over the past five years. However, all stressed that lack of balance remained a critical factor in incorrect media reporting on human rights issues, followed by a resort to stereotypes (80.6%). A high proportion also expressed concern about publishing the identities of victimised children (69.4%) and sensationalist



reporting (41.7%). Most agreed that a media focus on human rights issues was very important to the work of their organisations.

Most of the journalists also agreed at the media has a vital role to play in promoting and protecting human rights (87.3 %). They generally saw their role in this regard as being to inform (97.6%), to remain objective and neutral (82.8%), to reduce and prevent human rights violations (84.3%), to give a voice to minorities (81.5%) and to alleviate stigma regarding minorities (75.7%).

A high proportion (70.7%) of the journalists also agreed with the civil society respondents that media institutions had not done enough to introduce measures to provide accurate, balanced and fair information on disadvantaged groups. More than half (57%) said the media is generally biased against disadvantaged groups, and contributed to negative stereotypes (52.8%). The bias was seen to be due mainly to commercial considerations (43.2%), followed by editors' political interests (15.9%), owner's interests, and a lack of training and ethical considerations (each 11.4%).

Most of the journalists thought the main step to be taken to improve reporting on conflict and human rights issues was to institute better quality controls in fact-checking. Almost two-thirds said the main way in which journalists could influence a change of media culture around human rights issues was to become better informed about minorities (60.7). Many wanted to see human rights related reports receive greater prominence in coverage and they expressed a desire for assistance in identifying different angles for reporting on minority issues. They almost all pointed to a need to be provided with more information about disadvantaged groups.

However, relatively few of the media respondents said they wanted greater access to people in minority groups and NGOs dealing with human rights issues (both 13.9%). The surprisingly low response on this point may be related to an overall concern within the media about the quality of information provided by NGOs and other agencies working on minority and human rights issues. Many of the journalists regarded the information provided by such entities as limited (45.7%) or only satisfactory (16%), with a few considering it biased (13.8%). Clearly, there is a critical need for relationship building between media and civil society representatives if reporting on human rights issues is to improve.

### **Codes, guidelines, training**

The survey highlighted that media institutions in Sri Lanka generally do not provide their staff with sufficient resources and mechanisms for learning about how to report on the wide range of very serious human rights issues affecting the country. Journalists need and want codes of ethics reporting guidelines and related training.

Just over half (51.2%) of the media respondents thought a code of ethics for day-to-day practice was essential to build a media culture in Sri Lanka that could contribute effectively to resolving the conflict and promoting human rights. An assurance of editorial freedom (22) and provision of reporting guidelines (18.3%) were other important factors, with diversity in the newsroom (8.5) considered a less important factor. Almost all said appropriate training would allow them to put ethical journalism into practice.

But while many of the media respondents said their institutions had a code of ethics, one fifth was not aware of in-house codes. And almost half of the respondents who were aware their institutions' codes said they had received no training on professional ethics (47.6%). Similarly, just under half the respondents said their institutions had guidelines for reporting on conflict and disadvantaged groups, but about half of these respondents did not have copies. Just 30 per cent had received training on reporting on conflict or war, human rights and disadvantaged groups. The two-thirds who said they had received no such training almost all wanted it, especially in regard to conflict reporting.

There was relatively high awareness among the media respondents about educational materials available for reporting on conflict (65.8%), human rights and minorities (69.6%). However, only

a third (32.4%) used them regularly. Of those who were unaware of such materials, many said they would make use of them, especially in regard to human rights (74.2%) and disadvantaged groups (73.2%).

# Annex 3 - Overview of Legal and Regulatory Framework of media in Sri Lanka<sup>35</sup>

## **Newsprint**

The newspapers with the widest circulation in all three languages are owned by the state. A previously successful family run newspaper enterprise, the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited (ANCL) was “nationalised” under the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited Law No 28 of 1973, with the then government taking over 75% of its shares (vested in the Public Trustee), stating intention to broad-base ownership of the company by distribution of shares amongst the public. The ANCL Law provides that this should be done; however it has not happened to date. As a result, successive governments have used and abused their monopoly over these newspapers. Conflict reporting has been a major area under government control and manipulation. There is no state control over the privately owned newspapers, except under emergency or PTA censorship (see below) when they are in force.

## **Broadcasting**

The state radio, Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) was established under and is governed by the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation Act No 37 of 1966 (SLBC Act). The act also provides for the issue of licenses by the Minister in charge, for private broadcasting stations. The Minister also has control over the appointment and removal of members of the corporation, including the director general.

Similarly, the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC), the state television, was set up under and is governed by the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation Act No 6 of 1982, and also provides for the grant of licenses for private television broadcasting. The Minister in charge appoints the majority of members of the corporation, while the Ministers responsible for the SLBC and the National Film Corporation appoint the rest.

Experience has shown that relative freedom to operate will not automatically ensure balanced reporting amongst private broadcasters, resulting in many critics calling for the establishment of an independent authority to regulate both state and private broadcasting in Sri Lanka, with a mandate to ensure diversity in broadcasting.

In addition, the state also owns the Independent Television Network (ITN), which began as a private station, later acquired by the state. Except for the issuing of licenses as stated above, there is no government control over the private radio and television channels.

## **Sri Lanka Press Council Law**

The Sri Lanka Press Council Law No 5 of 1973 imposes restrictions specifically on the press. The aims of the act as stated in the preamble, were to ensure freedom of the press, high ethical standards in journalism and the free flow of information. However, many aspects of the Press Council Law such as the level of government control in the composition of the Council and the wide regulation-making power granted to the relevant Minister have been widely criticised.

Further, the law prohibits publication of material deemed to be falling under the broad categories of obscenity and profanity, government decision-making, fiscal policy, official secrets

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<sup>35</sup> This section has been adapted from *A Study of Media in Sri Lanka (excluding the North and East)*, CPA, April 2005

and defamation. Section 16(1), prohibits publication of proceedings of Cabinet meetings without prior approval of the Secretary to the Cabinet. The act also prohibits the publication of any matter under consideration by a Minister or the government, any official secret (see below) or any matter relating to military, naval, air force or police establishments, equipment or installation which is likely to be prejudicial to the defence and security of the country.

The Press Council turned out to be an ineffective institution and has currently been abolished.

### **Official Secrets Act**

Under the Official Secrets Act No 32 of 1955 it is an offence for anyone in possession of an official secret to communicate it to any unauthorised person or any person to whom it is not in the interest of the state to communicate it. An official secret is broadly defined to include any information relating to;

- the armed forces
- any implements of war maintained for use in the service of the country
- any equipment, organisation or establishment intended to be or capable of being used for the purposes of the defence of Sri Lanka
- directly or indirectly, the defences of Sri Lanka

The Official Secrets Act applies to everyone and not just the media. However, its impact on the media is especially significant, as there are a number of issues related to defence and the military, such as corruption in procurement of military equipment, which should be subject to open debate.

In practice, though this Act has not been used in a draconian fashion against citizens or media personnel, the mere existence of such law has the disturbing influence of inhibiting Journalists, resulting in self-censorship when reporting on sensitive issues such as the ethnic conflict, where defence information often plays a key role. While a handful of daring journalists persisted in exposing suspicious arms deals and other malpractice in the armed forces, wider exposure could have been expected if the media were not subject to such far-reaching legislation.

### **Emergency regulations**

Emergency regulations have been one of the most powerful means by which censorship – particularly with regards to conflict reporting - has been achieved. The Public Security Ordinance No 25 of 1947 empowers the President to issue regulations that appear to him or her to be necessary or expedient in the interests of public security, the preservation of public order and the suppression of mutiny, riot or civil commotion, or for the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the life of the community. Emergency regulations take precedence over all other laws except the Constitution, and once emergency has been declared the fact of the existence of a state of emergency cannot be questioned in court.

The appointment of a competent authority by whom information must be scrutinize prior to being made public, is a regular feature in censorship by emergency regulation. Further, the authority is invariably appointed by a Minister or the President, raising grave doubts as to his or her independence.

Following are some of the more draconian emergency regulations Sri Lanka has intermittently been under over the past years:

- Editorial comment, feature stories, news reports on any subject should be submitted for approval to a competent authority
- There could be no publication of any matter which is under consideration or alleged to be under consideration by any Minister or Ministry
- No person may affix in a public place or distribute among the public any poster or leaflet without prior police permission

- No person shall bring the President or government into hatred or contempt or incite feelings of disaffection
- Printing presses could be sealed if public security, public order or essential services are threatened

Having been operative virtually uninterrupted for many years, emergency rule lapsed in July 2001 along with the search and arrest regime under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (see below). After the Boxing Day tsunami in 2004, emergency rule was re-imposed. On 4 January 2005 the Public Security Ordinance (Part 2) was brought into operation by Presidential Proclamation to be effective in 14 districts in Sri Lanka. The regulations, which were published on January 20 2005 but were to be operative from January 4 2005, were for the most part the same as those declared earlier during the times of civil unrest. As Asanga Welikala notes in *A State of Permanent Crisis*<sup>36</sup>,

*On the face of the text, the wide, overbroad language of these regulations could lend themselves to abuse, in that, in addition to dealing with activities that the State could legitimately restrain or prohibit in the interests of national security and the suppression of terrorism, they could also serve to curtail legitimate democratic activity and fundamental freedoms, dissent and the autonomy of civil society. In particular the wide range of activities prohibited by Regulation 6, 7 and 8, the definition of terrorism in Regulation 20 and the immunity clause, Regulation 19. These provisions are overbroad, drafted in very wide language, and where offences have not expressly been established, they allow for the possible criminalisation of a range of legitimate activities of civil society, and could violate constitutionally protected fundamental rights.*

### **Criminal Defamation**

Criminal defamation has been used extensively in the past in order to silence critical reportage and to persecute editors and journalists. For example, five cases were filed in the High Court of Colombo against Victor Ivan, the editor of the Ravaya newspaper, at the beginning of 2002. Four other mainstream newspaper editors were also facing criminal defamation charges.<sup>79</sup> In 2002 Parliament unanimously passed a law abolishing criminal defamation. However the constitutional and legislative provisions governing emergency rule remain un-amended, allowing for the possibility of emergency being re-imposed in the future.

### **Prevention of Terrorism Act**

The Prevention of Terrorism Act No 48 of 1979 (PTA) is yet another law restricting media freedom, usually discussed alongside emergency regulations. Enacted first as a temporary law to deal with the armed struggle by the Tamil separatist movement in 1979, the law became permanent in 1982 with the escalation of the conflict. The PTA is currently inoperative in practice, resulting from a commitment made by the government under the ceasefire agreement with the LTTE in 2002.

The PTA deals mainly with providing wide powers of search, arrest and detention to the police to deal with suspected terrorism. However, Part V of the act prohibits the publication of any matter relating to;

- i. the commission or investigation of an offence under the Act, or
- ii. "incitement to violence, or which is likely to cause racial or communal disharmony or feelings of ill-will or hostility between different communities or racial or religious groups"

without the approval of a competent authority (appointed by the relevant Minister). Further, Section 2(1)(h) of the PTA provides "[Any person who] by words either spoken or intended to be read or by signs or by visible representation or otherwise causes or intends to cause commission of acts of violence or religious, racial or communal disharmony or feelings of ill-will or hostility among different communities or racial or religious groups... [shall be guilty of an offence]".

<sup>36</sup> *A State of Permanent Crisis: Constitutional Government, Fundamental Rights and States of Emergency in Sri Lanka*, Asanga Welikala, 2008, Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Though at first it may not appear to be objectionable, incidents can be cited which demonstrate the potential for abuse of this law by the authorities. For example, in a case brought under the Act in 1996, an Editor of the *Satana* (battle) newspaper and four others were detained as a result of an article on a defeat of the Sri Lankan army by the LTTE. In a more high profile case during the same year, the news director of TNL (television) was charged over a broadcast that stated that the LTTE had attacked security forces in the east, resulting in the forces fleeing. The Press and the human rights community, both domestic and international, created uproar over this particular suppression of broadcasting freedom, and the case was later withdrawn.

### **The case of J.S. Tissainayagam**

J.S. Tissainayagam, a working journalist and Editor of the [www.outreachsl.com](http://www.outreachsl.com) website, was detained under the draconian PTA on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2008 and held for five months without any charge by the Terrorist Investigation Department (TID). He was charged in August 2008 in the Colombo High Courts under the PTA. The full text of the indictment is noted here for the chilling consequences it has on the Freedom of Expression in Sri Lanka.

*This complaint states that in Colombo, which is within the jurisdiction of this court during the period between 1st June 2006 and 1st June 2007, the accused together with unknown persons committed an offence or abetted the commission of an offence or entered into a common intention with a prior understanding to abet the commission of an offence whether planned or unplanned, by words either spoken or intended to be read or by signs or by visible representations or otherwise, which intends to cause the commission of acts of violence or racial or communal disharmony and brings the Government into disrepute, through the printing or distribution of the publication North Eastern Monthly magazine or by agreeing to commit or abet the commission of the offence of acting to promote that organization, and that since the aforesaid offence has been committed as a result of the said conspiracy, an offence which is a punishable offence under section 2(2)(ii) read with section 2(1)(h) of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act no. 48 of 1979 as amended by Act No. 10 of 1982 and Act No. 22 of 1988 which is to be read with section 113 (a) and section 102 the penal code has been committed.*

*In the above time, place and circumstances, an offence has been committed by words either spoken or intended to be read or by signs or by visible representations or otherwise, which intends to cause the commission of acts of violence or racial or communal disharmony and brings the Government into disrepute, through the printing or distribution of the publication North Eastern Monthly Magazine or by acting to promote that organization, through the publishing of its contents seen in the document extract marked "X" and annexed hereto, which is a punishable offence under section 2(2)(ii) read with section 2(1)(h) of the of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act no. 48 of 1979 as amended by Act No. 10 of 1982 and Act No. 22 of 1988 which is to be read with section 113 (a) and section 102 the penal code.*

*In the above time, place and circumstances, an offence has been committed by contributing or collecting or obtaining information relating to or donating funds for the purpose of terrorism through the collection of funds from Non Governmental Organisations for the North Eastern Monthly magazine, which is an offence punishable under Regulation 6 (c) of the Emergency (Prevention and Prohibition of Terrorism and Specified Terrorist Activities) Regulations No. 07 of 2003 published on 6th December 2006 in Gazette Extraordinary No. 1474/3 of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.*

### **Annexure X**

*By stating in the July 2006 the editorial of the North Eastern Monthly Magazine under the heading "Providing security to Tamils now will define northeastern politics of the future" stating, "it is fairly obvious that the government is not going to offer them any protection. In fact it is the state security forces that are the main perpetrator of the killings."*

*By stating that in the November 2006 North East Monthly, under the heading "With no military options Govt. buys time by offering watered down devolution" he states, "Such offensives against the civilians are accompanied by attempts to starve the population by refusing them food as*

*well as medicines and fuel, with the hope of driving out the people of Vaharai and depopulating it. As this story is being written Vaharai is being subject to intense shelling and aerial bombardment.”*

As the Free Media Movement (FMM) noted in response to this absurd indictment<sup>37</sup>,

*[we are] dismayed that, after five months of detention purportedly for the purposes of investigations by the TID, and in which considerable procedural leeway has been given the authorities by the courts, the Attorney General has only been able to frame charges against Mr. Tissainayagam on such manifestly insubstantial and absurd grounds as these. It appears that the authorities are desperately attempting to manufacture grounds on which to prolong the incarceration of Mr. Tissainayagam using legal provisions that can only be described as oppressive. We note that at least in respect of the allegation of bringing the government into disrepute, there is no corresponding criminal offence recognised by the law of Sri Lanka, and are therefore at a loss to understand how someone can be charged for the commission of a non-existent offence. These concerns raise several questions of very grave significance for the protection of fundamental human rights in general, and the freedom of expression and the independence and integrity of the media in particular.*

### **Media Charter in 2006**

In 2006, five of Sri Lanka's leading journalist associations have come together to sign a landmark media charter in a joint expression of solidarity. The document, The Media Charter for a Democratic and Pluralist Media Culture and Social and Professional Rights for Media and Journalism in Sri Lanka, includes a two-year action plan to campaign for major structural changes to Sri Lankan media and a commitment to editorial independence, ethical conduct, public service values, and the rights and duties of journalists. The five associations are the Federation of Media Employees, the Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association, the Sri Lanka Tamil media Alliance, the Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum and the Free Media Movement. The Centre for Policy Alternatives facilitated the drafting and endorsement of Charter under the programme of Voices of Reconciliation.

The charter has also been endorsed by 29 regional journalist associations and is supported by the International Federation of Journalists. It sets out a commitment to the fundamental principles of journalism including the rights and responsibilities of journalists. It goes on to call for the drawing up of codes of ethical conduct, accountable systems for self-regulation by journalists, and the establishment of safeguards for editorial independence.

The Charter also calls for transparent and open government, demanding that political parties respect the role of the media to report in an independent and critical manner on all aspects of government, as well as the adoption of freedom of information legislation. It also notes the need to remove direct political control over the media and to create an independent framework of administration, including proper funding, for state-owned media.

Amongst other points, the Charter also calls for dialogue between media management and journalists associations with the aim of protecting journalists labour rights, guaranteeing non-discrimination, encouraging diversity and providing access to professional training.

### **Proposed National Media Policy, September 2007**

On 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2007, the Sri Lankan Ministry of Mass Media and Information released a Proposed National Media Policy (draft Policy) for consultation (see Annex 1). The draft Policy is extremely brief – just one page in total. For the most part it consists of instructions to, or standards for, the media rather than policy statements as such to guide government action in this area. The Mission statement gives a good flavour of the overall tenor of the policy, stating:

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<sup>37</sup> <http://freemediasrilanka.wordpress.com/2008/08/20/indictment-of-journalist-j-s-tissainayagam/>

“Achieving excellence in the total practice of the media by creating a people-centred, development oriented, free, and responsible media culture as required by a well-informed and democratic society.”

As noted in a response by Article 19 and CPA<sup>38</sup>,

*While there is nothing wrong with a media policy referring to the idea of media responsibility, we note with concern that this is a refrain which, in the mouths of officials, is almost always a call for media control to the detriment of a free and independent media. The substance of the draft Policy is very unclear as to how media responsibility will be promoted. We wish to bring attention to the significant difference between the media itself undertaking measures to enhance its service to public goals and quite another for the government or officials to do so, particularly through legislation.*

*It may be noted that a government media policy should focus primarily on official action. Many of the statements in the draft Policy are legitimate only insofar as they are left to the media to implement on a voluntary or self-regulatory basis. These matters have, for the most part, no place in an official media policy. Several of the specific responsibilities mentioned – including upholding national identity, unity and harmony – are not, in democracies, recognised as media roles, regardless of how they are sought to be implemented. Rather, it is the responsibility of the media to serve as a forum for wide-ranging public debate, reflecting the full gamut of views held by different members of society.*

*An equally serious and related problem is the almost complete failure of the Mission, Objectives or substance of the draft Policy to recognise the obligation of the government to take measures to create an enabling environment in which a free, independent and pluralistic media can thrive.*

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<sup>38</sup> Note on Sri Lanka's Proposed National Media Policy, CPA and Article 19, [http://www.cpalanka.org/Policy\\_Brief/National\\_Media\\_Policy.pdf](http://www.cpalanka.org/Policy_Brief/National_Media_Policy.pdf)



# Annexure 4 - Terms of Reference

## An assessment of practices of and potentials for improved information flows and exchange

### **RATIONALE**

As part of the civil society movement in SL, Hivos partners have always been active in the search for contributions to the struggle against human rights violations, impunity and the erosion of the rule of law, while trying to build sustainable and ways for the people to improve their livelihoods. Media, culture and the arts have been important themes supported by Hivos, as forms of communication in the process of development and the creation of a climate for free exchange of information. Partner organisations that have been active at this front are, for example, Women and Media Collective, ScriptNet and Theatre of the People.

Under the escalating political conflict and the erosion of democracy in the past few years, many of the civil society organisations and their initiatives came under pressure. Direct threats and the feeling of fear have silenced many groups. Where in the past, groups could still express their ideas and mobilize (local) opinion for political debate and change, albeit in a limited way, at the moment the slightest space for this seems to have disappeared. Freedom of expression has increasingly come under attack.

Under the mentioned conditions, in Hivos we are desperately asking whether something could be done to let the voices be heard of the constituencies of the civil society organisations, including of our partners. Are there, in spite of the silencing effects of the situation, still open spaces for information exchange and public debate? Is political repression the single cause of the felt stagnation, or are there other factors that could still be influenced? Some publications suggest that there are other factors, indeed. For example, in its PhD thesis, Udan Fernando speaks of the gap between “old guard” activists, who battle against cynicism and disillusionment, and the new kids on the block.<sup>39</sup> The deep divisions within society brought about by the conflict are also reflected within civil society organisations: differences on strategic solutions, ethnicity, religion and political views. All these factors do have a silencing effect on civil society. What could be done to break through this silence, even within the limits set by the “external” circumstances? It is this that forms the main reason behind the commissioning of this consultancy mission.

### **SUPPRESSED FREEDOMS**

Those who follow the news on Sri Lanka, know how rapidly the political and human rights situation has deteriorated in the past three years. With the increasing incidence of unlawful killings, enforced disappearances and arbitrary arrests which all go unpunished, and massive displacements, the situation has become very grim, while at the same time the state of the rule of law gradually collapses. Data on these developments are being disclosed by human rights organisations. They have their established channels through which information from the local level is communicated to relevant regional and international organisations and bodies. However, human rights activists increasingly face serious threats on their lives and their fact-finding missions are often made difficult to impossible.

Hopeless is also to discover that the government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) seems to be deaf to any international pressure. One of the weapons the GoSL has is the suppression of the independent media, which it combines with widespread and effective campaigns to inculcate its own vision and “philosophy”. Since the most recent escalation of the war, “the proponents of a military solution (to the conflict) have gained ascendancy in political arenas and in the media, an

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<sup>39</sup> Udan Fernando, *Uneasy Encounters, Relationships between Dutch Donors and Sri Lankan NGOs*, 2008

unprecedented level of hate speech is being generated and broadcasted against the media and journalists who cover the ethnic conflict in a balanced and unbiased manner. The space of dissent, or for holding diverse opinions, has shrunk and the spirit of constructive criticism of politics and politicians has almost disappeared....”<sup>40</sup> A similar situation prevails in the LTTE-controlled areas where dissident voices are brutally silenced.

The ethnic polarisation of society, very much fuelled by the propaganda machines of both parties at war, works against all those who endeavour to build bridges as to promote peaceful solutions and a return to normal life. Civil society organisations, including Hivos partners, see their efforts in that direction thwarted and the feeling of fear for the increasing violence has made their work impossible.

A somewhat earlier study of the CPA<sup>41</sup> shows that the provinces are the “weakest spot” in the state of the media in terms of reliable, accurate and independent reporting. The same report also mentions a number of interesting media initiatives at community level that has been going on, including those with community radio and the use of alternative media and ICT. How these initiatives fare now, under the worsened situation, is not known to us.

## **ABOUT HIVOS**

Hivos is a Dutch NGO inspired by humanist values and works in more than 30 countries world wide, where it support civil society organisations active in a variety of programmes. For more information, see [www.hivos.org](http://www.hivos.org). In Sri Lanka Hivos is active since the early 1980s. During more than two decades it has supported a large number of civil society organisations in a variety of sectors, including economic development and micro credit, sustainable development and women’s rights. At the moment, it maintains a small support programme in the areas of human rights and women’s rights, the arts and culture, and sustainable production.<sup>42</sup> Hivos prefers to support innovative activities of strategic value with relative small amounts of money. Where larger amounts are needed, it often seeks cooperation with other funding agencies.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE MISSION**

The **main objective** of the mission is to lay the ground for the creation of new initiatives (or the making of existing ones effective) for the channelling and exchange of information at the local level, and between the local and national levels, aimed at improving the conditions of human rights and the freedom of information flows.

The **immediate objectives** of the mission are:

1. To assess practices of and identify potentials for an effective voicing of the aspirations, messages and demands of civil society organisations and their constituencies. What is involved here is mainly information on the ongoing violence and abuses as well as on positive actions and ideas for dialogue and public debate.
2. To assess practices of and identify potentials for the creation and improvement of local/community systems of information flow and exchange.

The objectives count with the limitations caused by the present conflict situation and at the same time, include the creation of seeds that ultimately contribute to its resolution. This stems from the basic conviction that access to a free flow of information and sharing of knowledge are preconditions for peace building and respect for human rights.

The systems of information transfer and exchange assume the use of any effective form of media: traditional media and new media or a combination of both, ICT/ digital media, NGO publications,

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<sup>40</sup> From the report for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council by FFM and INFORM, quoted in CPA, “War Peace and Governance in Sri Lanka, Overview and Trends in 2006”, page 2.

<sup>41</sup> CPA, A Study of Media in Sri Lanka (excluding the North and East), April 2005

<sup>42</sup> Support is being given to: NAFSO, MPIS, Rural Women’s Front, Community Development Foundation in Batticaloa, Savisthri, Viluthu, Muslim Women Research and Action Front, Butterfly Peace Garden, People to People’s Dialogue, Community Decelopment Organisation in Puttalam, Law & Society Trust, Companions on a Journey, ScriptNet, Theatre of the People, Khoj, Tulana Media Unit.

citizens journalism, artistic and cultural practice and its distribution, which include the use of street theatre, poster/banners and short films.

Independence and non-partisanship are basic conditions.

### **KEY QUESTIONS**

The questions can be grouped into two major lines: one, aimed at sketching already existing programmes and initiatives, and the second aimed at finding the gaps and identifying ideas and possibilities for improvement. The questions apply to all regions in Sri Lanka, including the North and the East.

1. Which innovative information flows and exchange programmes – at both the local and national levels – have been going on in the past five years? - (location; actors; donors (if any); approach and mediums used; outreach; aims/ content; effectiveness).<sup>43</sup>
2. Human rights and women’s organisations are active in documenting human rights violations and advocate – at relevant bodies nationally and internationally – for reforms as to stop those violations, provide redress, bring the perpetrators to justice and restore the rule of law. In doing so, they hold fact finding missions and share information to relevant parties. – To what extent do they engage in disseminating relevant information on human rights and women’s rights violations – in adapted forms - to a wider public (taking security issues into account)? What is the practice and how large is the outreach? How is the state of journalism on human rights issues at the moment? What are the bottlenecks and could they (theoretically) be solved under the present social-political circumstances? –
3. What are the potentials of (and space for) community radio in Sri Lanka in terms of independence, outreach, and impact? Is it possible to develop independent community radio programmes within the existing legal framework? Who are the decision-makers on content development? Are there “best practices” at work?
4. What are the perceivable and real working linkages between the active civil society organisations – human rights, women, arts and culture, etc. organisations – and the professional media actors (mainstream or alternative)? How can these linkages be improved? Do the civil society organisations endeavour to strengthen their links with the media and (individual) journalists? What are the constraints?
5. Analyse the own publishing activities of the civil society organisations on human rights and women’s rights issues. What is the depth and quality of those publications, and how large is the distribution?

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

Conclusions are drawn in answer to the immediate objectives. Recommendations are appreciated and shall be directed to possibilities or topics for further attention by Hivos.

### **METHODOLOGY**

We expect the consultant to use qualitative research methods. This includes the use of secondary sources of information, semi-structured and partly open-ended interviews, direct observations and –where deemed desirable – group discussions. Figures should be primarily used to illustrate the analysis. Gender is supposed to be methodologically integrated in the process: data should be dis-aggregated to sex.

The method is also qualitative in the sense that it does not presume an exhaustive survey of all initiatives and programmes in the country. Through a “snow ball” approach, the consultant selects key informants which brings her/him to the real relevant cases and ideas.

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<sup>43</sup> Including experiences of Hivos partner organisations; see under Methodology.

In the collection of material on existing practices and ideas, the consultant is expected to also make use of the rich experiences of Hivos' partners, among which both NGOs and community-based organisations. Hivos will furnish necessary material to the consultant, after which contacts can be sought with the Hivos partners for more information.

The results of the mission will be discussed in a workshop with relevant Hivos partners, other civil society organisations, journalists and other media personnel, relevant academics, and – if relevant – representatives of other donor agencies that support human rights monitoring programmes and media initiatives. This workshop is meant to result in more concrete plans to which Hivos could contribute in the near future.