

GIVING THE BROADER PICTURE

BBC TV AND THE WIDER WORLD

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Third World and Environment Broadcasting Project



THIRD WORLD AND
ENVIRONMENT
BROADCASTING
PROJECT

1993

(3) How sustained are the trends?

This report ignores data from 87/88.

(1) - Balance of TV

(2) - Where UK's excellence?

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Special thanks go to Paddy Coulter.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION & SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Following on from the Third World and Environment Broadcasting Project's previous research publications, Losing the Picture and Getting the Full Picture, this report examines factual television coverage of international issues in the 1990s with special regard to the role of BBC TV.

The Project, which has been wholly funded by voluntary organisations, is supported by over 50 national agencies involved with overseas development and the environment. In the debate that surrounded the Broadcasting Act 1990, these agencies expressed fears about the vulnerable place of documentaries in the programme schedules. Our latest research indicates that those fears were well-founded.

SUMMARY

1. There has been a marked decline in the total hours of documentary output on British television dedicated to international issues. Between 1989-90 and 1991-92, overall documentary international coverage on the four UK terrestrial channels **fell by 36 per cent** (page 5).
2. Through its outstanding factual coverage BBC TV has made a major and distinguished contribution to British public awareness of international affairs. However, our review of current performance reveals that BBC TV's documentary coverage of developing countries in the Third World, or South, **fell by 35 per cent** between 1989-90 and 1991-92 (page 11). There would seem to be a general trend on all channels of reducing programming hours in this critical area.
3. The commitment to educative programming set out in the BBC's Extending Choice report features the highly commendable objective "to reflect insights and perspectives on the rest of the world to this country." But our research (page 7) shows an apparent trend on both BBC channels to cut especially **peak-time** documentary coverage of the developing countries of the South over a period when both Channel 4 and ITV managed an increase. For example, between 1989-90 and 1991-92, BBC1's **peak-time documentary coverage of the South fell by more than half.**

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4. The BBC's welcome pledge to maintain an authoritative television news and current affairs service ensures an impressive mix of national and international coverage. As our analysis (pages 15 - 16) indicates, reports on **conflicts and disasters account for two-thirds** of the coverage of the developing countries of the South by BBC TV's main evening news 'flagship' and its ITN rival. Moreover, both tend to feature a relatively narrow band of Third World countries. Documentaries have an indispensable role to play in complementing this conflict-dominated news coverage of global issues and in giving viewers a broader, more balanced picture of the world and its peoples.
5. Extending Choice sets out the positive aim of reflecting "international developments and perspectives to the British audience *through its full range of programming*" (our italics). Our survey of recent BBC TV output suggests that some of the more compelling programmes on international issues have had non-factual formats such as drama and comedy. Developing an imaginative range of high quality international programming in both factual and non-factual genres should be an integral part of BBC TV's public service broadcasting remit.
6. If the objectives of Extending Choice are to be achieved the BBC must be guaranteed sufficient and reliable income. Our research uncovered widespread concern about the adverse effects on both **quality and output** of production budget cuts implemented over recent years. Programmes on international issues are peculiarly vulnerable as international filming tends to be costly. The Third World and environment agencies urge that the BBC allocates adequate funding to programme-makers to cover the relatively expensive costs of research, preparation and overseas filming which quality international programmes are bound to incur.

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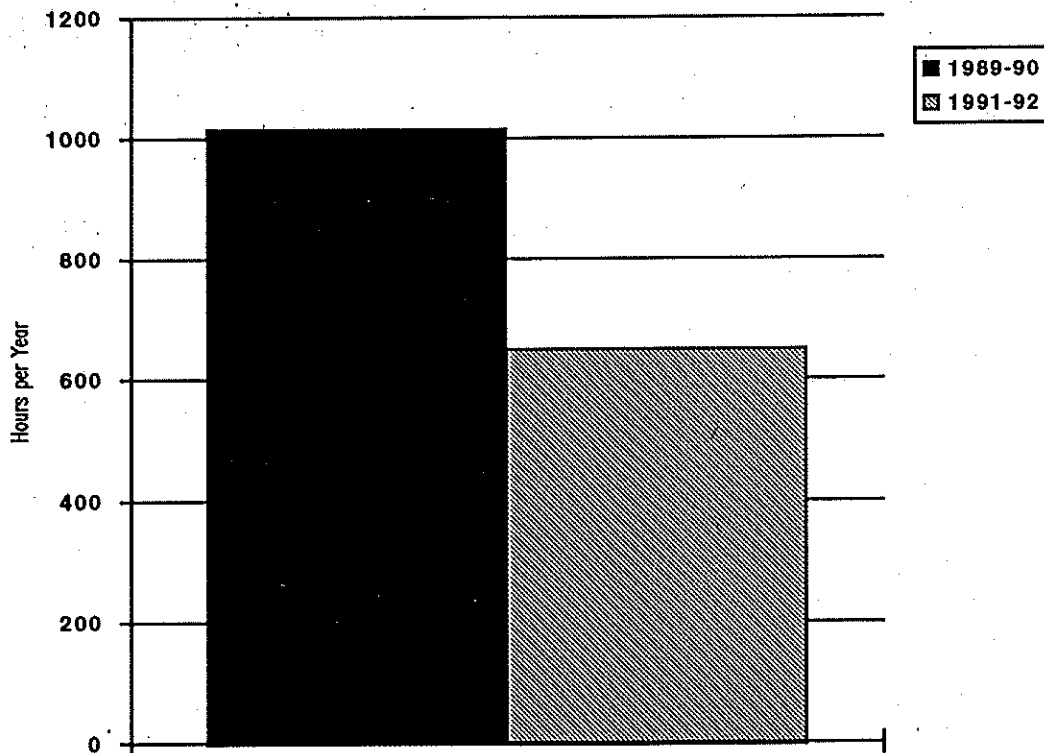
PART TWO: RESEARCH FINDINGS

A) DOCUMENTARY COVERAGE OF INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

i) TOTAL HOURS: ALL CHANNELS

The research examined all documentaries on the four terrestrial channels (BBC1, BBC2, ITV and Channel 4) broadcast between September 1991 and August 1992, which devoted a substantial or significant proportion of programme time to footage filmed outside the UK and Republic of Ireland. Table 1 compares the total hours of documentary coverage of international issues for 1989-90 and 1991-92.

Table 1 Total Hours of Documentary Coverage on International Issues: All Channels



Conclusions

Documentary coverage of international issues on the four terrestrial channels plummeted from 1015 hours in 1989-90 to 650 hours in 1991-92. This means more than one third (36 per cent) of all such coverage has vanished from the schedules in just two years.

A) DOCUMENTARY COVERAGE OF INTERNATIONAL ISSUES (Contd.)

ii) PEAK AND NON-PEAK PROGRAMMING: CHANNEL BY CHANNEL

Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5 analyse peak-time and non-peak documentary output on international issues for each of the four terrestrial channels.

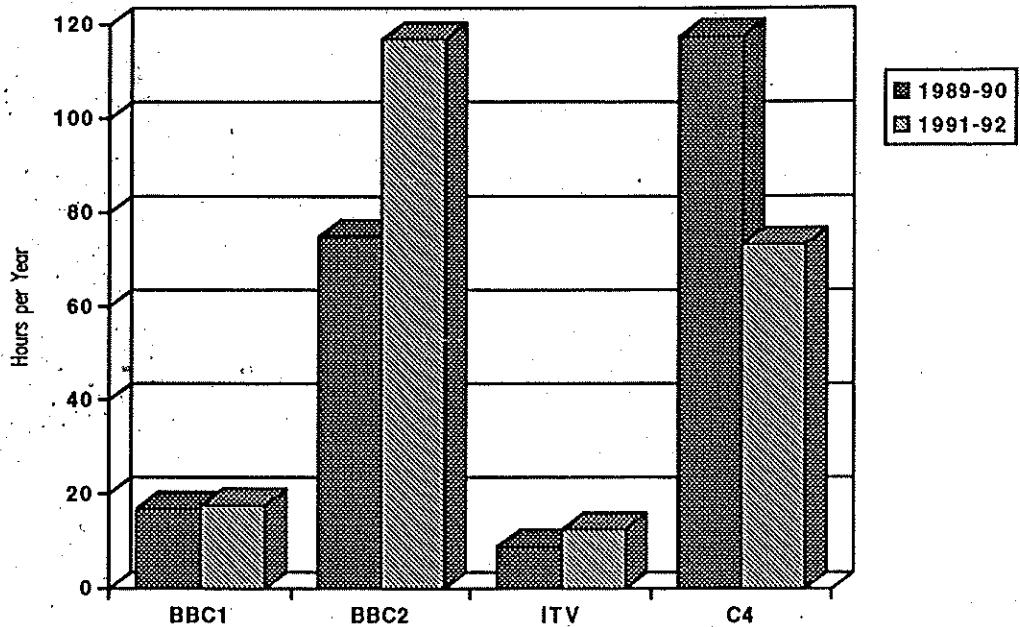
Peak and non-peak coverage was monitored because programmes shown in peak-time generally attract much greater audiences than those shown in non-peak hours. Peak viewing hours are broadly agreed to fall between 6.30pm and 10.30pm.

International coverage has been divided into two broad categories: **South** comprising developing countries located mainly in the southern hemisphere and **North** comprising industrialised countries located mainly in the northern hemisphere [cf. APPENDIX (i) page 23].

N. B. These figures may help to put the research which follows into context:-

- BBC1's total output for 1991-92 was **6,497 hours** (source Guide to the BBC 1992).
- BBC2's total output for 1991-92 was **6,329 hours** (source Guide to the BBC 1992).
- With four hours of peak-time viewing every night and 366 days in the year examined, there were **1,464 hours per channel** of peak programming time.

**Table 3 Documentary Coverage of the NORTH:
Hours of PEAK Programming**



Conclusions

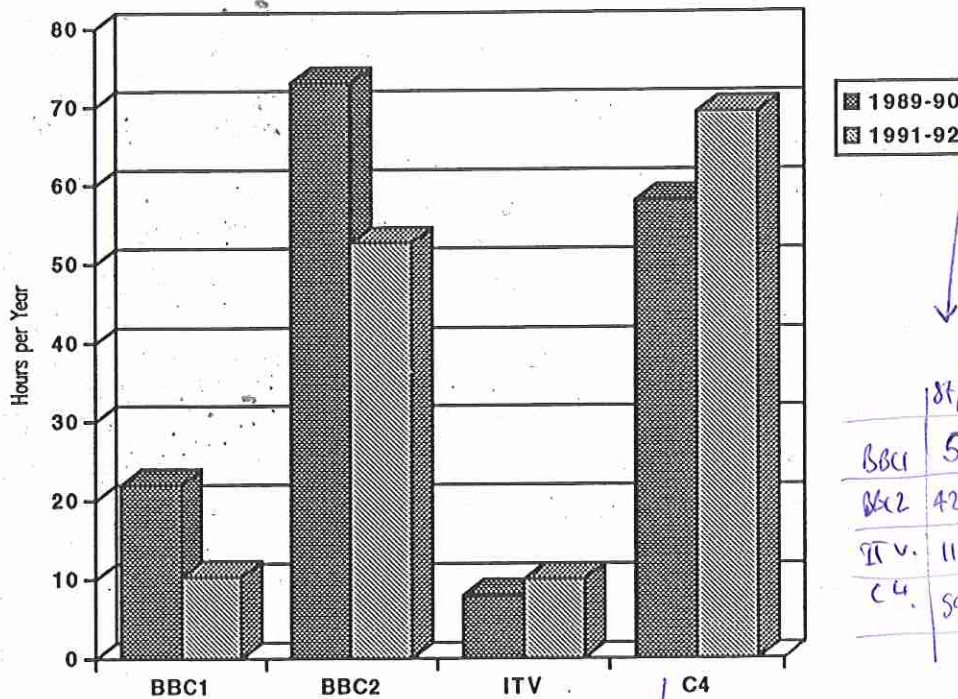
The marginal rise in BBC1's peak-time documentary coverage of the industrialised countries of the North (from 17 hours in '89-90 to 17.7 hours in '91-92) belies the fact that BBC1's peak-time documentary coverage of the North has been halved from its 1987-88 level of 36 hours.

BBC2's peak-time documentary coverage of the North has increased markedly (from 75 hours in '89-90 to over 116 hours in '91-92). Nearly one third of this output concentrated on the USA (37.7 hours).

C4's peak-time documentary coverage of the North fell by more than a third (from 117 hours in '89-90 to 75 hours in '91-92).

A) DOCUMENTARY COVERAGE OF INTERNATIONAL ISSUES (Contd.)

**Table 2 Documentary Coverage of the SOUTH:
Hours of PEAK Programming**



*Polina SWB
no number env. issues too*

	8/8	8/10	9/12
BBC1	5	22	10.3
BBC2	42	71	52
ITV	11	8	10
C4	59	64?	69

*64
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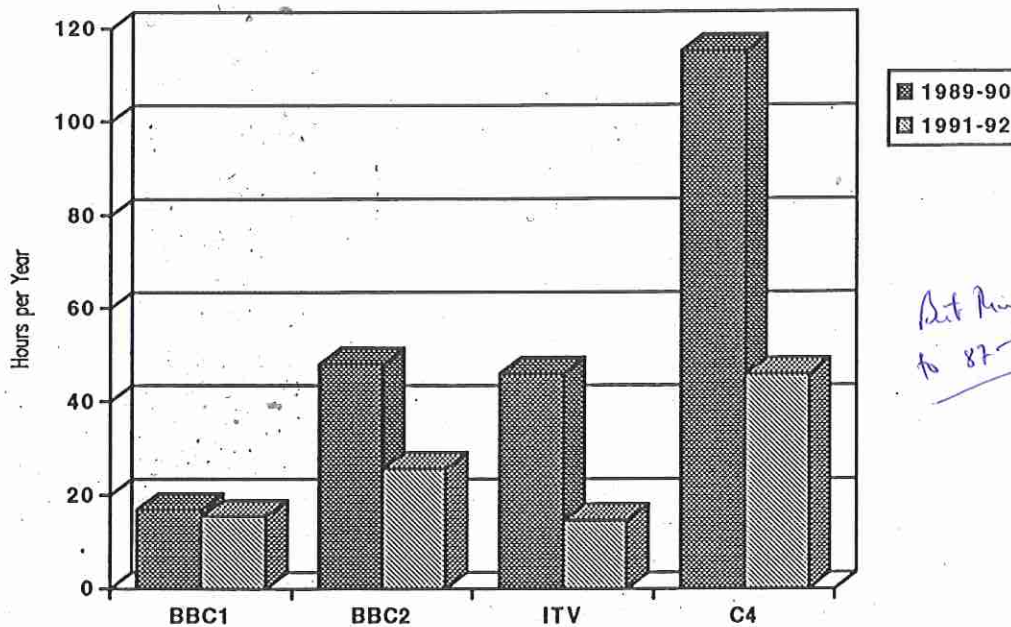
Conclusions

BBC1's peak-time documentary coverage of the developing countries of the South dropped to below half its 1989-90 level (from 22 hours in '89-90 to 10.3 hours in '91-92).

BBC2's peak-time documentary coverage of the South fell by more than a quarter in the same period, even taking into account the substantial ONE WORLD season of environment and development-related programmes broadcast in May-June 1992.

While the two BBC channels were cutting their peak-time documentary coverage of the South, both independent channels actually increased their peak-time coverage. ITV carried roughly the same amount of documentary coverage of the South as BBC1, and C4 carried more than BBC2. This is not a situation that is likely to persist, given the added financial pressure placed on commercial television since the implementation in January 1993 of the Broadcasting Act 1990. C4 has already re-scheduled its innovative Third World series SOUTH into non-peak programming hours.

**Table 4 Documentary Coverage of the SOUTH:
NON-PEAK Programming**



But this is relative to 87-8 results with last year's report.

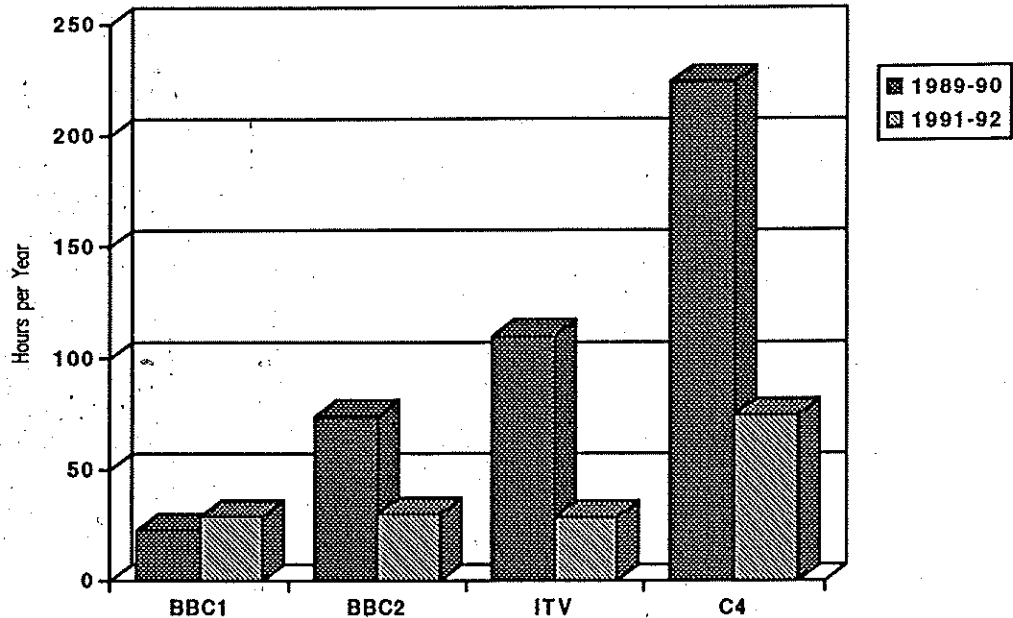
Conclusions

There was a general fall in non-peak documentary coverage of the South, most notably on C4 where coverage was down by 60% (from 115 hours in '89-90 to 46 hours in '91-92).

In their response to the White Paper, Broadcasting in the '90s: Competition, Choice and Quality (November 1988), the UK's major Third World and environment agencies expressed the fear that documentary coverage of international issues was being shunted into non-peak programming hours. Table 4 shows that such coverage is now disappearing from even this supposed safe haven.

It should be noted that nearly half of BBC1's non-peak documentary coverage of the South in 1991-92 came from the EVERYMAN strand [cf. APPENDIX (ii) page 25 for details]. Due to a change in editorial emphasis, it seems highly likely that future series will contain reduced international coverage. From 1993 onwards EVERYMAN will focus more markedly on the domestic arena.

**Table 5 Documentary Coverage of the NORTH:
NON-PEAK Programming**



Conclusions

The general decline in non-peak documentary programme hours is also apparent in international coverage of the North. The most noticeable fall again occurred on C4 where coverage was down by two thirds (from 224 hours in '89-90 to 74.5 hours in '91-92).

BBC2's non-peak documentary coverage of the North fell by more than 50% (from 74 hours in '89-90 to 30 hours in '91-92).

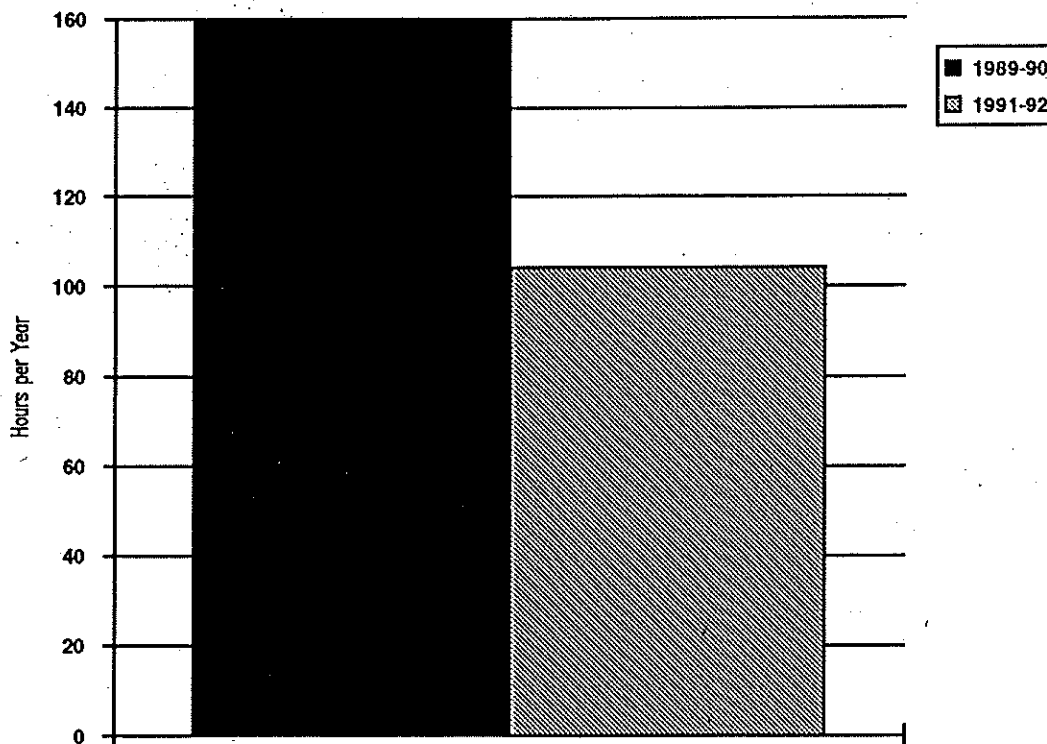
BBC1's non-peak documentary coverage of the North was marginally higher in 1991-92 than 1989-90 (29 hours in '91-92, 23 hours in '89-90).

A) DOCUMENTARY COVERAGE OF INTERNATIONAL ISSUES (Contd.)

iii) Coverage of the South: BBC TV

Table 6 shows the total hours of documentary coverage dedicated to the South by BBC1 and BBC2 in both peak and non-peak programming hours for 1989-90 and 1991-92.

Table 6 Total Documentary Coverage of the SOUTH: BBC TV



Conclusions

Adding together documentary output on BBC1 and BBC2 in both peak and non-peak viewing hours, it can be seen that BBC TV's total documentary coverage of the developing countries of the South fell from 160 hours in 1989-90 to 104.12 hours in 1991-92. This means that BBC TV's documentary coverage of the Third World has fallen by 35 per cent in just two years.

In 1991-92 BBC TV's total output was 12,826 hours (source Guide to the BBC 1992). This means that documentary programming dedicated to the South accounted for just 0.8 per cent of BBC TV's total output.

RESEARCH FINDINGS (Contd.)

B) CURRENT AFFAIRS COVERAGE OF INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

The research examined international coverage on the following current affairs strands between September 1991 and August 1992:

- PANORAMA (BBC1)
- ASSIGNMENT (BBC2)
- WORLD IN ACTION (ITV)
- THIS WEEK (ITV)
- FIRST TUESDAY (ITV)
- DISPATCHES (C4)

The list is not fully comprehensive [cf. APPENDIX (i) page 24] but it covers major strands on each of the four terrestrial channels.

The arrival on-screen of BBC2's new ASSIGNMENT strand is a particularly significant and welcome factor in BBC News and Current Affairs' commitment to coverage of international issues. The strand sets out to cover issues and countries not usually featured on the news agenda. Its coverage of the South tends not to be dominated by issues of war and conflict, which our research (below) indicates is more often the case with mainstream news coverage. Out of a total of 18.75 hours on international issues in 1991-92, ASSIGNMENT dedicated nine hours of coverage to the developing countries of the South. Two thirds of this focused on non-conflict issues, including three hours on development-related matters [cf. APPENDIX (ii) for further details].

However, even taking into account ASSIGNMENT's substantial contribution, nearly **two-thirds** of monitored international current affairs coverage was dedicated to the **North**. Of this, more than half (54%) concentrated on conflicts and disasters, while only 5% focused on environment issues.

43% of monitored current affairs coverage of the **South** concentrated on issues of war and conflict, while only 8% dealt with environment matters.

In total, international output from the monitored current affairs strands amounted to 56.5 hours in 1991-92. By comparison total international documentary coverage amounted to 650 hours over the same period. Current affairs programming dedicated to international issues therefore represents a fraction of that dedicated by documentary programmes.

RESEARCH FINDINGS (Contd.)

C) NEWS AND DOCUMENTARIES: THE COMPLEMENTARY ROLES

The **content and scope** of international news coverage was compared with that of international documentary coverage for the period September 1991 to August 1992. The research was confined to the two main evening news programmes - NINE O'CLOCK NEWS on BBC1 and NEWS AT TEN on ITV. These are regarded by many viewers as authoritative, 'flagship' news programmes. Both are broadcast in peak viewing hours and usually attract much larger audiences than other news strands.

International coverage comprised 30% of the total output of NINE O'CLOCK NEWS in 1991-92. Around one quarter of the total output of NEWS AT TEN was devoted to international coverage over the same period.

i) INTERNATIONAL COVERAGE BY ISSUE

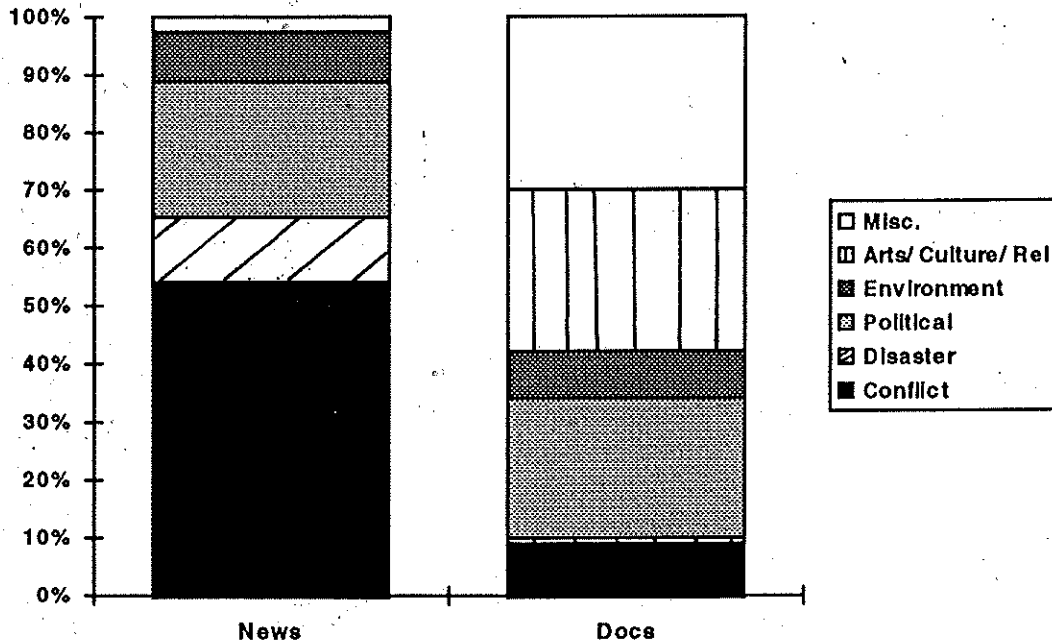
Tables 7 and 8 analyse the content of mainstream international news coverage and international documentary coverage by issue. Six broad categories have been defined [cf. APPENDIX (i) page 24 for further details on these categories]:

- **Conflict**
- **Disasters**
- **Political**
- **Environment**
- **Arts, Culture and Religion**
- **Miscellaneous**

C) NEWS AND DOCUMENTARIES: THE COMPLEMENTARY ROLES (Contd.)

i) International Coverage by Issue (Contd.)

Table 7 Issue Spread: SOUTH 1991-92



Conclusions

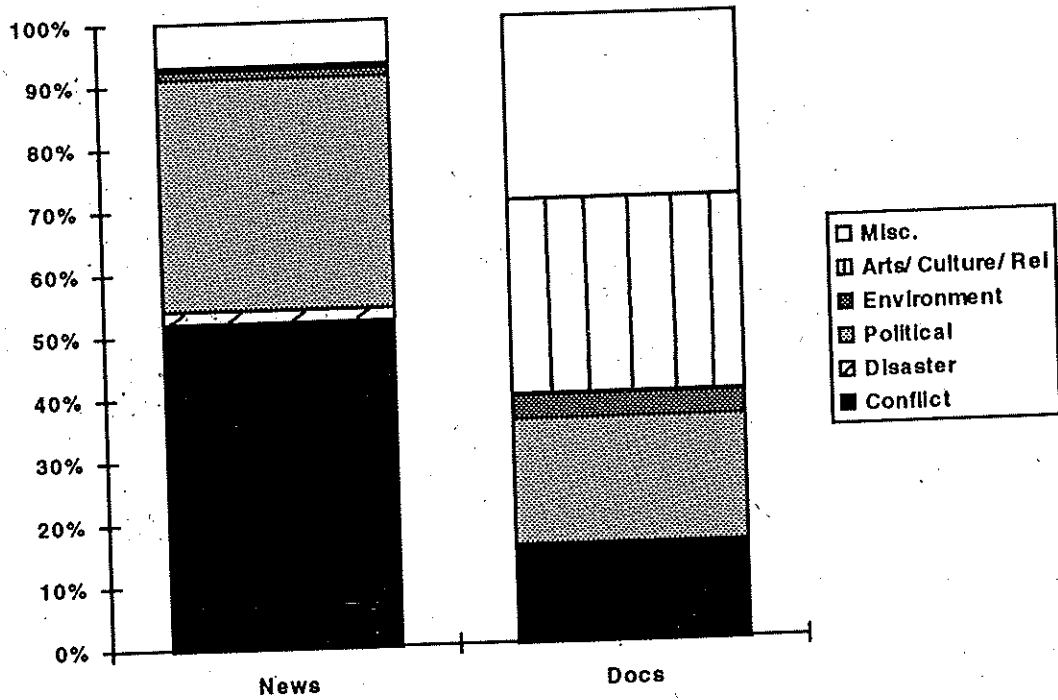
8.5% of mainstream international news coverage of the South dealt with environment issues. Virtually all of this was due to the reporting of the Earth Summit in Rio in June 1992 which received extensive coverage on both the main evening news programmes (a total of 48 minutes on the NINE O'CLOCK NEWS and 67 minutes on NEWS AT TEN).

However, around **two thirds** of mainstream international news coverage of the South concentrated on conflicts and disasters. By comparison 90% of documentary coverage of the South was devoted to a broad spread of non-conflict issues.

C) NEWS AND DOCUMENTARIES: THE COMPLEMENTARY ROLES (Contd.)

i) International Coverage by Issue (Contd.)

Table 8 Issue Spread: NORTH 1991-92



Conclusions

More than half (52%) of mainstream international news coverage of the North concentrated on conflict issues. By comparison 85% of all documentary coverage of the North was devoted to a broad spread of non-conflict issues.

C) NEWS AND DOCUMENTARIES: THE COMPLEMENTARY ROLES (Contd.)

ii) INTERNATIONAL COVERAGE BY LOCATION

- News - 69% of mainstream international news coverage was dedicated to the industrialised nations of the North. Nearly three-quarters of this concentrated on just three countries (USA - 28%; ex-Yugoslavia - 25%; ex-USSR - 21%).
- Documentaries - More than 40% of all international documentary coverage focused on global matters and the developing countries of the South.

Documentary programming covered a total of 112 individual countries in 1991-92. Of these, 38 countries in the South received no coverage on either of the mainstream news programmes over the same period. Table 9 lists them all grouped according to continent.

Table 9 Third World Countries given DOCUMENTARY Coverage in 1991-92 but NOT Mainstream News Coverage

ASIA (7)

Bahrain
Malaysia
Papua New Guinea
South Korea
Taiwan
Western Samoa
Yemen

CENTRAL & SOUTH AMERICA (13)

Bahamas
Bolivia
Chile
Costa Rica
Ecuador
Guatemala
Honduras
Jamaica
Nicaragua
Peru
Puerto Rico
Surinam
Uruguay

AFRICA (18)

Angola
Botswana
Burkina Faso
Cameroon
Ghana
Ivory Coast
Madagascar
Malawi
Mauritius
Morocco
Namibia
Nigeria
Rwanda
Seychelles
Swaziland
Tanzania
Tunisia
Western Sahara

C) NEWS AND DOCUMENTARIES: THE COMPLEMENTARY ROLES (Contd.)

ii) International Coverage by Location (Contd.)

Conclusions

Despite the overall fall in documentary coverage of international issues, documentaries complement the narrower range of countries, especially in the South, covered by the main evening news programmes.

PART THREE: THE BROADER PICTURE

A) BBC TV AND PUBLIC AWARENESS OF GLOBAL ISSUES

It would be hard to overstate the importance of BBC TV to British public awareness of environment and overseas development issues. In a 1989 Harris poll 84 per cent of British adults gave television as their main source of information on developing countries: for many people television is their window on world affairs.

As the research above shows, the BBC makes a major contribution to UK television coverage of global issues. Significant change in the level or quality of this BBC TV contribution has serious implications for public perception of global affairs and for the public education work of the major UK voluntary bodies concerned with the environment and Third World development.

B) THE BBC'S OWN VISION: THE 'KEY AREAS'

Britain's leading Third World and environment agencies strongly endorse much of the vision of the BBC's future role outlined in the Extending Choice report, published by the Corporation last year. We particularly welcome the commitment to guarantee the provision of educative programming which includes the objective "to reflect insights and perspectives on the rest of the world to this country".

We also commend another key area identified by the BBC, "Communicating Between the UK and Abroad" though there is concern that this should be seen as a genuinely two-way exchange of communications. The international proposals in Extending Choice seem to dwell on the export of British culture, on providing a quality service for overseas audiences, and generally on extending the reach of British broadcasting. There are no parallel proposals outlined to develop the other side of the exchange.

C) DOCUMENTARY COVERAGE OF INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

In Extending Choice the BBC pledges to maintain and "even increase" the prominence of educative general programming in peak-time schedules, placing priority on (among other things):

"Current affairs, documentary and feature programming, which portrays the contemporary world..."

This is a welcome commitment but, as our review of current performance reveals, there is much room for improvement. It is disturbing enough that overall documentary coverage of international issues on the main terrestrial channels has fallen sharply over the past two years; it is doubly disturbing that the BBC TV appears to be following the same broad pattern of reducing programming hours in this critical area.

This should perhaps be seen in the wider context of a significant general decrease in programming hours and percentages of output devoted to the "features, documentaries and current affairs" programme category which the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) analysed in Cultural Trends 1992:13. The PSI found that BBC Television's output in this category had dropped from 2,450 hours (23.3 per cent of total output) in 1985-86 to 2,302 hours (18.3 per cent) in 1990-91. The latest figures in Guide to the BBC 1992 show that although there has been some improvement to 2,409 hours (18.8 per cent), this level of output is still below the 1985-86 figures.

The trend towards insularity seems a bizarre development for a public service broadcaster at a time of growing recognition of Britain's interdependence with the rest of the international community. The 1990s have already produced a national debate on our place in Europe, witnessed the dispatch of British troops to the Gulf and Bosnia, and seen much public concern about the implications of the ending of the Cold War and role of the United Nations. Problems of refugees and civil war, previously seen as Third World emergencies, are now appearing on our doorstep in Europe. It is worrying that the reduction in international coverage also coincides with increased alarm about levels of racism and xenophobia in British and European public life.

D) DOCUMENTARY COVERAGE OF THE SOUTH

What else covered?

The area of greatest concern to Third World and environment agencies is the apparent trend on both BBC channels to cut **peak-time** documentary coverage of the developing countries of the South. We are among the first to acknowledge the excellence of many of BBC TV's peak-time programmes on the South, but our findings show that their numbers have in fact been dropping over a period when both Channel 4 and ITV managed an increase. We sometimes encounter a complacent view within the BBC that the acclaimed BBC ONE WORLD seasons (broadcast in 1990 and again in 1992) cover this ground adequately and that 'BBC TV is doing enough on this front'. But our research shows that in the most recent year surveyed C4 has achieved many more hours in its peak-time schedule than BBC2, even **including BBC2's substantial programming contribution to ONE WORLD 1992.**

Perhaps the most disturbing finding of all is BBC1's relatively poor performance, particularly in view of its enormous weekly audience reach of 92% of the population - equal to that of ITV. It is something of a shock to discover that BBC1 is very far from out-performing its main competitor here; ITV lays no similar claim to a public service broadcasting role.

Programmes scheduled on BBC1 attract a diversity of viewers from all social groups, and programmes scheduled in prime-time gain very large audiences. We maintain that programmes which raise public awareness on Third World and environment issues are not inherently a minority concern. Prime-time initiatives on BBC1, such as COMIC RELIEF which attract large, diverse and loyal audiences are welcomed but we believe that BBC1 could do more to feature documentaries on global issues at peak viewing times.

At a 'Guardian' debate on the BBC last year the previous BBC1 Controller, Jonathan Powell, was questioned about his channel's commitment to coverage of international issues. In reply he said, "I see international coverage as mainly the domain of News and Current Affairs." When pressed that news and current affairs concentrate on conflict-related issues he replied that he believed the broader picture was given through documentary programme strands like INSIDE STORY and EVERYMAN.

PART THREE: THE BROADER PICTURE (Contd.)

D) Documentary coverage of the South (Contd.)

The Third World and environment agencies feel that, under its new Controllèr, BBC1 could schedule a more imaginative coverage of international issues through a wider range of programming than just the occasional documentary in those strands.

However, current priorities for network television detailed in Extending Choice refer only to BBC1 scheduling "major documentaries about *British* life, history and culture in prime time" (page 43, our italics). To borrow the BBC's motto, it would seem that "**Nation Shall Speak Peace Unto Nation**" just as long as it is not in peak-time on the main national television channel. We hold that this insularity is quite unacceptable and we strongly urge that this particular network priority is amended in line with the language about the public purpose of the BBC in the earlier part of Extending Choice, namely that it should be 'a core role' to ensure 'an appropriate mix of coverage of *international*, national and regional issues and perspectives' (page 20, our italics).

E) NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS COVERAGE OF THE SOUTH

Third World and environment agencies welcome the BBC's stated commitment to maintain an impartial and authoritative television news and current affairs service "at the heart of the peaktime schedule" providing a mix of national and international coverage. We applaud the BBC's recently enhanced international news gathering - including the appointment of George Alagiah as Developing World correspondent in the Foreign News team - and the financing of the excellent new ASSIGNMENT international current affairs strand on BBC2.

However, our analysis shows that the coverage of the South by the main BBC TV news 'flagship', the NINE O'CLOCK NEWS (BBC1), like its ITN rival NEWS AT TEN (ITV), is predominantly conflict and disaster-oriented, encompassing a relatively narrow range of countries. For many millions of viewers the news bulletins on these two popular channels may represent their main window on the rest of the world. When television news covers domestic catastrophes, such as the Zeebrugge ferry disaster, viewers can put such events into an appropriate cultural context - they are aware that cross-channel ferries do not normally sink with tremendous loss of life. Viewers are much less likely to bring the same interpretative context to dramatic events from the Third World.

PART THREE: THE BROADER PICTURE (Contd.)

E) News and Current Affairs Coverage of the South (Contd.)

A broader, more balanced picture of the world is required in which global environment and development news stories account for a greater proportion of international news coverage of the South. The generally excellent (in both quantity and quality) news coverage of last summer's UN Earth Summit in Rio demonstrates the potential, but this breakthrough needs to be followed up by consistent reporting of the global environmental issues highlighted during the Earth Summit.

Even at their best, news and current affairs can only cover a limited agenda - documentaries, features and educational programmes are indispensable in complementing news coverage and giving viewers a fuller, in-depth account of the world and its peoples. A public service broadcaster should be obliged to provide this broader, counter-balancing picture.

F) NON-FACTUAL PROGRAMMING

Third World and environment agencies welcome the BBC's aim of reflecting "international developments and perspectives to the British audience through its full range of programming". Some of the more compelling programmes in this area have had non-factual formats - dramas such as THE MARCH (BBC1, 1990), LUCIA (BBC2, 1992) and BITTER HARVEST (BBC2, 1992), the BEHIND THE NOSE programme on the causes of African poverty which combined comedy sketches with documentary (BBC1, 1992), or the satirical social action magazine, ED CASE (BBC2, 1992). Their critical success shows that there is plenty of scope for high quality entertainment formats on Third World and environment subjects.

In our view a publicly funded broadcaster should have a particular responsibility to develop an imaginative range of internationally filmed programmes from drama and other genres.

G) PROGRAMME FINANCE

Third World and environment agencies would claim no particular expertise on the financing of the BBC's services. The licence fee would appear to be the most dependable source of BBC finance and for that reason most of the Agencies would favour its retention. However, we would like to see consideration given to the adoption of a more appropriate measure than the Retail Price Index when assessing the actual costs of running a broadcasting operation. This would take account of the costs of skills and technology not assessed by the RPI.

There is a great deal of concern about the effects of the paring down of BBC production budgets over recent years including the 6-8 per cent cut which seems to have been imposed across the board in 1993. Although there is no suggestion that programmes on international issues are singled out for cuts, these programmes are peculiarly vulnerable as international filming is costly. We find, for example, that the output of BBC2's outstanding anthropological strand UNDER THE SUN is contracting from the 10 programmes scheduled for the forthcoming 1993 series to the 8 programmes planned for 1994 - a drop of 20 per cent.

There are less obviously measurable effects. Since the easiest areas to squeeze are overseas research 'recess' and preparation time, quality as well as quantity becomes a target. If the BBC is in earnest about achieving the more ambitious objectives of Extending Choice the widespread chiselling of production budgets in this area should be reversed and adequate funding given to producers to cover the relatively expensive costs which high quality international programmes are bound to incur.

H) INTERNATIONAL CO-PRODUCTION

We understand the pressure on the BBC to develop "long-term co-production partnerships and output deals with overseas broadcasters" (Extending Choice, page 39) particularly for major international projects. In our experience some of these co-production relationships can be enormously beneficial, for instance the ONE WORLD collaboration of European public service broadcasters co-founded by BBC TV and the German ARD network in 1989. This partnership ('the Hamburg declaration') now encompasses Japan, North America and many countries of the South.

PART THREE: THE BROADER PICTURE (Contd.)

H) International Co-Production (Contd.)

But it is wishful thinking to assume that all such international co-productions are as satisfactory. The hard fact of the matter is that the BBC producers lose a degree of editorial independence in an international co-production arrangement. Third World and environment agencies have become particularly concerned about the editorial influence of US co-producers on BBC international projects with their increasing demands for 'upbeat exotica' and treatments which make viewers 'feel good', coupled with a declining interest in educative programmes which address more controversial issues. We would like a franker discussion of this complicated subject and a statement of the BBC's journalistic principles about such partnerships as there are in practice many ways in which the choices for British viewers are being subtly restricted rather than extended by such deals.

APPENDIX (i): METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The original research within this document examines factual television output broadcast between 1st September 1991 and 31st August 1992.

1. Data Collection

Data on documentary coverage was obtained largely from the collection of back-copies of listings magazines in the ITC library. Data for the analysis of international news coverage was obtained from transcripts of NEWS AT TEN (ITV) and the NINE O'CLOCK NEWS (BBC1) in the News Information libraries of the respective organisations. Data on the content of current affairs strands was gathered mainly from programme lists made available by individual current affairs departments.

2. International Coverage

The research examined factual coverage of issues outside the UK and Republic of Ireland. Studio debates on international matters were not included unless the programme concerned devoted a significant amount of air-time to footage filmed abroad.

a) North and South

A broad distinction was made between the coverage of industrialised nations which lie mainly in the Northern hemisphere, and Third World or developing countries found mainly in the South. Notable exceptions to this rough geographical rule include Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong, all of which have been categorised along with the industrialised nations of the North. The terms "ex-Yugoslavia" and "ex-USSR" have been used to maintain continuity with the Project's previous research, when both were categorised as single nations within the North.

b) Global

A small but important sub-group of documentaries were found to have been filmed in so many countries it was impossible to place them accurately in either the North or South category. Programmes such as ITV's 2 hour-long, peak-time environment/music special THE LAST SHOW ON EARTH and BBC2's repeated series LIFE ON EARTH and THE TRIALS OF LIFE are examples of this global sub-group. ITV and BBC2 were the only channels to carry such documentary programming. In all, BBC2's peak-time global coverage amounted to 19.75 hours over the period examined. Such coverage has been incorporated into Table 1 (page 5) but it does not appear in the North/South analysis elsewhere.

3) International Issues

International issues were divided into six broad categories:-

- **Conflict**, comprising international and civil war, global security, terrorism, crime and civil unrest
- **Disasters**, comprising natural and man-made catastrophes, and famines.
- **Political**, comprising elections, political change, poverty, development, human rights, political history, diplomatic relations and commerce
- **Environment**
- **Arts, Culture and Religion**
- **Miscellaneous**, comprising science, medicine and health, technology, wildlife, sport, adventure, and more 'lightweight' human interest

4) Peak and Non-Peak Programming

Peak and non-peak coverage was monitored because programmes shown in peak-time generally attract much greater audiences than those shown in non-peak hours. Peak viewing hours are broadly agreed to fall between 6.30pm and 10.30pm. Any programmes that crossed these dividing lines have been classed according to when the bulk of their coverage was transmitted.

5) Current Affairs

The research examined the following current affairs strands:

- PANORAMA (BBC1)
- ASSIGNMENT (BBC2)
- WORLD IN ACTION (ITV)
- THIS WEEK (ITV)
- FIRST TUESDAY (ITV)
- DISPATCHES (C4)

News and current affairs magazine programmes were not examined because of the difficulties incurred in researching this type of programme format. Programmes such as NEWSNIGHT (BBC2) are made up of longer reports than hard news programmes, usually lasting for about 10 minutes each. With a few exceptions they follow the same agenda as news programmes.

APPENDIX (ii): KEY BBC TV STRANDS AND SERIES

The following list gives a summary breakdown of some of the most significant contributors to BBC TV's factual output on Third World and environment issues. Unless otherwise stated, all details and figures relate to the period from 1st September 1991 to 31st August 1992.

- **EVERYMAN** BBC1 (Documentaries)

Out of a total of 28 programmes broadcast, 19 were on international issues, all in non-peak viewing hours, totalling 14 hours 15 minutes. EVERYMAN covered a spread of issues with religion and human rights predominating. Countries covered in the South included Guatemala, Egypt, Bangladesh, Burma, India, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Territories, and the Philippines. The series has lacked a committed time slot - when programmes are pushed back into later-running slots, audience ratings have tended to fall considerably.

Following a recent change in editorial emphasis, EVERYMAN is shifting its focus towards the domestic arena. While international coverage has not been ruled out altogether, there will almost certainly be a reduction in the strand's Third World and environment related output.

In 1991-92, 49% of BBC1's non-peak documentary coverage of the South came from EVERYMAN.

- **INSIDE STORY** BBC1 (Documentaries)

Out of a total of 13 programmes 7 focused on international issues, mostly of 50 minutes duration and all in peak-time, totalling 6 hours and 15 minutes. 3 of these 7 programmes focused on the South:- one on South Africa's civil unrest, one on Sri Lanka's terrorist groups and one highly acclaimed programme, **Trade Slaves**, on development issues and poverty in Sierra Leone. **Trade Slaves** achieved a consolidated audience rating of 3.5 million. The programme was scheduled against ITV's music-special on the Gaelic rock band RUNRIG which attracted only 1 million viewers.

During a Guardian Debate in 1992 the former Controller of BBC1, Jonathan Powell, claimed his channel's commitment to in-depth international coverage was fulfilled by EVERYMAN and INSIDE STORY. However, in its coverage of the South, INSIDE STORY reflected the 2:1 bias of conflict over non-conflict issues which is more usually seen among news and current affairs coverage.

In September 1992, just outside the period examined by this report, INSIDE STORY's The Women Trade gained a consolidated audience rating of 6.4 million. It was scheduled against C4's re-run of the popular drama INSPECTOR MORSE, which attracted 7 million viewers.

- BEHIND THE NOSE (COMIC RELIEF) BBC1 (Documentaries)
Comic Relief's two hour, peak-time special comprised a mixture of comedy sketches and public awareness raising reports (1992 was not a 'Red Nose Day' fundraising year). Tony Robinson's documentary on poverty and development issues, filmed largely in Tanzania, helped to register a consolidated audience rating of 6.6 million. BEHIND THE NOSE was scheduled against BBC2's arts strand ARENA which attracted 0.9 million viewers, and against C4's US comedy-import ROSEANNE which gained an audience of 4.5 million.
- PANORAMA BBC1 (Current Affairs)
Out of 48 programmes 11 focused on international issues, all in peak-time and all of 40 minutes duration. Only two of these dealt with non-conflict issues in the South - one programme focused on Israeli elections, and one entitled The South Strikes Back was concerned with environmental damage caused by the timber trade in Malaysia. The South Strikes Back was screened as part of the ONE WORLD season in June 1992.
- ASSIGNMENT BBC2 (Current Affairs)
Out of a total of 30 programmes 25 focused on international issues, all in peak-time, all of 45 minutes duration, totalling 18 hours 45 minutes. This excellent new current affairs strand sets out to break away from the conflict-led news agenda usually followed by most current affairs strands. 13 of the 25 international programmes focused on countries in the South, and of those, more than two-thirds dealt with non-conflict issues. Southern countries covered by ASSIGNMENT included Argentina, Brazil, Angola, Korea, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Israel and the Occupied Territories, Mongolia and Vietnam.

ASSIGNMENT has been analysed as a current affairs strand because it is produced by BBC News and Current Affairs. However, some might argue that its in-depth coverage of the South merits reckoning in any calculation of BBC TV's documentary coverage of Third World issues. Table 6 (above, page 11) shows that BBC TV's documentary coverage of the South has fallen by 35 per cent since 1989-90. Even if ASSIGNMENT's 9.75 hours of programming on the South were to be included in the equation, the 1991-2 figure would still be down by 29% on the total for 1989-90.

- FINE CUT BBC2 (Documentaries)
Out of a total of 10 programmes 9 focused on international issues, most in peak-time, totalling 12 hours 50 minutes. 4 of the 9 were dedicated to the South, covering Afghanistan, Kuwait, Nicaragua and India. FINE CUT's consolidated audience ratings (usually around 1 million) should be seen in light of the fact that the series has been scheduled against BBC1's drama series CASUALTY which usually gains an audience of upwards of 15 million.
- NATURE BBC2 (Documentaries)
Out of a total of 16 programmes 12 focused on international issues, all of 30 minutes duration, all broadcast in peak-time. 3 of the 12 were dedicated to the South. Malaysian Take-Away dealt with deforestation in Malaysia, another programme dealt with development issues in Bangladesh and one further programme focused on South Africa. NATURE also covered stories in Mexico and Zimbabwe just outside the period covered by our research dates.

Over the last two years the number of slots accorded to the strand has been reduced from 20 to 16. Due to a change in editorial emphasis NATURE's international coverage seems set to fall still further. Future series will focus more on the domestic arena.

- UNDER THE SUN BBC2 (Documentaries)
Due to an administrative change, no programmes from this newish anthropological strand were broadcast between September 1991 and August 1992. This was disappointing for such an important BBC strand which requires regular annual scheduling to achieve the higher profile warranted by the quality of individual UNDER THE SUN programmes. Ten programmes are scheduled for transmission in 1993 but only eight are planned for 1994. This would constitute a fall of 20 per cent.

Other strands such as HORIZON (BBC2 Documentaries) and some one-off projects also venture abroad occasionally. These often make a significant contribution to public awareness of international affairs.

- **POLE TO POLE BBC1**

In November 1992 (outside the period covered by our research) Michael Palin's peak-time travelogue series went to Ethiopia. The programme gained a consolidated audience rating of 10.4 million. It was scheduled against ITV's headline US movie-import FATAL ATTRACTION which gained 11.1 million viewers. At the same time BBC2's SECRET AGENT and C4's SHORT AND CURLIES attracted fewer than a million viewers each.

The following week's POLE TO POLE was filmed in Kenya. It was watched by an increased audience of 10.9 million viewers, demonstrating how imaginative peak-time scheduling can generate substantial audience interest in factual programmes filmed in Third World countries.

APPENDIX (iii): ABOUT THE THIRD WORLD AND ENVIRONMENT BROADCASTING PROJECT

The Third World and Environment Broadcasting Project was established in February 1989 following a meeting of voluntary agencies concerned about the future of sustained in-depth coverage of international issues on UK television. There was consensus that the disappearance of such coverage from programme schedules could lead to a British public poorly informed on vital issues that affect the future of the planet and all its peoples. The Project, which has been entirely funded by voluntary organisations, has the support of more than 50 national agencies:

- **ACTIONAID**
- **ACORD**
- **ANTI-SLAVERY INTERNATIONAL**
- **CAFOD**
- **CARE**
- **CATHOLIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**
- **CENTRE FOR MULTI-CULTURAL EDUCATION**
- **CHRISTIAN AID**
- **COMIC RELIEF (CHARITY PROJECTS)**
- **COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT**
- **COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT**
- **COUNCIL FOR EDUCATION IN WORLD CITIZENSHIP**
- **EARTHSCAN**
- **FRIENDS OF THE EARTH**
- **GREENPEACE**
- **HELP THE AGED**
- **INTERMEDIATE TECHNOLOGY**
- **INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING TRUST**
- **INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**
- **METHODIST RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT FUND**
- **MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP**
- **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION CENTRES**
- **ONE WORLD ACTION**
- **ONE WORLD BROADCASTING TRUST**
- **OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE**
- **OXFAM**
- **PANOS INSTITUTE**
- **POPULATION CONCERN**
- **QUAKER PEACE AND SERVICE**
- **THE REFUGEE COUNCIL**
- **RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE**
- **ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE**
- **SAVE THE CHILDREN FUND**
- **SCOTTISH CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL AID FUND**
- **SCOTTISH EDUCATION AND ACTION FOR DEVELOPMENT**
- **SKILLSHARE AFRICA**
- **SOS SAHEL**
- **SURVIVAL INTERNATIONAL**
- **TEAR FUND**
- **TELEVISION TRUST FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**
- **THIRD WORLD FIRST**
- **TWIN**

- UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION
- UNICEF-UK
- VOLUNTARY SERVICE OVERSEAS
- WAR ON WANT
- WATER AID
- WORLD AWARE
- WORLD DEVELOPMENT MOVEMENT
- WORLD UNIVERSITY SERVICE
- WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE (WWF)

Agencies listed in **bold** have been represented on the Project's Board of Management.

Giving The Broader Picture is printed on 100% recycled paper. Further copies are available priced £2.00 each. Other titles available include Losing The Picture, Getting The Full Picture and The Good Franchise Guide.

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