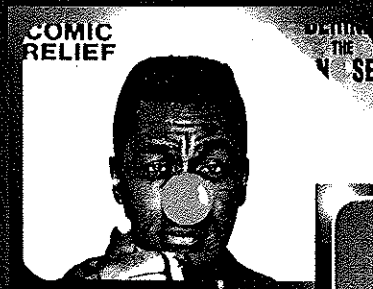


Losing Perspective:

Global Affairs on British
Terrestrial Television 1989-1999

By Jennie Stone

Features

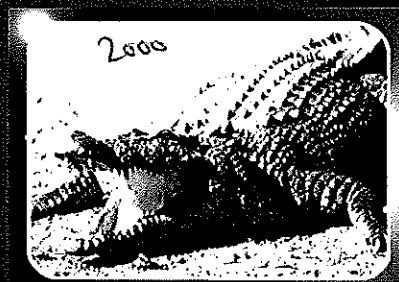


Factual Output



Travel

Environmental Strands



Religious Programmes

Current Affairs



Wildlife



International Documentaries

Arts

16. the effect of choice on British TV.
So this is the demerit down. - But what were audiences making of that wonderful content in the 1980s?
what are they making of it now.
ie How was they integrate, engaged with it.

24. Celebrity

Acknowledgements



The Third World and Environment Broadcasting Project (3WE) wishes to thank the numerous programme makers and programme department libraries who helped us with our research.

Many thanks to the members of the project management committee for their continuing support. Thanks to Ash Patel for the cover design. Special thanks to Robert Towler at the ITC's research department for all his help with the research, and to the staff of the ITC library.



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Introduction



The greater part of the past year has been dominated by impending legislation which will change the whole ethos of television broadcasting in this country.

**-Richard Attenborough, then-Chairman of Channel Four Television
1989 Channel Four Annual Report**

When the Third World and Environment Broadcasting Project first embarked upon this research project ten years ago, the international political and economic landscape was radically different. So was the landscape of the British television industry.

In 1989, foreign affairs were dominated by dramatic political changes in Eastern Europe and Russia, events viewed with optimism by all who watched them unfold. Likewise, the passage of the Broadcasting Act of 1990 promised viewers greater choice with more diverse programming. How far have these early hopes been realised?

3WE, established in 1989 by a consortium of Britain's leading international development, environment and human rights agencies, was founded on concern about the potential reduction in coverage of international affairs on British television under the new rules set out in what became the 1990 Broadcasting Act. Since 1989, 3WE has published reports comprised of original research monitoring the output of British terrestrial television on global issues. *Losing Perspective: Global Affairs on British Terrestrial Television 1989-1999* is the sixth in this series of reports, and looks at trends over the last decade in the area of international factual programming.

Television remains the primary medium through which the British public is informed about the developing world. A Harris survey in 1989 found that this was true for 84% of the British public. A 1993 RSGB survey found that this was still the case for 82% of the public. A 1997 MORI survey¹, which took polls right across Europe, again found that for 82% of Britons, television was the most common source of information about international issues. In addition, a very recent ITC research poll² found that 61% of Britons surveyed agreed that "more and more, it is true that what one country does these days affects what other countries have to cope with."

¹ Corrado, Michele, MORI and Alphonse L. MacDonald, UNFPA. "Awareness of Population Issues Affecting Developing Countries." MORI/WAPOR/UNFPA Paper prepared for WAPOR's 50th Anniversary Conference, Edinburgh, September 1997.

² Ipsos-RSL survey for ITC. "Broadcasters' Audience Reaction Service (Television) November 1999."

Increasing global links are the fabric of our societies, and Britain in particular stands in a unique international position at the heart of the UN Security Council, European Community, NATO, the Group of 8, the Commonwealth and many other influential global bodies. How far is Britain's prominent involvement in world affairs matched by widely accessible public information about what is happening beyond our borders? With television as the primary source of information about the rest of the world, 3WE believes broadcasters have a key responsibility towards coverage of these links.

3WE was founded at the time when the Broadcasting Bill was being debated in Parliament, in the months leading up to its ratification as the 1990 Broadcasting Act. The fear then was that with ITV freed from many of its public service obligations, the other channels, particularly its main rival for the mass audience, BBC1, would also be obliged to dilute key programming responsibilities in order to compete for audience share. Ten years on this report assesses how far these feared knock-on consequences have proved to be the case.

Key Findings



By adhering rigorously to the same methodology for monitoring international factual programming on the terrestrial channels over the past ten years, this study is able to track reliably core trends not considered elsewhere. This report has analysed all non-news/current affairs factual programming where a significant proportion of the programme time was devoted to footage filmed overseas. The methodology is very inclusive and recognises programmes about subjects such as wildlife, travel, and cookery, as well as the more serious themes of politics, human rights and the environment.

The main findings of the research are:

- **There is substantially less non-news/current affairs factual programming output filmed outside the British Isles than at the beginning of the decade.** In 1989-90 there were 1037 hours, in 1998-99 there were only 728.6 hours.
- This study finds that the **gap between commercial television, which is subject to the economics of audience ratings, and the public service strongholds of BBC1 and BBC2 has widened.** While international coverage has dropped across all channels, the commercial channels have seen a much more radical decline.

Specifically On Coverage of the Developing World:

- **At the start of the decade, the largest category of developing country factual programming concerned Human Rights, Development and Environmental issues, at 30% of output.** Programmes about Religions, Cultures and Arts about developing countries were also significant, at 20% of output. Over the decade the 3WE research reports³ have found that these categories have been replaced by Travel and Wildlife programming which do not offer complete portraits of the developing world. In 1998-99, almost 60% of programming on developing countries concerned Travel (20%) and Wildlife (38%).

³ *Losing the Picture: The Future for Television's Coverage of Global Issues* (1990); *Getting the Full Picture: The Complementary Roles of Television News, Current Affairs and Documentary Programmes on the Coverage of International Issues* (1990); *Giving the Broader Picture: BBC TV and the Wider World* (1993); *What in the World is Going On? British Television and Global Affairs* (1995); and *World Out of Focus: British Terrestrial Television and Global Affairs* (1998)

- **The total output of factual programmes on developing countries by the four on-going terrestrial channels has dropped by almost 50% since 1989.** Even including newcomer Channel Five, the total output over the past ten years in this area has reduced by a third. **All channels are showing fewer peak-time programmes about the developing world than at the beginning of the decade.**
- **BBC TV's output has decreased in the amount of programmes filmed in the countries of the developing world.**
BBC1's output has fallen by 28% since the start of the decade.
BBC2's output has fallen by 37% since the beginning of the decade.
However, BBC2 bids, for the first time in our ten year study, to overtake Channel Four in developing country programming.
- **ITV is now broadcasting 74% less factual programming on developing countries since the beginning of the decade.** It has dropped this type of output more than any other channel.
- **Channel Four has seen a drop of 56% since 1989-90, a loss of nearly 100 programming hours.** This is particularly worrying since the Channel Four service is required to cater for interests not well covered by other channels. The channel's remit specifically includes coverage of international and global issues.
- **Channel Five, since its inception in 1997, has commissioned hardly any new programmes in the developing world but has repackaged archive programming, largely about wildlife.**

despite gov to
24 hr schedule.

Recommendations



- **In a world of increasing globalisation, broadcasters must reassess the importance of international programming and commit to increasing and not decreasing programme hours in this area.** In light of television's importance as the UK's primary source of information on the world in which we live, this commitment should unambiguously be made a matter of public record.
- **Broadcasters must encourage innovations and new ideas that can transmit this information in interesting ways.** A more explicit commitment to quality programming on international issues would allow programme-makers to produce ground-breaking projects.
- **These programmes must cover a broader range of issues that give a balanced view of the world.** The challenge to broadcasters is not to shy away from tackling more serious issues which confront humanity at the outset of a new millennium.
- **Some programmes from all subject areas must be shown during popular, peak-time slots so that they can reach a wide audience.** On the evidence in this study, substantial and sustained audience engagement with in-depth programmes on developing countries, their people and the environment in which they live is not only possible but fairly common.
- **There should be a dedication to dialogue between documentary commissioners, producers and Britain's international development agencies.** Producers could have close liaison with development agencies including possible stints overseas as part of career training and development: it is 3WE's belief that exposure breeds informed interest and greater awareness.
- **There should be a strengthening of positive programme requirements in future broadcasting legislation to include factual programmes on global issues for commercial broadcasters who get universal access in return for certain obligations.**

Method and Scope of Research



This report is based on comprehensive original research. The Third World and Environment Broadcasting Project (3WE) examined all *new* programming:

- **broadcast on BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel Four and Channel Five**
- **between 1 September 1998 and 31 August 1999**
- **where a significant proportion of programme time was devoted to footage filmed outside the British Isles (i.e. outside Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland).**

To identify core trends this research has been contrasted with previous 3WE research from 1989/90, 1991/92, 1993/94, and 1996/97. Channel Five began on March 31st, 1997 and as a consequence only entered five months of the 1996/97 research, while the other channels for that year were counted over a full twelve months. This year's research, then, constitutes the first time that Channel Five was counted for the entire 12 months.

Where a significant proportion of programme time was filmed overseas, we counted the time of the entire programme. Distinctions have been drawn between three international factual programme genres: news, current affairs and all other factual programmes (eg. documentaries, docusoaps). These distinctions have been maintained for consistency with the methodology maintained since 1989. All non-news factual programming was listed and analysed. Because news and current affairs already receive some measure of regulatory protection they are not counted in the main body of research which only deals with **International Factual Output**. Open University, school programmes and repeats were not counted. Separate sections dealing with current affairs and news filmed in the developing world are included on pages 17-19. Where possible the current affairs information was checked with broadcasters because in this area the programmes broadcast are occasionally different to those advertised. Because of ITV's regional nature 3WE monitored the output of London licence holders, Carlton and LWT. Programme details were sourced from listing magazines at the Independent Television Commission (ITC) library, and supplemented by viewing experience and information from relevant programme departments.

Within international factual programming, our analysis seeks to highlight coverage of the developing world, drawing on the widely-adopted distinction drawn by the Brandt Commission between the developing countries (or the **South**) located mainly to the south of the industrialised nations which comprise the **North**. These distinctions are problematic, as nations of the former Soviet Union are included in the 'North' category, but for reasons of

consistency we maintain the distinctions used in 3WE's previous five research reports. For programmes where the exact location was impossible to determine (ie. generic ocean wildlife or generic disastrous weather programmes) we counted them as 'Various' and listed the continent base as 'Both North and South.'

As in previous 3WE research, our research differentiates between programmes shown at **Peak** and **Non-Peak** time slots. Peak-time is classified as between 6:30pm and 10:30pm since this is when audiences are substantially larger than at other times of the day. A programme is counted as peak when the majority of the programme minutes fall into peak time. Where the programme minutes fell exactly half out- and half in- prime time, we gave the benefit of the doubt and counted that programme as 'Peak.' We maintain these peak-time definitions for consistency with previous research, although 3WE acknowledges that some channels such as C4 and BBC2 now consider time slots up to midnight as attracting significant audiences.

Programmes were categorised into **Issues**, as outlined on page 13. For the issue spread percentages, the information was gathered by giving each programme counted the same value regardless of length. Commercial channels were given the same number of minutes per hour as the BBC, and were not penalised extra for having commercial breaks within the programme. For all other information in the research, the duration of the programme was counted in minutes, minus 10% of the programme time to allow for commercials/trails between programmes.

This report also includes a section about the audience reception for those documentaries and current affairs about developing countries which are being shown. This is a new direction for this report, as we consult with various programme makers and programme support personnel to gauge the popularity of these programmes.

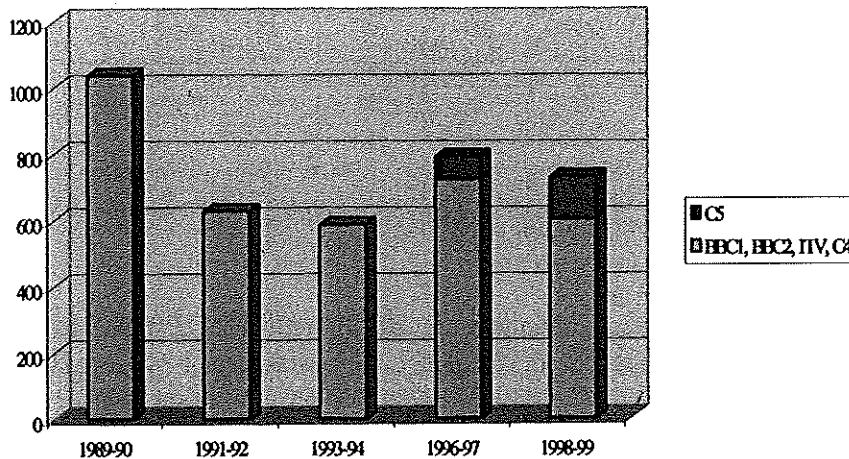
Research Findings



Factual Programmes

Chart 1 shows the total hours of international factual programming output (not including news/current affairs), filmed wholly or significantly outside the British Isles and broadcast on the five terrestrial channels for each of the years studied.

**Chart 1. Total International Factual Output:
All Channels**



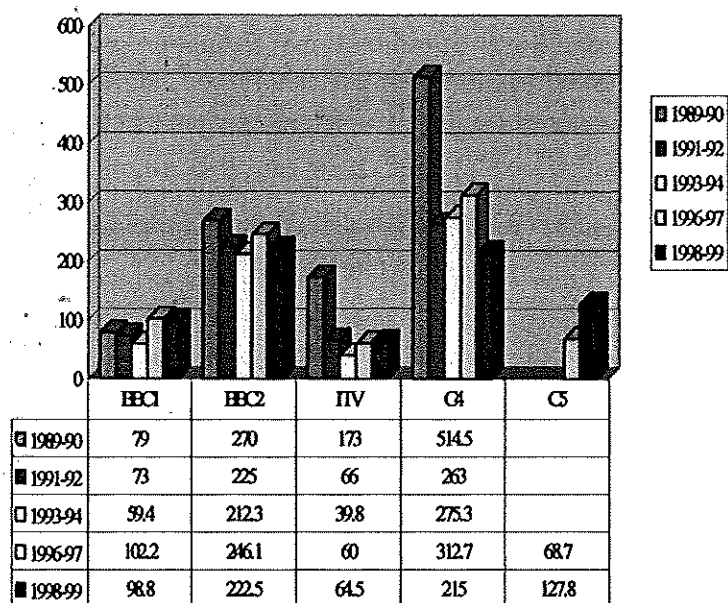
Total International Output	BBC1, BBC2, ITV, C4	C5	Totals
1989-90	1037		1037
1991-92	627		627
1993-94	586		586
1996-97	721	69	790
1998-99	600.8	127.8	728.6

Key Points and Analysis

- The total number of hours of international factual programming over the past decade has dropped by over 308 hours on terrestrial British television. This has occurred despite the addition of Channel Five in 1997, and despite the addition of 24-hour broadcasting on Channel Four, also in 1997.
- The four terrestrial channels tracked since 1989 have seen a total decline of over 436 hours of international programming, which amounts to an overall decline of 42%. International programming levels have almost returned to those of 1993-94, the lowest over 3WE's ten year study.

**Chart 2. Total International Factual Output:
Channel by Channel**

The chart below shows the total hours of factual programming (not including news/current affairs), filmed outside the British Isles for each of the five terrestrial channels over the past 10 years.



Key Points and Analysis

- While the public service channels of BBC1 and BBC2 have remained relatively consistent in their output, the commercial channels have dramatically decreased their international factual programming hours.
- **BBC1** has improved its performance in its output of international factual programmes since 1989, though its 1998-99 figures have fallen back from 1996-97. It is the only channel to be showing more international programming since the beginning of the decade. Travel programmes such as *Holiday* and Wildlife programmes such as *Wildlife on One* factor largely in this figure.
- **BBC2's** international factual output, though 18% lower than at the start of the decade, for the first time in our ten-year study is higher than that of Channel Four.
- **ITV's** output of factual international programming has dropped markedly, to about a third of its 1989-90 levels, a loss of almost 109 hours.
- **Channel Four's** international factual output is now far less than half its output at the beginning of the decade: almost 100 hours less than in 1996-97, and at its lowest level since 1989.
- The increase in **Channel Five's** performance, the virtual doubling of its 1996-97 figure, could be accounted for by the fact that only five months of the new channel's schedule were counted in the last study, while this report includes all twelve.

Chart 3. Factual Programming Output on Developing Countries:

Channel by Channel

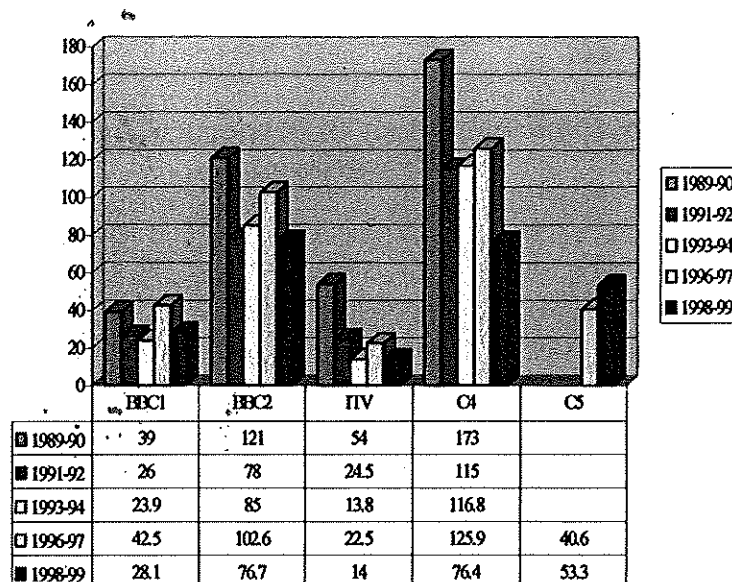


Chart 3 shows the total hours of factual programming output (not including news/current affairs) filmed in developing countries for each of the five terrestrial channels.

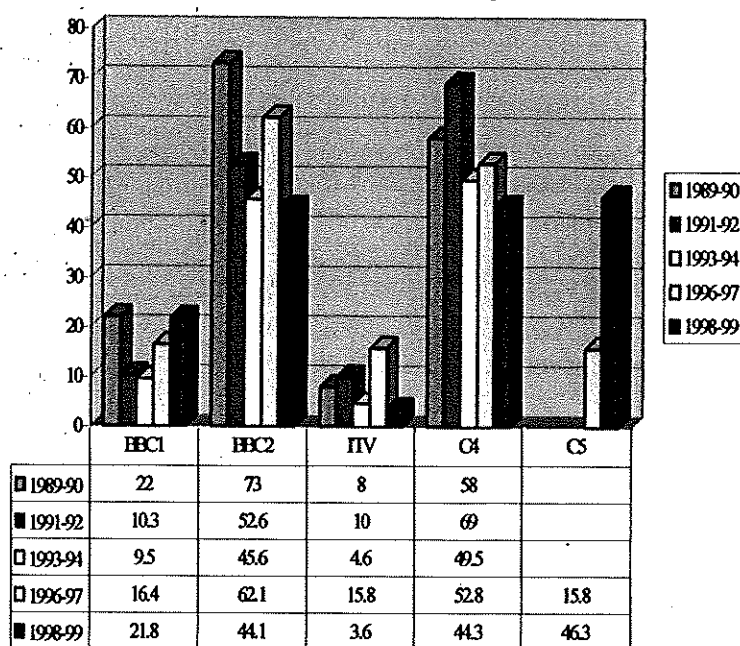
Key Points and Analysis

- The total output of factual programmes on developing countries by the channels tracked since 1989 has dropped by almost 50% since 1989. Even with the inclusion of Channel Five, the total output over the past ten years in this area has reduced by a third.
- **BBC1's** output in this category has dropped by 28%; **BBC2's** output has dropped by 37%. For the first time in our ten-year study, **BBC2's** factual programming output on the developing world bids to overtake that of Channel Four.
- The largest drop is seen by **ITV**, which is now broadcasting 74% less factual programming on developing countries than at the start of the decade.
- At the beginning of the decade, **Channel Four** broadcast more factual programming on developing countries than **BBC1** and **BBC2** combined, while today this trend is reversed. Channel Four's output in this category has dropped by 56% since 1989-90, a loss of nearly 100 programming hours.
- Since **Channel Five** was only operational from March 31, 1997, it was only counted for five months of 3WE's research report of 1996-97. It was found at that time to broadcast approximately 8 hours of factual programming about developing countries per month. In this report, this figure has dropped to 4.4 hours per month. Of its total of approximately 53 hours, nearly 47 of those are in the Wildlife category.

Peak and Non-Peak Output on Developing Countries

The following two charts analyse peak and non-peak factual output (not including news/current affairs) on developing countries for each of the five terrestrial channels. Each channel broadcasts around 1,400 hours of peak-time programming per year.

Chart 4. Factual Output on Developing Countries: Peak Programming

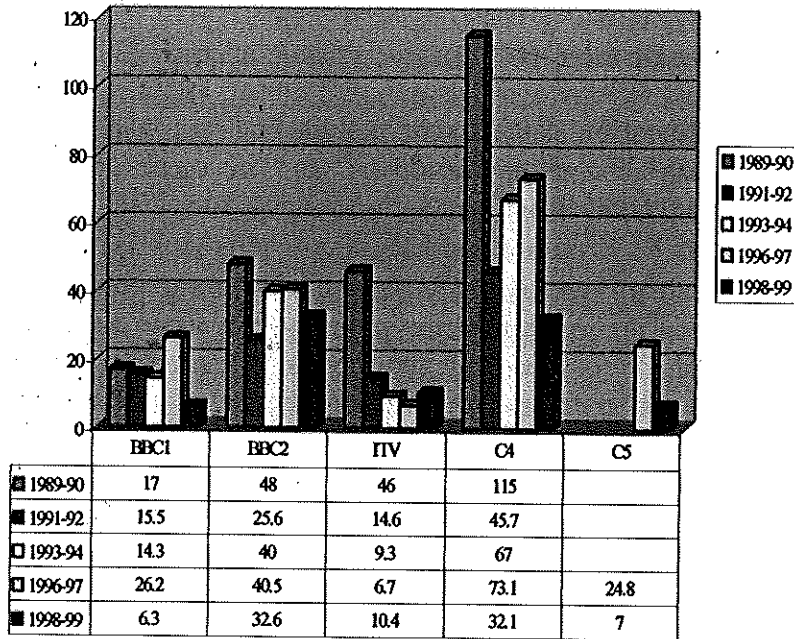


Key Points and Analysis

- Of the four channels which have been tracked since 1989, all have dropped their peak-time factual programming on developing countries. **BBC2** seems to show the largest drop, of almost 30 hours.
- **Channel Four** has dropped by almost 14 hours its factual programming about developing countries in peak-time. **BBC1** has broadly maintained its 1989-90 output, with variations over the decade in output. **ITV** has halved its output at peak-time in this area from an already low level.
- **Channel Five's** large increase in peak-time programming on developing countries can largely be accounted for by its daily 7:30pm slot of **Wildlife** programming, which makes up the overwhelming bulk of its developing country output.

Late-night or off-peak schedules have traditionally been the last bastion for programmes on developing countries. Even here there has been a decrease in the level of programming.

**Chart 5. Factual Output on Developing Countries:
Non-Peak Programming**



Key Points and Analysis

- All five channels have decreased their non-peak output of programmes about developing countries. There has been a loss of 138 hours of programming in this area: these figures represent a marked drop to a new low.
- **BBC1** has dropped by almost 11 hours, a third of its 1989-90 output;
- **BBC2** by almost 16 hours;
- **ITV** has reduced by almost 36 hours since 1989, a fifth of its 1989-90 non-peak output;
- **Channel Four** has reduced its off-peak output in this category by almost **83 hours**, roughly a quarter of its non-peak developing country output at the start of the decade.
- Even though it has only been in existence since 1997, **Channel Five** has already markedly reduced its non-peak factual programming on the developing world by approximately 88% per month.

Issue Spread



Previous research categorised factual programming according to the following broad issue bands:

- **Conflict and Disaster (C&D):** comprising international and civil war, global security, terrorism, crime and civil unrest within the past ten years, and both historical and contemporary natural and man-made catastrophes.
- **Politics (Pol):** comprising elections and political change, political economics, and political analysis within the past 10 years.
- **Development, Environment and Human Rights (DEH)** issues.
- **Religions, Cultures and Arts (RCA),** including anthropology.
- **Wildlife (WL)** and natural history: simply put, these are shows mainly about animals. Purely reconstituted footage of animals was distinguished from animal programmes exhibiting their environmental and human contexts, and such differences are discussed on the pages which follow.
- **Miscellaneous (Misc):** comprising science, medicine, health, and lightweight human interest topics. Entertainment/live music/performance programmes and sporting programmes were not included unless they were telling a story about the wider context of the event.

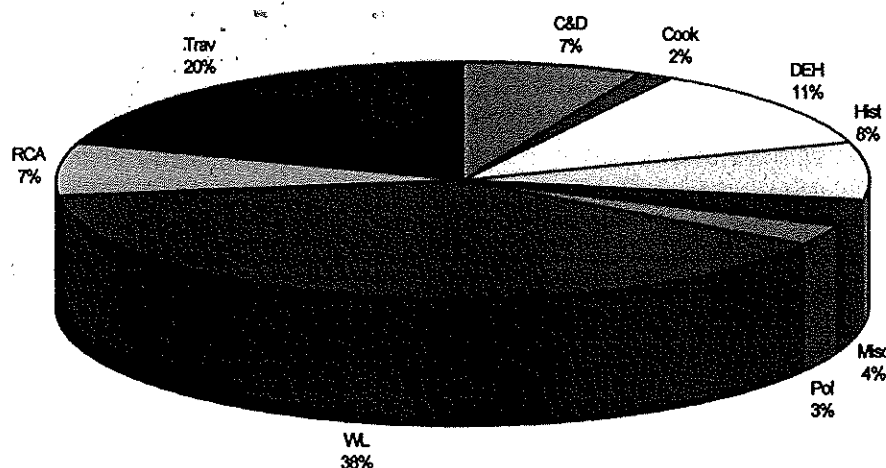
In the 1996-97 research, the following three categories were removed from 'Miscellaneous' and given their own weighting, to give a greater understanding of the overall issue spread.

- **History (Hist):** factual programmes telling stories which took place over ten years ago (in order to distinguish the 'History' category from 'Conflict and Disaster,' in the case of war documentaries). This category also comprised archaeology, and included standard documentaries made up of archival footage and 'talking head' interviews, if the historical subject matter was placed outside the British Isles.
- **Travel (Trav):** all variations on the travel/adventure/holiday programme.
- **Cookery (Cook):** because this category often blurred with travel, we marked as 'Cookery' all factual programmes which had cooking as the primary theme and were filmed outside the British Isles.

In this section of the report, all above categories are included: Note that these denote the number of programmes shown in each category, not the number of hours. This methodology has traditionally been used for this portion of our research so as to give equal weight to all programmes regardless of length, and 10% of time is not reduced so as not to penalise the commercial channels.

1998-99 No. of Developing Country Programmes	C&D	Cook	DEH	Hist	Misc	Pol	WL	RCA	Trav	Total
BBC1	1	0	10	1	2	0	22	2	15	53
BBC2	7	7	16	18	4	8	56	10	27	153
ITV	1	0	2	0	1	1	4	1	12	22
C4	22	0	19	16	8	4	9	20	25	123
C5	1	0	3	0	1	0	82	0	9	96
TOTAL 1998-99	32	7	50	35	16	13	173	33	88	447

Chart 6. Issue Spread: Factual Programming on Developing Countries: All Channels 1998-99



Key Points and Analysis

- The two largest categories of factual programming filmed in the developing world are Wildlife (38%, up from 32% in 1996-97) and Travel (20%, up from 10% in 1996-97). Together these categories make up nearly 60% of all developing country programming, which begs an analysis of their public service value. While these are not homogeneous categories, a disproportionate number of these types of programmes consist of either simply footage of animals without a broader social context (C4's *Australia Wild* series; C5's *Animal Edens* series; and BBC2's *The Animal Zone*) or celebrities visiting resorts (BBC1's *Holiday*, C5's *Russell Grant's Postcards*). 'Holiday'-type travel programmes figure more heavily than adventure travel programmes.

BBC2 produces the largest amount of travel programmes of all five channels, with Channel Four not far behind. Special mention should be made of those programmes which manage to reflect the complexity of the interrelationship between travel, cultures and environment, such as BBC2's *Edge of Blue Heaven* series, and C4's *Bangkok Bound* and *The Ramayana*.

In 1993-94 the total number of hours of wildlife programming filmed internationally was 87.7 hours. In 1998-99 this figure has risen to 189 hours, representing a **116% increase in wildlife programmes**. One reason for this is the introduction of Channel Five which put out a disproportionately large amount of wildlife programming. Almost 50% of the total Wildlife programming comes from Channel Five. The second largest Wildlife broadcaster is BBC2.

Wildlife programmes, when well made, can be an educational and valuable part of the television schedule. However, viewers are not being given a balanced picture of the developing countries if over a third of factual programmes are about their animal inhabitants. The wildlife programmes on Channel Five are largely old Anglia TV *Survival* programmes with new music and a new commentary updating information about the species' plight or habitat. The original filming of these programmes was carried out anything up to 25 years ago.

- **Conflict and Disaster** programme hours have increased by 5%, **Cookery** programmes have decreased by 2%, and **History** has increased by 2% from 1996-97 levels. A significant amount of programming in the Conflict and Disaster category could be labelled 'disaster weather,' which includes such programmes as Channel Five's *Coming Disasters*, *Killer Weather*, and *Nature's Fury*; ITV's *Anatomy of Disaster* and *Eye of the Storm*; Channel Four's *Raging Planet* and *Storm Force*; and BBC1's *Violent Planet* strands.
- Documentaries about **Religion, Culture and Arts**, as well as those in the **Miscellaneous** category, have significantly dropped – each by 9%. In 1998-99, the 'RCA' programmes have included several episodes filmed overseas from BBC1's *Songs of Praise* strand and BBC2's *Desperately Seeking Something*.
- The only documentary broadcast on Channel Five over the twelve month period that classified as **Politics** and was filmed outside of the UK was entitled, 'The Full Monica,' a profile of Monica Lewinsky.
- Of the remaining categories, **Development, Environment and Human Rights**, only constituting 44 hours, has remained at a very low level. For those programmes in this category broadcast on **BBC1 and BBC2**, the majority were filmed in the developing world. These include BBC1's innovative cluster of programmes, *The Burning East*, about Indonesia's rainforest, and BBC2's *Urgent Action* for its annual *Human Rights Season*, which in 1998 celebrated the 50th anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. **Channel Four** documentaries falling into this category largely consisted of 'lighter' environmental shows such as *The Ocean World of John Stoneman* and *Gardens of the Caribbean* as well as the more heavyweight *Shanghai Vice*. **Channel Five** broadcast only 3 programmes which fell into this category, and these were primarily lighter environmental-

related topics such as *Dwellers of the Deep*. ITV broadcast two programmes considered to be about Development, Environment and Human Rights: *Children of the Sewers*, and John Pilger's *The Timor Conspiracy*. The DEH category appears to have become increasingly polarised between programmes which either address weighty topics and are consequently pushed to the margins of Non-Peak scheduling, or are lighter with celebrity presenters, and get screened at Peak-Time.

In 1990, 3WE published a report which observed international factual programming between the years of 1987 to 1989.⁴

- Ten years ago, the largest category of factual programmes on developing countries was of **Development, Environment and Human Rights** issues, at 88 hours per year (30% of factual output on developing countries), double the levels seen today. This is significant to note that ten years on, it has dropped to only 11% of output. In 1987-89, these included such programmes as Channel Four's *Korea, the Unknown War*, BBC1's *From Cornish Tin to African Gold*, and ITV's *Mountains of Gold*.
- The second largest category ten years ago was **Religions, Cultures and Arts**, constituting 20% of factual output on the developing world, at 58.1 hours per year. These included such award-winning programmes as Channel Four's *Caste at Birth* and *Baka - People of the Rainforest*. This has reduced by more than half, to only 7% of developing country programming in 1998-99, at 21.3 hours. This is a very significant reduction in an important area of programming which helps augment multicultural awareness within the UK.
- **Wildlife** was the third largest category in 1987-89 with 19% of factual output on the developing world, at 53.7 hours per year. This compared to 91 hours and 38% of developing country output in 1998-99. Following behind Wildlife in 1987-89 were **Political** programmes at 13% (36.2 hours per year), having therefore dropped by 10% to only 9.8 hours in 1998-99. **Historical** programmes on developing countries were 11% of output (30.6 hours per year) in this area in 1987-89, having dropped 3% to 28.9 hours in 1998-99. **Travel**, on the other hand, has increased by 13% at 45 hours in 1998-99, more than doubling its output from 7% of developing country factual output (21.4 hours per year) in 1987-89.

In the name of 'choice,' it appears that British viewers are now treated to a greater amount of travel and wildlife programmes with a serious diminution in other categories of programming. There is room for much greater production innovation in these categories.

⁴ In the reports since, the findings have only covered a twelve-month period, but these findings from the start of the decade cover a two-year period.

Current Affairs



International coverage on television news bulletins has frequently been criticised for a failure to provide viewers with proper context. This is where current affairs programmes become crucial, by taking the time to delve into subjects which might otherwise be treated in two-minute news items. All terrestrial television channels are required to produce some international current affairs as part of their licence agreement (in the case of ITV, Channel Four and Channel Five) or under the Royal Charter (for BBC1 and BBC2). However, these remits remain vague: there is no quota set on precisely how much international coverage counts as enough to satisfy the remit. ITV and Channel Five's statutory remits require these channels to broadcast high quality news and current affairs concerning national and international matters. Channel Four's statutory remit requires 'sufficient' coverage of national and global issues in high quality news and current affairs.

Recent research which has looked into changes in production processes for current affairs has concluded that a great deal of self-censoring takes place as budget cuts require producers to work with fewer options for investigative reporting, particularly if this involves going overseas.⁵ This is resulting in safer, less investigative current affairs output. The number of hours of international current affairs programming per year is very small compared to other international factual programming. In 1998-99, compared to a total of 248.8 hours of factual programming on developing countries, only approximately 12 hours of current affairs programming was on the developing world.

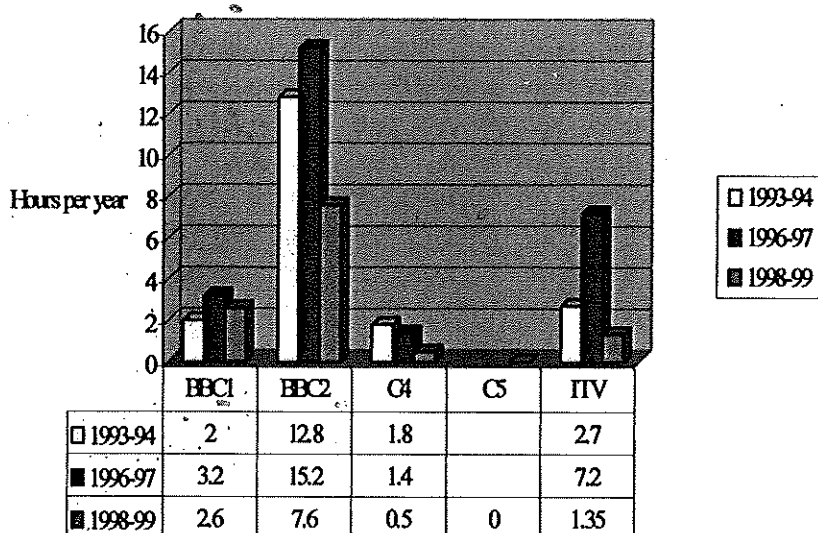
We did not include those programmes with daily slots (thereby blurring their distinction from news) such as BBC2's *Newsnight*. BBC1, BBC2, ITV and C4 all have series that cover current affairs. The main strands are:

- **BBC1** *Panorama*
- **BBC2** *Correspondent* and *Correspondent Special* (previously *Assignment*)
- **ITV** *World in Action* and *Tonight with Trevor Macdonald*⁶
- **C4** *Dispatches*
- **C5** *What's the Story?*

⁵ "A Shrinking Iceberg Travelling South... Changing Trends in British Television: A Case Study of Drama and Current Affairs" by Steven Barnett and Emily Seymour of the University of Westminster (published by the Campaign for Quality Television 1999).

⁶ The last *World in Action* was screened on December 7, 1998; the first *Tonight with Trevor Macdonald* was screened on the 8th of April, 1999.

**Chart 7. Current Affairs Programmes on Developing Countries:
1993-1999**



Key Points and Analysis

- Overall we see that **current affairs coverage of the developing world has dropped by 38% since 1993.**
- Several of **BBC2's** *Correspondent* strand included stories about developing countries, such as *Murder in Purda* reporting on human rights abuses against women in Pakistan. Other stories ranged from Kenyan wildlife services under threat to political diplomacy by the UN's Kofi Annan. BBC2 is the broadcaster producing the largest amount of programming in this area.
- Only 1 of **Channel Four's** *Dispatches* strand was filmed in the developing world. This featured nuclear testing in Xinjiang province, China.
- **Channel Five** does not enter into this category at all. Its current affairs strand, *What's the Story*, had no programmes about developing countries. It largely features domestic consumer issues, as seen in *Mobile Madness*, *Car Wars*, and *Perfect Pregnancies*. This is despite the specific remit in Channel Five's license that it must produce 1 hour per week of current affairs which is of high quality about national and international matters
- **ITV** aired one *World in Action* about a developing country issue: *Death Wish*, about the death penalty in the Caribbean. One *Tonight with Trevor Macdonald* was also filmed in the developing South: *Vietnam*, about a woman providing help to Vietnamese orphans.

News



If most people receive the bulk of their information about the developing world from television, then television news is an area worthy of intensive study. In this report we have not analysed international coverage by the five British terrestrial channels, largely because of several in-depth studies currently being undertaken elsewhere. Here, however, some exceptional international newsgathering on British terrestrial television must be acknowledged, particularly on the part of BBC News and Channel 4 News. It is 3WE's belief that some of Britain's excellent international journalism might be leveraged more effectively into other (non news/current affairs) programming areas.

When 3WE last analysed news coverage in 1993-94, as seen in *What in the World is Going On? British Television and Global Affairs*, we found that a large amount of international coverage, particularly about developing countries, covered 'Conflict and Disaster' stories (48% of developing country airtime). While some of these news stories may have a humanitarian agenda, it still seems unbalanced that the bulk of information the British public receives about developing countries from television news is about their conflicts. It remains to be seen whether the upcoming news research will complement our findings on the non-news/current affairs factual programming.

Channel by Channel Analysis

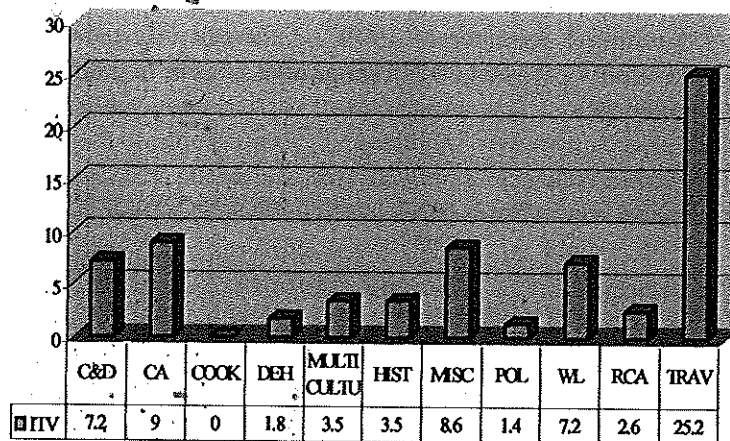


Independent Television (ITV)

The 1990 Broadcasting Act removed the broad public service requirement from ITV's licence to 'inform, educate and entertain' but the licence obliges Channel 3 (ITV) to meet the programming requirements for diversity and high quality. There is no specific requirement for international coverage, with the exception of news and current affairs.

As Chart 8 suggests, below, ITV does not appear to be providing diversity in its international programming. The main international issues covered on ITV as a mass-audience channel, are **Travel, Wildlife, Miscellaneous and Conflict and Disaster**. In 1998-99, the largest category of international factual programming on ITV is in the Travel category, at 25.2 hours, roughly half of the total international output. This far surpasses all other categories, none of which exceed 9 hours. The two significant strands in this category are *Wish You Were Here...?* which showcases celebrities visiting holiday hotspots, and *Holidays from Hell*, which illustrates the consumer holidaymaker suffering setbacks on vacation.

Chart 8. ITV by Issue - Total International Factual Output 1998-99



Casting an eye back to ITV's factual programmes in 1989-90, it is significant that the IBA's⁷ annual report pronounced, "Documentary output is one of ITV's unsung strengths." While 3WE only counts international documentaries, the reduction over the decade in this kind of output is noteworthy, from 173 hours in 1989-90 to 64.5 hours in 1998-99. A decade ago, the *First Tuesday* strand every month showcased important documentaries, including the October 1988 *Afghansti*, on Soviet conscripts serving in Afghanistan, which won the RTS documentary award. Also that year, Adrian Cowell won a BAFTA award for his painstaking filmwork in Brazil over many years, as seen in *Mountains of Gold*. The *First Tuesday* strand does not appear to have been adequately replaced.

Channel Four

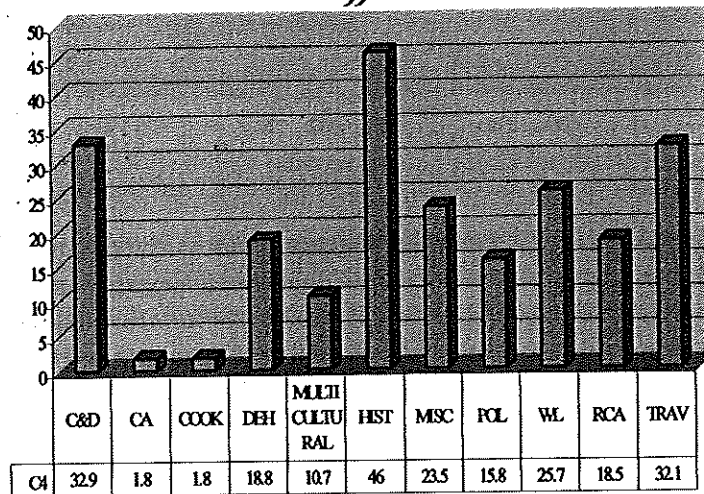
The Broadcasting Act 1990 gives Channel Four a specific remit requiring its programmes to 'contain a suitable proportion of matter calculated to appeal to tastes and interests not generally catered for by Channel Three and that innovation in the form and content of those programmes should be encouraged.' The Channel Four service should also have a 'distinctive character.' The Broadcasting Act requires Channel Four to provide a public service for disseminating information, education and entertainment. News and current affairs must be 'of high quality, and with a minimum 4 hours per week each.' Thus while it is a commercial channel, Channel Four does have a specific public service remit which stands it apart from the other terrestrial commercial channels.

A new licence and Statement of Programme Policy for Channel Four were published in February, 1998. These largely represented a tightening of certain editorial areas, such as strengthened requirements for education, diversity and multicultural programmes. It also stipulates that Channel Four should include

⁷ The Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) was the predecessor of the Independent Television Commission (ITC)

coverage of global issues. During the summer of 1999, Channel 4 pledged itself publicly to major new international projects in line with the licence requirements. For example, the channel is hosting a themed series of programmes called 'On the Line,' concerned with culture and communities along the meridian line from the UK to Ghana, beginning December of 1999. Although this programming falls outside this year's study period, 3WE recognises it as a valuable addition to Channel Four's schedule.

Chart 9. Channel Four by Issue - Total International Factual Output 1998-99



As Chart 9 demonstrates, while Channel Four's overall international factual output has almost halved since the start of the decade, we see here that in 1998-99 the number of programmes across the various categories is fairly evenly represented. It therefore seems to cater for diversity, with the notable shortcoming being the small amount of international **Current Affairs** coverage, at only 1.8 hours over the entire year studied. The Channel Four annual report of 1998 reported that:

Dispatches returned in a new shorter format under a new commissioning editor but with no less impact, with its investigations of the Animal Liberation Frontland, a two-parter on domestic violence, and winning plaudits alongside programmes on ofsted, e. coli and Louise Woodward."

The annual report failed to remark on the increasing domestic focus of *Dispatches* investigations.

In the Current Affairs category, 1989-90 saw many more international subjects than 1998-99 has produced. In the *Dispatches* strand there was a clandestine report from inside Tibet; and an instant report on the collapse of the Czech communist regime, shot by students and a returning émigré director – 72 hours of video rushes were smuggled out to provide one of the most compelling accounts

of Eastern Europe in transition. *The World this Week*, the channel's excellent international current affairs magazine, has disappeared without any apparent replacement.

In **Factual Programmes** notable productions in 1998-99 included *Bloody Balkans*, a themed week which gave insight and a historical perspective to the ongoing conflict in the former Yugoslavia. *Algeria Daily* and *Lagos Stories* similarly brought the Algerian civil war and Nigerian elections into our living rooms with added insight, if only in 5-10 minute slots each. Phil Agland's outstanding *Shanghai Vice* followed his previous *Under the Clouds* to give an intimate view of urban life in contemporary China. In the *True Stories* strand, *Divorce Iranian Style* and *The Valley* brought kudos to Channel Four. *White Lives*, on life in South Africa five years after the official ending of apartheid, was also seen. Ten years ago, there seemed to be a distinct ecological agenda on Channel Four, with notable series including *Animal Traffic* on wildlife and *Fragile Earth* on the environment. The *Critical Eye* strand, for example, included *Pandora's Box*, a disturbing exposé of factory farming. The *True Stories* strand included the remarkable *After the Fire*, about Vietnam's environment since the war. The Danish documentary, *The Shepherd and the Bomb*, won the Prix Italia for its exposé of radiation fall-out in Khazakhstan. This genre of ecological programming now appears to be virtually extinct on the channel. Little effort appears to be made to innovate in this area, other than the attempt at revisionism in the controversial *Against Nature* series, seen in 1996-97.

Also in 1989-90, there seemed to be space available for non-British perspectives. For example, *Beirut – the Last Home Movie*, showed a rich family's survival amidst the shelling; and *Peace in our Time* was a Czech view of the Munich settlement, 50 years on. *Hello, Do you Hear Us?* by the distinguished Latvian filmmaker Juris Podrieks, explored people's moods and attitudes in the USSR at that time. Contemporary historical subjects like the Korean War, the Palestinian problem, and life in the Eastern bloc, were also prominent. In 1990, over 50 programmes and feature films were commissioned for *Soviet Spring*. These genuinely international perspectives seem to be largely missing in Channel Four's schedules ten years on.

BBC TV

Chart 10. BBC1 by Issue - Total International Factual Output 1998-99

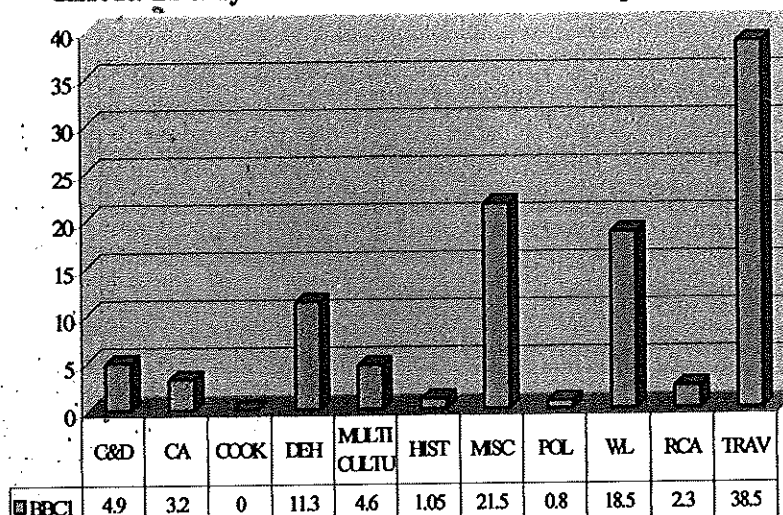
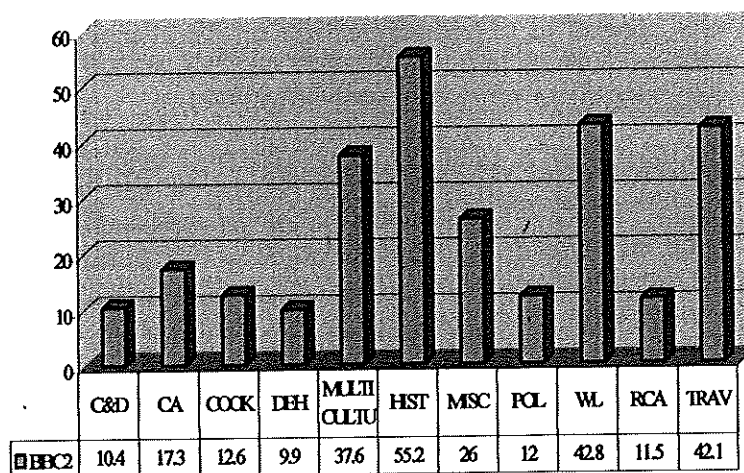


Chart 11. BBC2 by Issue - Total International Factual Output 1998-99



The BBC has specific public service obligations as a publicly-funded service (through the licence fee). Its obligations are outlined in the Royal Charter, most recently granted in 1996; the Agreement between the BBC and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport; and the BBC's Statement of Promises to Viewers and Listeners. "The BBC is obliged to maintain high general standards in programming and to offer a wide range of programmes providing information, education and entertainment in the licence fee-funded services. This includes programmes that stimulate and reflect the UK's diverse cultural activity."⁸

⁸ 'The BBC's Public Obligations' www.bbc.co.uk

As the mass-audience channel generally seen to be in competition with ITV, **BBC1** appears to broadly follow the same topic areas as ITV. A comparison with Chart 8 on page 20 on ITV's output highlights the similarities. In 1998-99, 42% of BBC1's international factual output was devoted to **Travel** and **Wildlife** programmes. Also showing significant output were programmes in the **Miscellaneous** category. These included 'fluffy' programming such as *Ruby Wax's American Pie*, and the docusoap *War and Piste*.

In 1998-99, **BBC2** has shown a rather varied international factual output, even though its overall figures have decreased since the beginning of the decade. **Travel** and **Wildlife** feature largely, but so also do **Historical**, **Miscellaneous** and **Current Affairs** programmes. In the History category were included such series as *Cold War* and *The West*, along with the *Timewatch* strand.

In **Current Affairs** in 1998-99, a BBC1 *Panorama* edition hosted by Fergal Keane revisited a woman and her family in post-apartheid South Africa in *In Search of Cynthia Mthebe*, and another explored the international response to the genocide in Rwanda in *When Good Men do Nothing*. BBC2's *Correspondent* had a number of pieces filmed in developing countries, including *Murder in Purdah* and *The Unfinished War*. In **Current Affairs** overall in its 1998 annual report the BBC claimed to be attempting to find new approaches to bring international issues to otherwise uninterested viewers. Robbie Williams reporting on child immunisation in Sri Lanka for BBC1's *Here and Now* was mentioned as such an approach.⁹

While this is encouraging, back in 1989-90 Current Affairs programmes on the BBC channels had an even stronger international priority. They largely followed the development of the 'democracy' movements in Eastern Europe, including an acclaimed *Panorama* with John Simpson.

*The extraordinary events in China and latterly in Eastern Europe led to a year of remarkable foreign coverage. From the bloody events in Tiananmen Square to the euphoria of the crowds in East Berlin, BBC News and Current Affairs kept the public informed. Earlier decisions to invest in stronger newsgathering facilities in Europe and the Far East and in a specialist Foreign Affairs Unit were fully justified.*¹⁰

Other notable *Panorama* included *Bloody Sunday*, which examined the attack by Soviet troops on a nationalist demonstration in Tbilisi, Georgia.

*The tempo of news events made it difficult for film-based current affairs always to react at the speed desirable, and plans had to be laid for *Panorama* to extend its ability to run live editions.*¹¹

⁹ Note that 3WE does not include *Here and Now* as a current affairs strand.

¹⁰ BBC Annual Report 88-89.

¹¹ Ibid.

For this reason, BBC2's *Special Assignment* began to give BBC correspondents at home and abroad the chance to tackle the main story of the week in the form of a 30-minute documentary.

In documentary features in 1998-99, BBC1's schedules included *The Burning East* series about environmental destruction and corruption in Indonesia. BBC2's *Great Railway Journeys* as always gave audiences an insightful look into international travel, and the *Timewatch* strand often provided a platform for international historical subjects. The *Under the Sun* strand on BBC2 also continued to provide high-quality international subjects, like the history of the Philippines in *The Caveman's Return*. *Chris Patten's East and West* informed British audiences about Eastern politics.

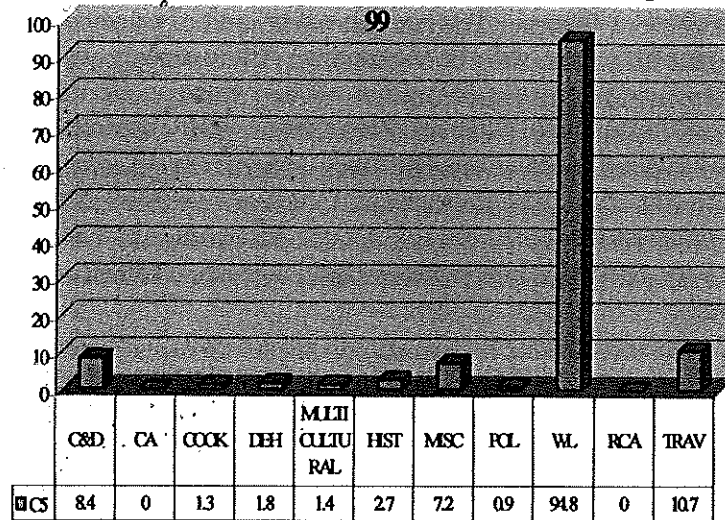
In 1989-90, there was a wider range of international subjects covered, including BBC1's *Inside Story* strand which explored a Russian beauty contest; and BBC2's *Forty Minutes* strand which covered the Armenian earthquake with *Out of the Ruins*. The *Forty Minutes* strand was in its eighth season and also included *Fourteen Days in May* which followed the last days of a condemned but quite possibly innocent black murderer in America and its half-dozen prizes included the John Grierson award at the British Film Institute. *Forty Minutes* has been replaced by *Modern Times*, which seems to have a more domestic focus.

In 1989-90, *Search of the Marcos Millions* won an Emmy for Outstanding Investigative Journalism. Also transmitted was a portrait of the Czech playwright Vaclav Havel, shot in secret and aired in Britain. Nine months later Havel was president of the country and Czech TV asked for the film to be expressed back for local airing. David Dimbleby's series, *An Ocean Apart* shed new light on relations between the USA and Britain over the past 80 years. *War Generation-Beirut* looked at young people growing up in war-torn Lebanon; *Child Slaves, a Fate Worse than Debt* investigated the problems of Third World Debt; *Biko and South Africa Under the Skin* took viewers into South Africa under apartheid. *The Red Dynasty Trilogy* examined 50 years of Chinese history in the wake of Tiananmen. And, the first two transmissions of an impressive new anthropology strand, *Under the Sun*, were aired on BBC2.

In the *Nature* series of specials were included *The State of Europe*, a Michael Buerk-presented series which told the story of the environmental crisis facing Poland – after the first episode was aired, the 'Medical Aid for Poland' charity received an extra £60,000 in donations. *Climate in Crisis* highlighted global warming issues and threats to the environment. In the past year, only BBC1's cluster of programmes, *The Burning East*, explored environmental issues in an innovative way. Many of the earlier environmental and political strands seem to have been gradually replaced by more **Wildlife** and **Travel** programmes, often with a soft focus.

Channel Five

Chart 12. Channel Five by Issue - Total International Factual Output 1998



Channel Five was planned to enlarge the choice of a majority of UK viewers and to introduce new competition into the advertising market. In the 1990 Broadcasting Act, ITC was required to award a Channel 5 licence on the basis of a competitive tender. The ITC had to be satisfied that applicants passed a quality threshold in terms of programming. "Taken as a whole, the programmes included in the service [had to] be of high quality and be calculated to appeal to a wide variety of tastes and interests."¹²

In its 1998 annual review, the ITC called on Channel Five to increase the quality and widen the range of programmes in general. Although it had improved its documentary output since the ITC's reprimand in this area in its 1997 annual review, very little of that output concerned international programmes.

Since Channel Five only came into being in 1997, it is obviously not possible to have a long-term comparison. It is still useful to see here the overwhelming output of **Wildlife** programming compared to all other categories. The only other category that even reached 10 hours over the year was **Travel**. All others were relatively insignificant by comparison. Within this Travel category, only two strands were represented: *Was it Good for You?* and *Russell Grant's Postcards*, which only gave 5-10 minute snapshots of various cities, mostly in Europe.

The key point here is that there is extremely little diversity in Channel Five's international factual output, although their remit specifically obliges them to provide a diverse range of programmes. Channel Five's remit requires one hour per week of national and international current affairs, with this quota to be

¹² ITC Notes, Note 30. Information Office ITC, November 1998.

increased to 1.5 hours per week in the sixth year of its licence. At present it appears to be providing no international current affairs at all.

When Channel Four started 15 years ago it had a guaranteed income tied to ITV's commercial income. Channel Five had no such initial budget with which to work. Channel Five also had the economic disadvantage of an enormous financial outlay in retuning over 9 million video cassette recorders across the country. As a consequence Channel Five has a very restricted programme commissioning budget. Internationally filmed programmes generally cost more than programmes filmed in the UK because of the extra expense of things such as travel, accommodation and insurance. As a consequence, Channel Five has commissioned very few *new* programmes that have been filmed abroad during our study period.

The wildlife programmes on Channel Five are largely old Anglia TV *Survival* programmes with new music and a new commentary updating information about the species' plight or habitat. The original filming of these programmes was carried out anything up to 25 years ago. Rather than commissioning new wildlife programme strands, Channel Five largely obtains its programmes from a wide variety of international distributors: most of these programmes have been broadcast on foreign channels before.

In 1997, Channel Five repeated a series of programmes called *Wideworld*, which were old Anglia and Open University educational programmes which often covered international issues. It went out at 8:30am in that year, and this year it appears that the same series is again being repeated,¹³ only its time slot has moved to 7:00am. If Channel Five considers this to meet its international output requirements, it is questionable what kind of audience, if any, such a series would receive at this early morning screening time.

The chart above reveals the extreme lack of innovation or diversity in Channel Five's international factual programming. It could be suggested that the acceptance of such a low standard is another indication that the overall currency for international factual programming across the terrestrial channels has decreased.

¹³ The Channel Five information service confirmed that the Channel only has the rights to Series 1 of *Wideworld*.

Popularity of Documentaries on Developing Countries

One of the main arguments advanced by broadcasters about why there are not more factual programmes about the developing world is that they are not popular with viewers. There has been little or no research to support this widely-held view, yet this view has contributed to justifying large budgetary cuts in international filming over the past decade. 3WE has never posited that documentaries about developing country issues attract very large audiences, and it does not attempt to make that claim here. However, it is worth defending that there remains a substantial viewer interest in this type of programming.

It is widely accepted that audience research is one of the more intangible and difficult areas to study. This is because a great many factors can have an influence on television viewing. These can include: what a given programme is slotted against; an individual's own tastes and mood at the time of viewing; how much of a given subject matter has been in the media generally; viewing expectations of broadcasters; how well a programme has been advertised and followed-up; schedules of programmes, and social viewing habits relating to socio-economics and culture. There clearly is a need for rigorous audience research in the area of international factual programming – third party, objective research that takes these many factors into account.

3WE has not undertaken such research here. Instead, international documentary strands which existed or had an equivalent counterpart at the start of the decade have been broadly looked at. In doing so, we have consulted not only ratings figures, but also programme makers and programme support material personnel to get a rounded sense of audience response to given programmes. This qualitative research set out to investigate whether overall the popularity of such programmes has increased, decreased, or remained the same over the past ten years.

Information on ratings has been retrieved from the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (BARB)'s published findings. BARB makes use of a distinction which we follow here: *consolidated* audience figures denote the number of viewers who watched the programme at the time it went to air, as well as including those viewers who recorded the programme and watched it at a later time.

Analysis of Selected Programmes

Special note should be made of three documentaries in 1999 of BBC1's *Comic Relief's Great Big Excellent African Adventure*. These programmes led up to Red Nose Day and an entire evening of fund-raising and comedy, interspersed with short documentary reports from African countries and the UK. In 1999, the *African Adventure* programmes were watched by approximately 4 million

viewers. *Comic Relief's Red Nose Day* attracted its best ever fund-raising response from viewers this year.

On BBC1, highlights from 1998-99 also included several episodes of *Panorama*, including: *Valley of the Dead*, filmed in Kosovo, with a consolidated audience of 2.9 million; *Death to America*, about the alleged Osama bin Laden terrorist attacks, with a 2.4 million audience; *In Search of Cynthia Mthebe*, Fergal Keane's hosted revisit to South Africa, with a 3.3 million consolidated audience; and *When Good Men do Nothing*, about the international response to the Rwandan genocide, which received a 2.6 million consolidated audience. A *Panorama* source cited several reasons why the number of programmes filmed overseas has decreased since the start of the decade: low audiences for these types of programmes, budgetary reductions, and a lack of personal interest in developing country issues on the part of the show's investigative reporters. While these figures may be low for BBC1's expectations, the audience figures presented here suggest that millions of Britons continue to be interested in these programmes.

BBC1's *The Burning East* series, about environmental destruction and corruption in Indonesia, received audiences between 3 and 5.9 million for those episodes shown during peak-time. *Violent Planet's Inferno*, which explored fire's effect on ecosystems, received 5.6 million. *Born to Be Wild*, in which one episode featured a leading comedian at Lake Victoria in Africa, bringing Wildlife issues to British viewers in an innovative way, received a 9.6 million audience.

On BBC2, those programmes which captured a generous number of viewers included the *Earth Story* series, which explored environmental history with the aid of impressive graphics and received between 2.7 and 3 million viewers. *Great Railway Journeys*, which combined a well-known British figure with history and travel, received between 2 and 3.4 million viewers. Two episodes of the *Timewatch* strand which filmed overseas received between 2.6 and 2.7 million viewers. A source from *Great Railway Journeys* said that less time is spent on programme development and follow-up now than at the start of the decade. It was also noted that travel programmes generally have smaller budgets, and therefore find it harder to remain independent of the willing sponsorship from the travel industry itself, which could account for the proliferation of 'holiday' as opposed to 'adventure' travel programmes. The once-dedicated *Great Railway Journeys* staff has dispersed into the freelance production world, which has also had an effects on the ethos of the production teams.

BBC2's *Correspondent* programmes which covered stories from the developing world did not do as well in ratings this past year, generally holding between 5 and 8% audience share. A *Correspondent* source once again cited budgetary reasons for the reduction in international filming. More human interest and personal stories will get commissioned today than previously, but this is simply an evolution in new ways of reaching viewers. The early Saturday evening slot was seen as both a possible deterrent and benefit for its viewer base: while the show might benefit from a mid-week, mid-evening slot, at the same time its 'graveyard'

time (as early Saturday evening is known) means that those interested viewers have little option for similar programming and will tune into *Correspondent*.

BBC2's *The Death of Yugoslavia*, which we did not count in our study because it was a revised repeat, nonetheless is worthy of mention here because it received a 1.9 million consolidated audience despite going out late on a Saturday evening. Its popularity was seen as timely because of the conflict in Kosovo at the time.

On Channel Four, *Cave Mummies of the Canaries* in *The Mystery of the Mummies* strand, and *Return to the Valley of the Kings* in the *To the Ends of the Earth* strand, both received 2.9 million viewers. *Films of Fire's Face of Debt* received 10,475 calls to a helpline set up after the airing of the programme. Channel Four's *Bloody Balkans* series of programmes, which gave invaluable insight and context to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, received fairly poor ratings. On the other hand, Tim Gardam, Channel Four director of programmes, has stated that *Divorce Iranian Style* in the *True Stories* strand did very well with 1.5 million viewers despite the handicap of subtitles, given that the expectation was for only 800,000.

The Disasters Emergency Committee, an organisation which puts forth concentrated public appeals in times of disasters or emergencies on behalf of Britain's aid agencies, reported that it received its best financial response ever this year: £53 million for its Kosovo appeal. With the proliferation of Balkans analysis in both news, current affairs and documentaries such as *Bloody Balkans*, the British public could be said to have been relatively well informed of the conflict.

ITV's *The Timor Conspiracy*, shown off-peak at 10:40pm in January of 1999, received 1.6 million viewers. A phone-in line set up to receive calls after the transmission of the programme was jammed with incoming calls and crashed. In August of this year, John Pilger's *Welcome to Australia* was aired, delving into the role played by Australia's Aborigines in that country's sport successes. Going out at 10pm, this programme received 4.2 million viewers. An on-line chat website after the transmission of the programme is also reported to have received a strong response.

Conclusions

There are many complex factors which account for the dwindling international programming that has been noted over the decade. These include but are not limited to diminishing budgets for programmes. At the same time, rapid technology innovations allow foreign images to be quickly and cheaply transmitted, a benefit which has resulted in less in-depth analysis. Production culture has also changed: staff are more likely to freelance and move between programmes today than they were in 1989, resulting in less commitment to any one strand. The advent of interactive television and the convergence of internet,

radio and television media has seen budget allocations towards investing in this infrastructure; undoubtedly one of the first areas to cut funding from is international filming, which is costly and time-consuming to produce.

As a research tool audience ratings are often criticised because they do not take into account less tangible reasons for television viewing. This argument claims that a programme watched by a smaller number of people may have a great impact. The qualitative exercise undertaken here provides evidence that despite the widely held belief, documentaries about developing countries continue to be popular with viewers when done in creative and fresh ways. This would suggest that the justification for budgetary cuts in this area because 'British audiences are not interested' is inadequate. The exercise above is both selective and limited. It does, however, draw out some significant facts which argue a need for more sophisticated, in-depth research into not only ratings, but also the wider impact of documentaries about developing countries.



Losing Perspective: Global Affairs on British Terrestrial Television 1989-1999 is the latest in a series of research reports published by the Third World & Environment Broadcasting Project (3WE). 3WE was first established in 1989 by a consortium of Britain's leading voluntary organisations concerned with international development, environment and human rights issues. The 3WE Board of Management includes representatives from ActionAid, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), Oxfam, Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB), Save the Children Fund, UNA-UK, UNICEF-UK, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). 3WE works for sustained, imaginative and fair media coverage of developing countries, their people and the environment in which they live.



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