



# GETTING THE **FULL** PICTURE

The complementary roles of television news, current affairs and documentary programmes on the coverage of international issues.

*by Jane Hardstaff*



**THIRD WORLD AND  
ENVIRONMENT  
BROADCASTING  
PROJECT**

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**GETTING THE FULL PICTURE**

**THE COMPLEMENTARY ROLES OF TELEVISION NEWS,  
CURRENT AFFAIRS AND DOCUMENTARY PROGRAMMES ON THE  
COVERAGE OF INTERNATIONAL ISSUES**

**A Report By**

**Jane Hardstaff**

**With Introduction By Amanda Bennett**

**Report No. 2 of the**

**Third World and Environment Broadcasting Project**

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The Third World and Environment Broadcasting Project was set up following a meeting of voluntary agencies in February 1989 to discuss a common response to the Government White Paper on Broadcasting. There was consensus that these plans represented a major threat to the sustained and in-depth coverage of international issues on television, and could lead to a British public poorly informed on vital issues that affect the future of the planet. The project, which has been entirely funded by voluntary organisations, has the backing of 50 national agencies:

- ActionAid
- Acord
- Anti-Slavery Society
- Band Aid
- British Refugee Council
- \*CAFOD**
  - Catholic Institute for International Relations
  - Centre for Multi-Cultural Education
  - Centre for World Development Education
- \*Christian Aid**
  - Commonwealth Secretariat
  - Cooperation and Development
  - Council for Education on World Citizenship
- \*Comic Relief**
  - 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
  - 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
- Voluntary Service Overseas
- War on Want
- Water Aid
- \*World Development Movement
- World University Service
- \*Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF)

Agencies starred have been represented on the Project's Board of Management.

For further information, please write to: International Broadcasting Trust, 2 Ferdinand Place, London NW1 8EE.

## INTRODUCTION

### The Future of Documentaries

This publication was commissioned by leading Third World and environment agencies in Britain. The research coincided with the passage of the broadcasting bill through Parliament, and the conclusions have been at the foundation of many of the arguments used during the intense debate, to illustrate the central role that documentaries play in raising public awareness.

Strong support was expressed on all sides, particularly in the House of Lords, for the need for documentaries covering both national and international issues to have a guaranteed place in the future schedules of both the ITV and BBC television networks. Though the battle was narrowly lost to have this obligation placed on the ITV companies in the legislation, the high esteem that such programming is held in was clearly illustrated.

The Broadcasting Act 1990 is now on the statute book and we are entering a period of radical change with a highly competitive financial future ahead for the television industry. The new Channel 3 (ITC) licenses, won by competitive tender, will be in operation from January 1993; Channel 4 must try to maintain its special remit whilst now having to rely on selling its own advertising space; the BBC's Royal Charter is up for renewal in 1996 which may spell the end of the licence fee; and the recent merger to form BSkyB means that satellite now poses a real threat to the traditional terrestrial channels.

Broadcasting is at a crossroads. Those on the outside who value the quality and impact of British television should be involved in preserving what is good, and supporting and participating in new developments to improve what is already on offer.

The Independent Television Commission's (ITC) illustrative guidelines for Channel 3 applicants (at present in draft form only) have now been published. The document clearly states that all licensees will be expected to offer a diverse range of programmes that reflect the existing categories of programmes available at present including news, current affairs and documentaries.

However in the case of documentaries this commitment is not backed up by any statutory obligation on companies. So as the financial squeeze bites, documentaries on international issues may be vulnerable to cut backs. Nor does the ITC have any power to influence the scheduling decisions of the new licencess. Therefore we are likely to see the continuation of the existing trend, clearly shown in the figures in Part 4 below, to move documentaries to less popular times.

Effective monitoring is essential and future developments in broadcasting demand some commitment from those who value the importance of television, and necessitate some strategic thinking. Third World and environment agencies must continue to stress, to both broadcasters and the ITC, how important it is to the success of their work that the current quality and level of documentary programming is maintained.

The ITC will be involving interested parties in consultation about future developments and the agencies need to make sure that they take an active part in this, and in the debate about the future role and financing of the BBC.

The advent of the 25% quota for independent production will have far reaching effects. Opportunities will open up for agencies to get more directly involved in programme production themselves as producers and sponsors, and raises the question whether charitable monies should be used for broadcast purposes. No longer will organisations be in touch with a limited number of broadcasters from the BBC or ITV, but with a host of independent producers needing help, money and ideas. How will an agency deal with these requests?

The figures in this report highlight the limited perspective of existing news programming in terms of the issues and geographical areas covered. There are now possibilities for agencies to be directly involved in the independent production of international news items. This could mean influencing the general news agenda to move away from the preponderance of conflict and war stories and the limited coverage of issues affecting the South.



This report, and the wealth of programming behind the hard figures, gives one clear reason why television in this country is so respected internationally. Much of this could be lost in the future and everything possible must be done to defend its existence. At the same time Third World and environment agencies need to look at new opportunities, to look creatively at how messages can be got across through all genres of programming whether 'factual', 'educational' or 'entertaining', and strategically to see how they can effect the television agenda both as individual organisations and collaboratively as an important pressure group and resource.

Amanda Bennett

Director, Third World and Environment Broadcasting  
Project

December 1990.

## SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research examined factual programming on the four national, terrestrial TV channels; BBC1, BBC2, ITV and Channel 4. Three forms of programming were looked at - news, current affairs and documentaries. The research compared coverage of international issues during September 1987 to August 1988 researched for the Project's previous report (Losing The Picture, published in January 1990) with the most recent year - September 1989 to August 1990. Coverage of continents and individual countries was divided into two broad categories; "the North" (industrialised countries located mainly in the Northern hemisphere, but with some exceptions - Australia, for example) and "the South" (developing countries located in the Southern hemisphere). The research findings (set out below with the help of tables to illustrate key points) give the following conclusions;

- \* Considerably more time on all channels was devoted to documentaries than to current affairs, making documentary programming the most significant contributor to in-depth factual coverage of global issues. During 1989-90 documentaries totalled 1015.3 hours compared with 68.7 hours of current affairs programmes.
- \* Documentaries covered a substantially broader range of international issues than news and current affairs. Over 90% of documentary programming during both years examined was devoted to "non-conflict" issues (the environment, wildlife, arts, religion, anthropology, development, human rights, history and so on). 60% of news coverage was devoted to stories about war and conflict (international and civil war, terrorism, crime and civil unrest). Current affairs programming, like news, devoted the greater proportion of its coverage - 59% - to stories about war and conflict.

- \* News coverage does not reflect the increase in public and political awareness of global environment issues over the past two years. 1.2% of international news coverage during 1987-88 was devoted to the environment, with only a slight increase to 1.3% during 1989-90. Documentaries devoted significantly more time to environment issues: 5.4% during 1987-88 rising to 8.2% during 1989-90.
- \* Differences between news and documentary perspectives are even more marked in coverage of the South. Nearly two thirds of news coverage of the South is devoted to war and conflict stories. Over 90% of documentary programming on the South is devoted to non-conflict issues.
- \* Documentaries cover quite different parts of the world from news and current affairs. Nearly two thirds of news coverage of the South during 1989-90 was devoted to a cluster of only six countries. A similar two thirds of documentary coverage was devoted to a range of thirty five different countries.
- \* During 1987-88 ITV's peak time documentary coverage of the South was greater than coverage on BBC1; ITV 11 hours, BBC1 5 hours. However, during 1989-90 ITV's peak time coverage slipped to 8 hours while BBC1's coverage rose to 22 hours. ITV's peak time programming is important as it is able to reach a much larger and different audience than other channels.

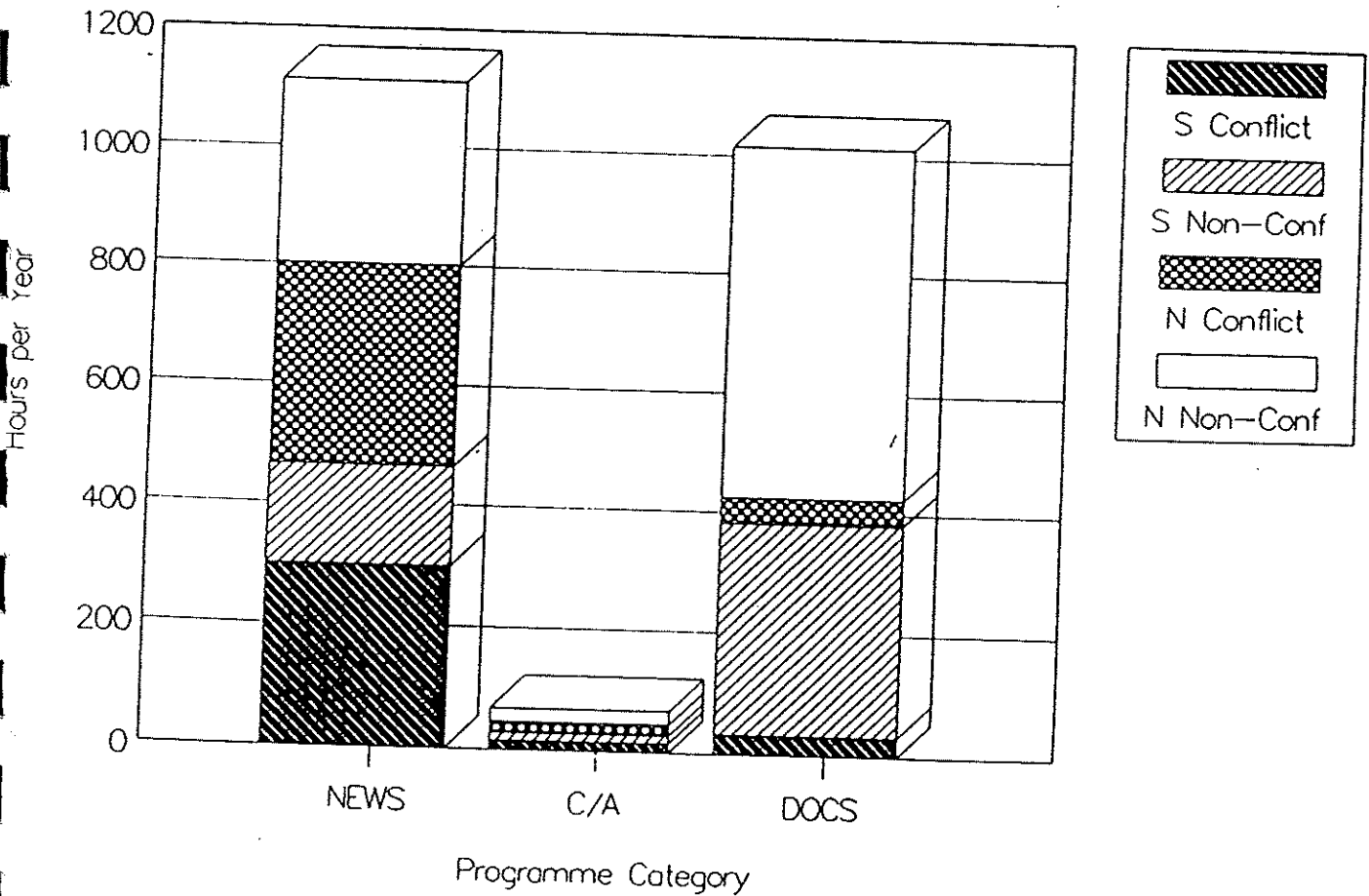
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**PART ONE: PROGRAMME HOURS PER YEAR**

Table 1 shows the total time (in hours) devoted to news, current affairs and documentary coverage of international issues during 1989-90. The distribution of programme time between issues of conflict and non-conflict in both the North and South is shown to give a broad indication of the very different perspectives on world events achieved by news and documentaries.

**Table 1 Hours Per Year of Factual Programmes on International Issues 1989-90.**



## Conclusions

- \* The total amount of time allocated to international issues by current affairs programmes was just a fraction of the time given to the same coverage by news and documentary programmes. (News 1112.3 hours, current affairs 40.9 hours, and documentaries 1015.3 hours in 1989-90).
- \* News coverage of both North and South was dominated by stories about war and conflict. Conflict issues accounted for over two thirds of coverage of the South in 1989-90. Over half of Northern coverage was devoted to conflict issues.
- \* Conflict issues were given a low profile by documentary programmes. Conflict issues accounted for less than 10% of documentary coverage of both North and South in 1989-90.
- \* Documentaries devoted a substantial amount of time to coverage of non-conflict issues (the environment, wildlife, history, arts, religion, development, human rights, culture and anthropology). Over 90% of coverage of both North and South during 1989-90 was devoted to a range of non-conflict issues.

## PART TWO: INTERNATIONAL COVERAGE BY ISSUE

Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 show factual programmes categorised according to issue. Coverage is divided into six broad categories;

- **Conflict**, comprising international and civil war, global security, terrorism, crime and civil unrest.
- **Disasters**.
- **Political**, comprising elections, political change, poverty, development and human rights, political history, diplomatic relations and commerce.
- **Environment**.
- **Arts, Culture and Religion**.
- **Non Political**, comprising science, medicine and health, technology, wildlife, adventure and human interest.

Table 2 Issue Spread, North 1987-88

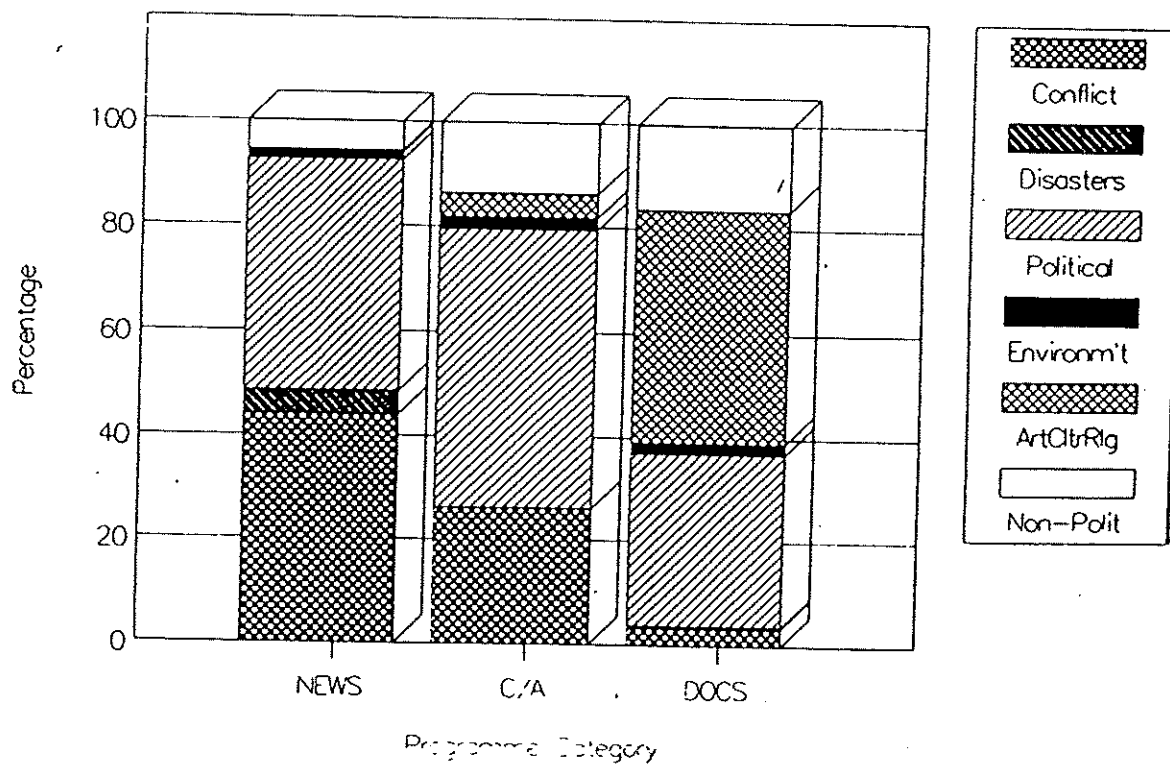
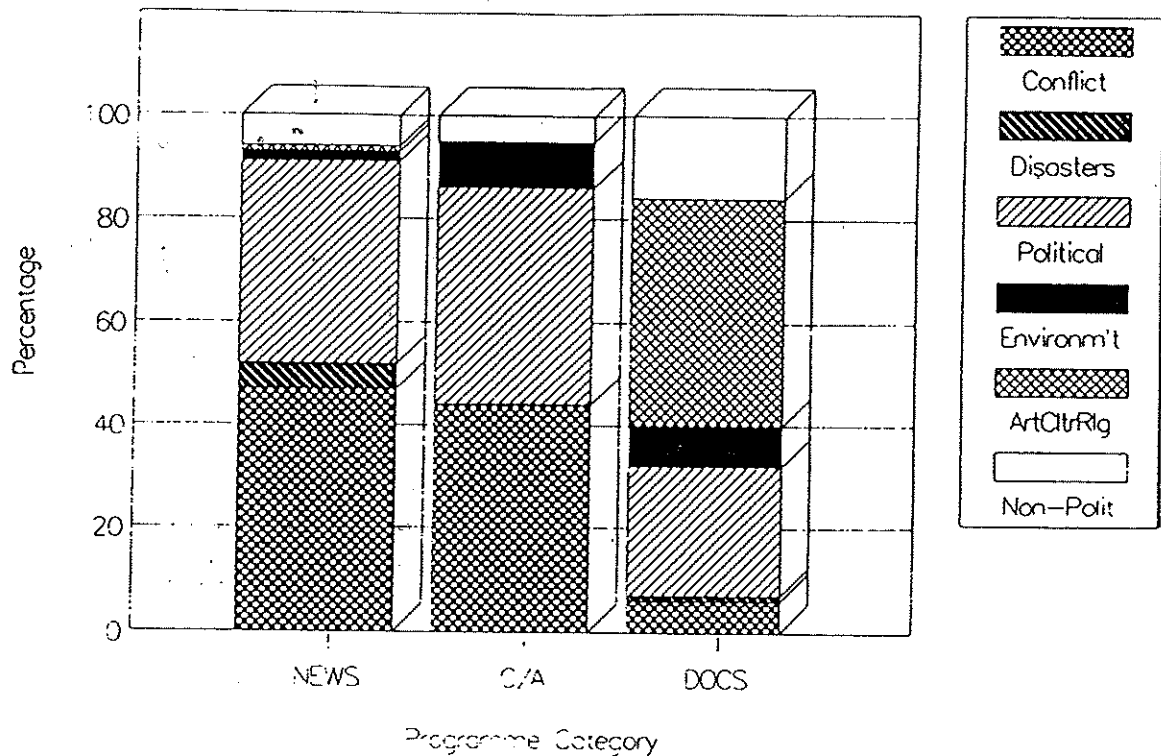


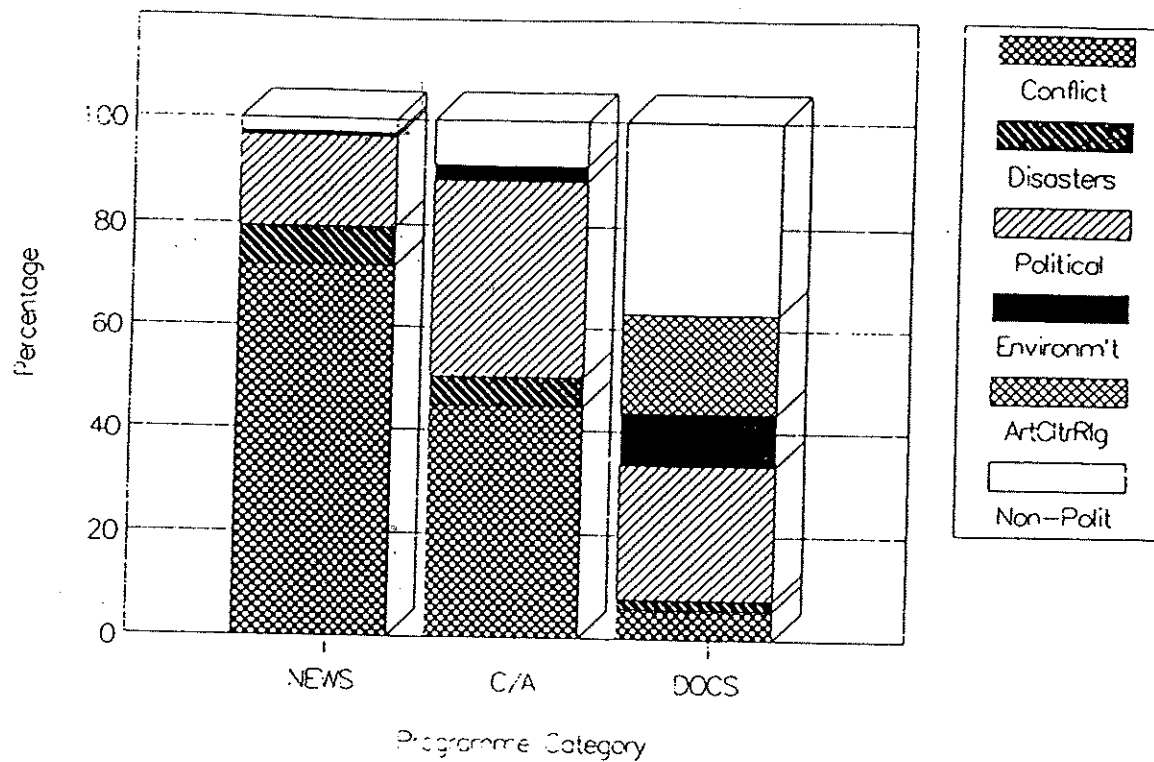
Table 3 Issue Spread, North 1989-90



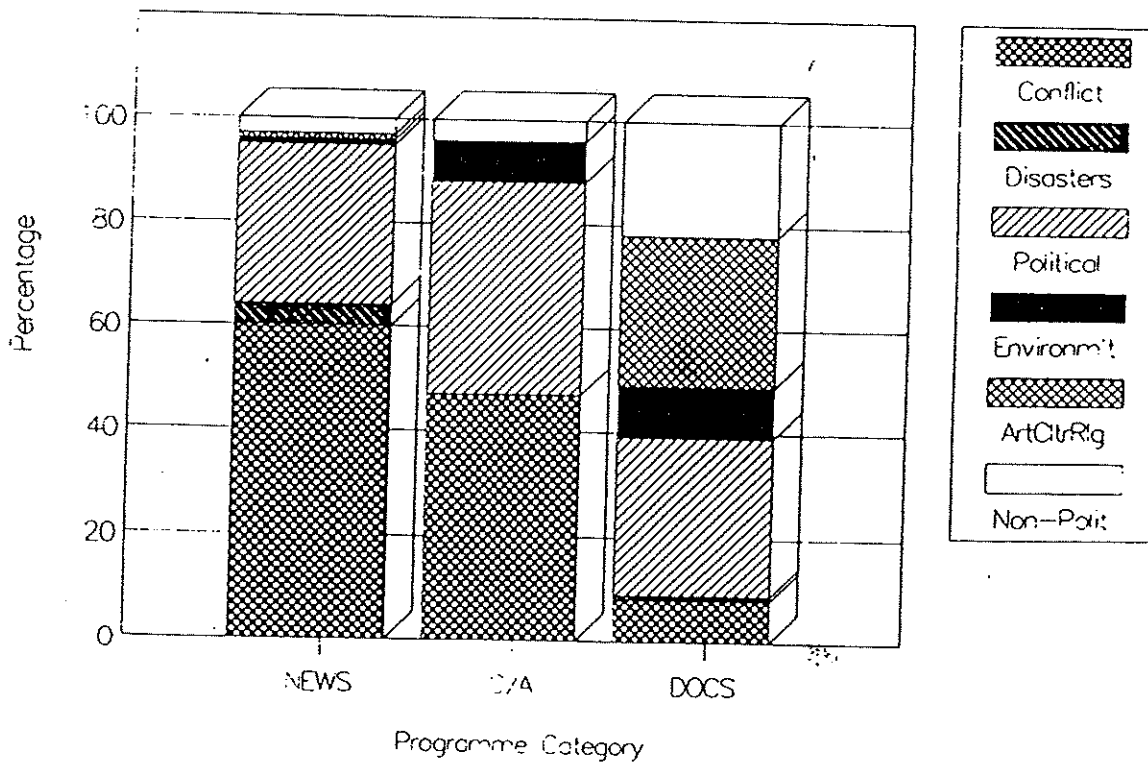
**Conclusions: North**

- \* Almost half of news coverage of the North was devoted to stories about conflict in both 1987-88 and 1989-90 (44% in 1987-88 and 47% in 1989-90).
- \* Documentary coverage devoted a comparable amount of time to the arts, culture and religion (44.5% in 1987-88 and 44% in 1989-90).
- \* News coverage does not reflect the increase in public and political awareness of global environment issues over the past two years. Only 2% of international coverage during 1989-90 was devoted to the environment. Documentaries devoted significantly more time to environment issues: 8% during 1989-90. Current affairs coverage of the global environment was higher (9% in 1989-90) but the total programme time given to current affairs was a fraction of that given to news and documentaries (see Table 1).

**Table 4 Issue Spread, South 1987-88**



**Table 5 Issue Spread, South 1989-90**





### Conclusions: South

- \* News coverage of the South focused predominantly on conflict stories (71.9% in 1987-88 and 60% in 1989-90).
- \* Documentaries devoted comparatively little time to conflict issues. During both years, over half of documentary coverage was of arts/culture/religion and non-political issues (which included programmes on wildlife, health and science).
- \* Environment issues in the South were given a low profile in news coverage (1% in 1989-90), compared to Documentary coverage (10% in 1989-90).

### PART THREE: INTERNATIONAL COVERAGE BY LOCATION

Tables 6 and 7 show factual programmes categorised according to continent. The five continents are broadly arranged according to the physical geography of a world map.

Table 6      Continent spread, 1987-88 (see overleaf)

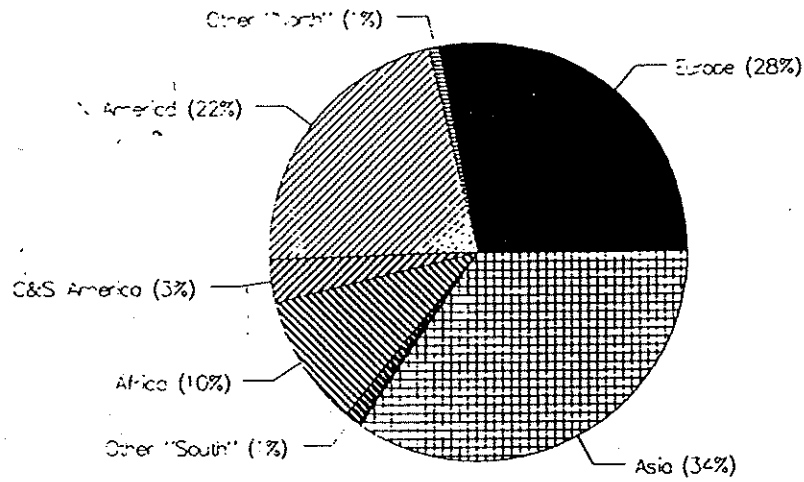
Table 7      Continent spread, 1989-90 (see overleaf)

#### Conclusions

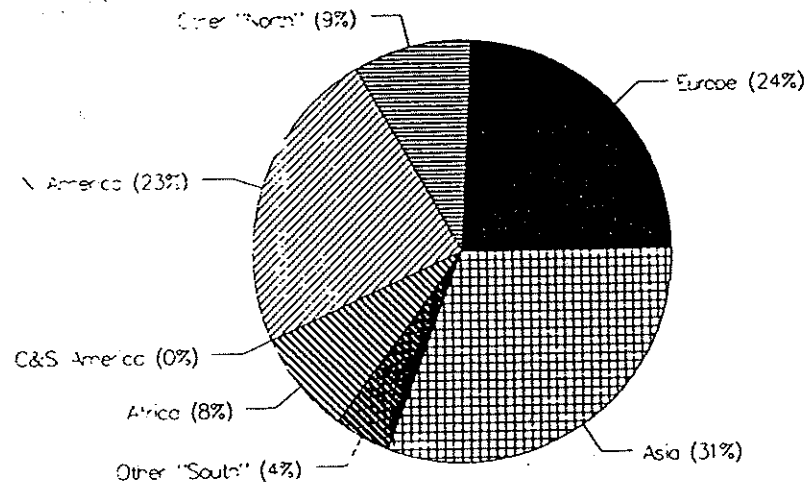
- \* There was a more even distribution of coverage among continents in the documentary category during both years.
  
- \* News and current affairs coverage was dominated by three continents; Europe, North America and Asia, with little or no coverage of Central and South America.

Table 6 Continent Spread, 1987-88

**NEWS**



**CURRENT AFFAIRS**



**DOCUMENTARIES**

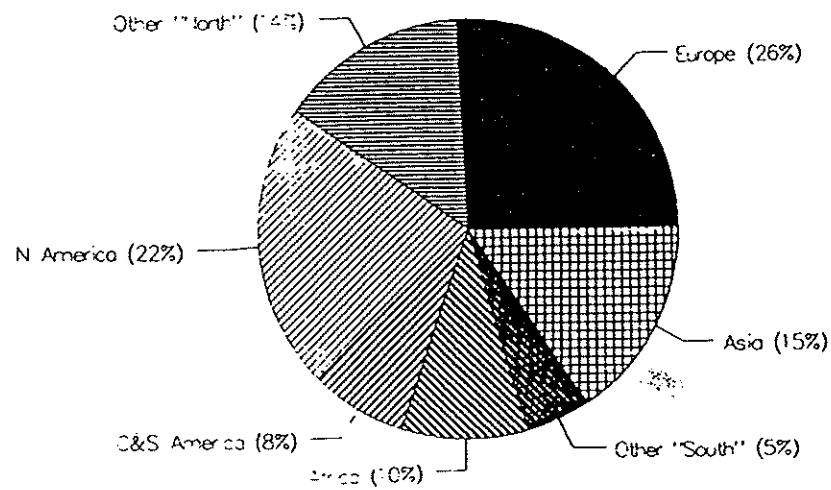
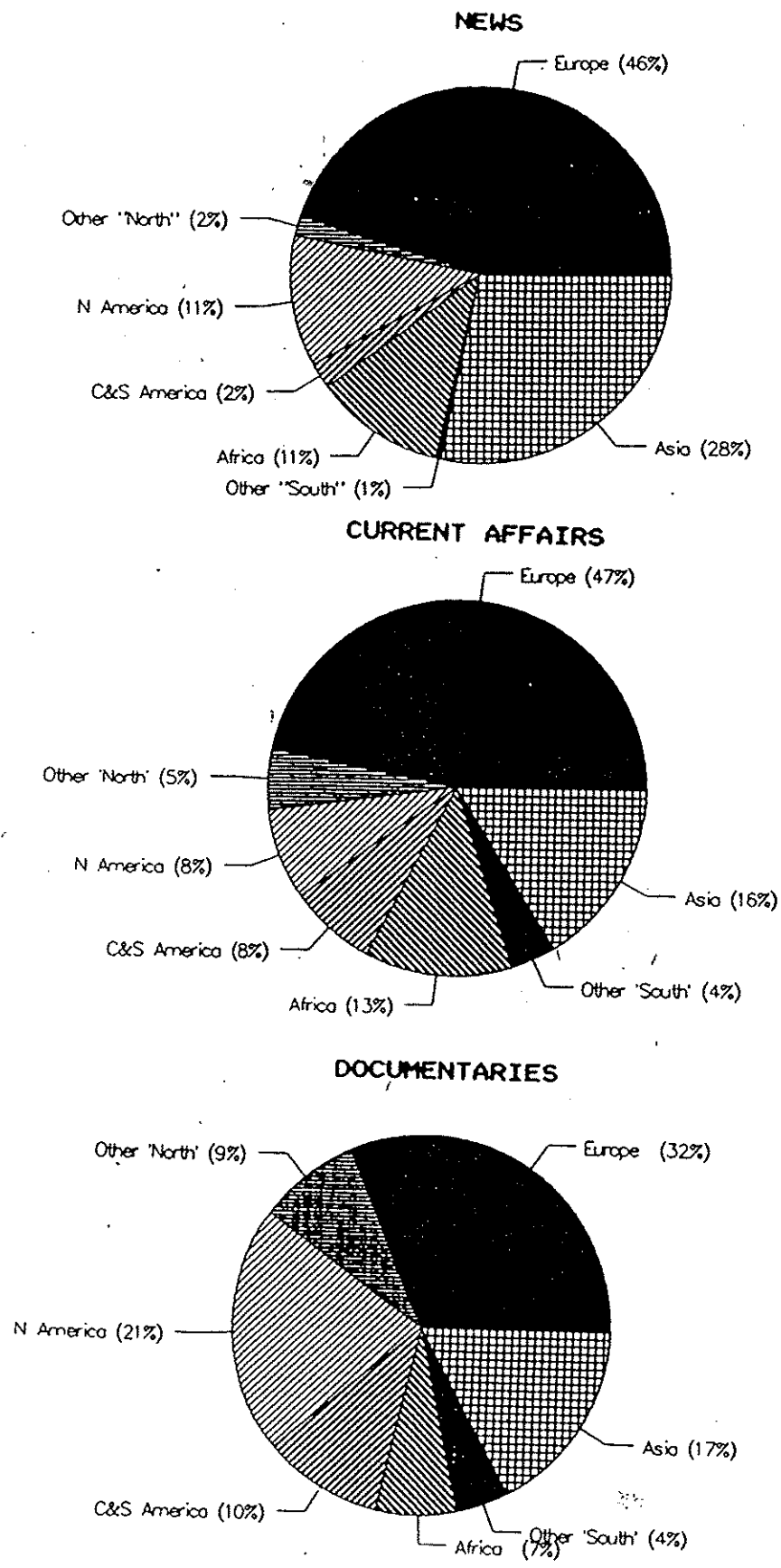


Table 7 Continent spread, 1989-90



Tables 8, 9, 10 and 11, show factual programmes categorised according to continent. Countries are indicated where they received a significant amount of individual coverage. In the case of documentaries a spread is shown as, unlike news and current affairs, there is no concentration on individual countries .

Table 8 Spread of countries, North, 1987-88.

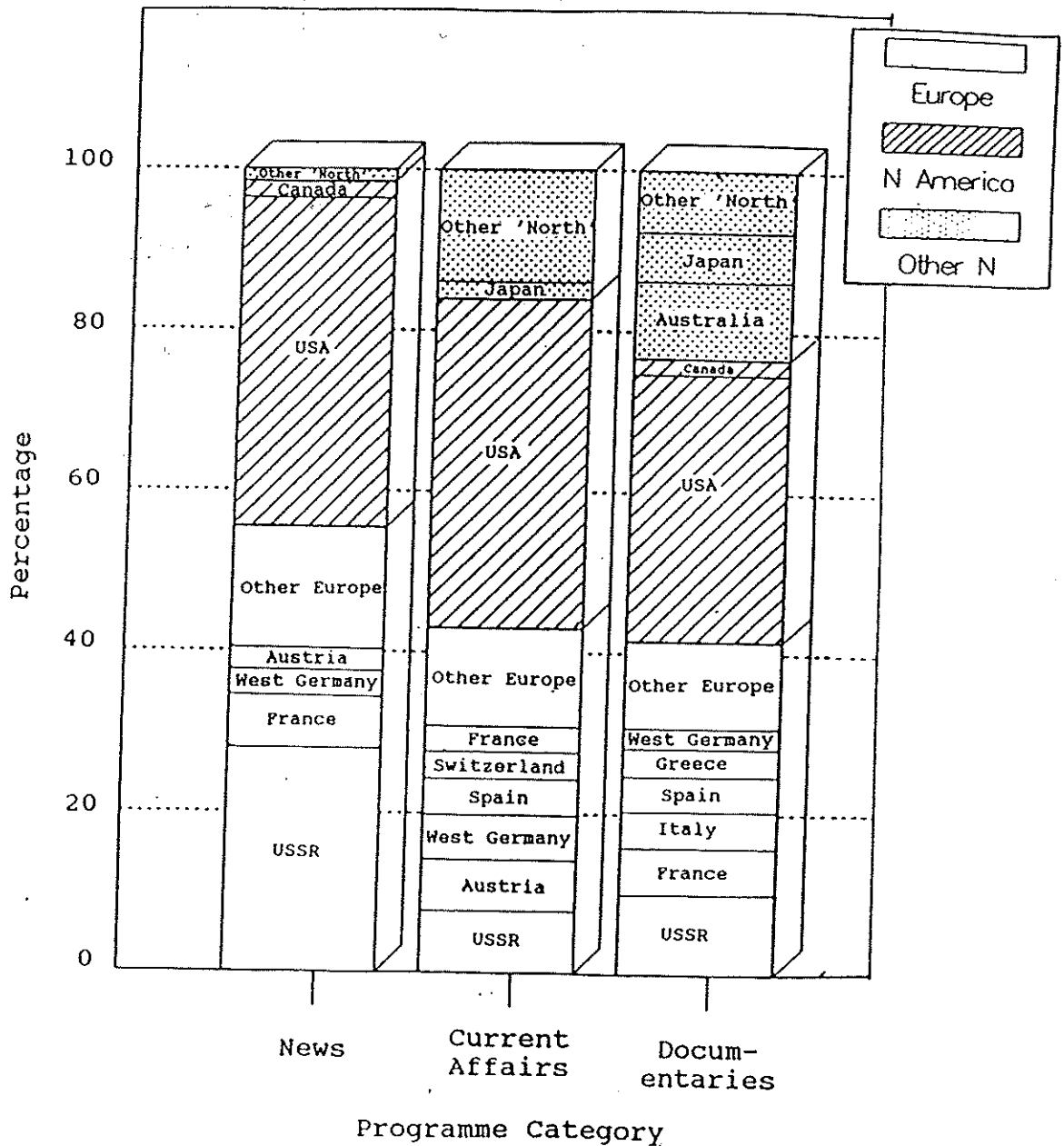
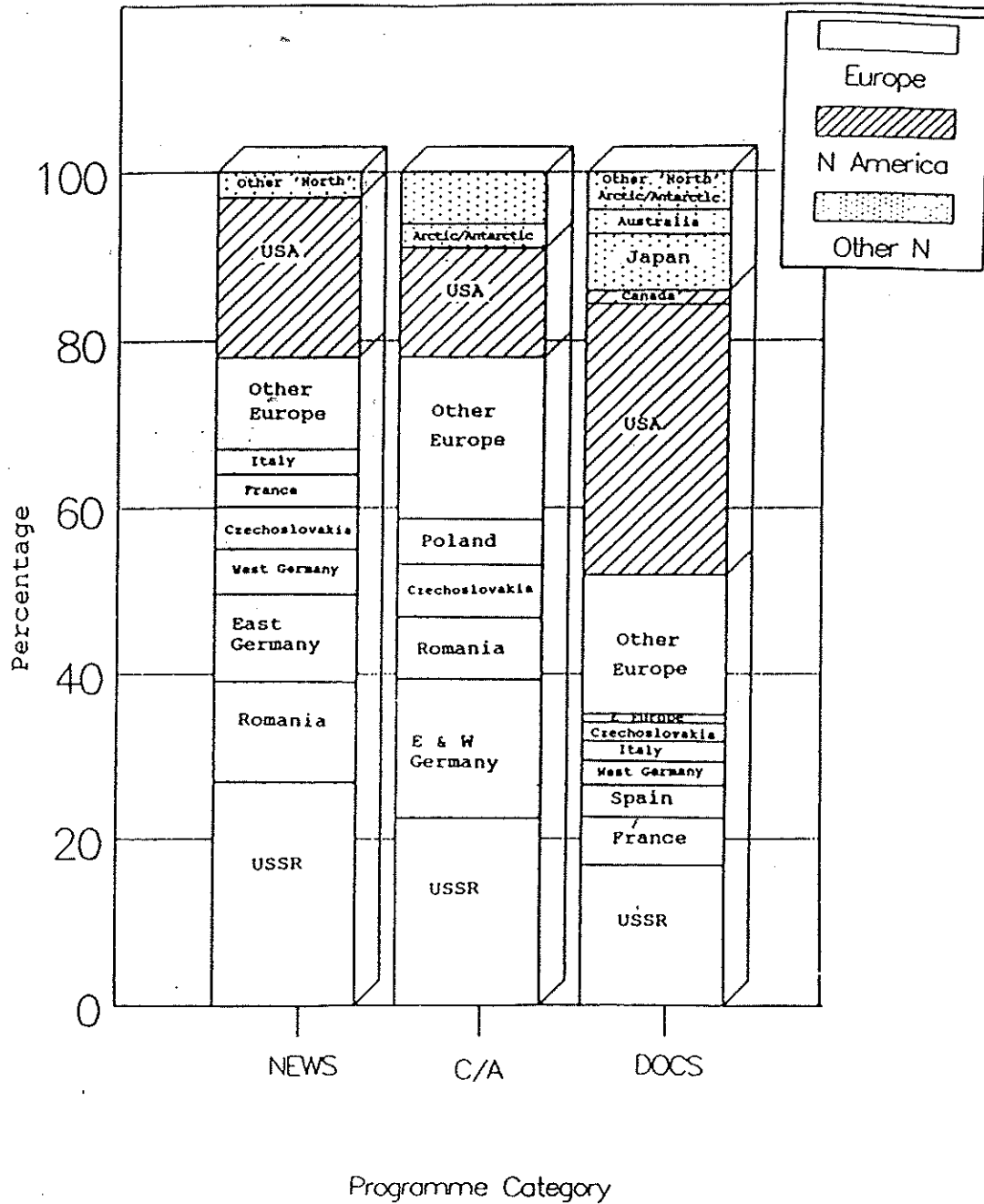


Table 9 Spread of countries, North, 1989-90



## Conclusions

- \* News and current affairs covered a limited range of countries in the North. Over three quarters of Northern news coverage during 1987-88 was devoted to just three countries (USA 40%; USSR 28.6%; France 7.3%). Over half was devoted to three countries during 1989-90 (USSR 27.5%; USA 19%; Romania 12.1%).
- \* Documentaries covered a slightly wider range of countries. Three quarters of Northern documentary coverage during 1987-88 was devoted to 8 countries (USA 33.5%; USSR 10%; Australia 9.3%; Japan 6.2%; France 5.7%; Italy 4.6%; Spain 4.5%; Greece 3.5%). During 1989-90 just under three quarters of Northern documentary coverage was devoted to a spread of 9 countries (USA 30.7%; USSR 16.6%; France 5.7%; Spain 4%; West Germany 3%; Australia 3%; Czechoslovakia 2.2%; Italy 2.1%).

Table 10 Spread of countries, South, 1987-88

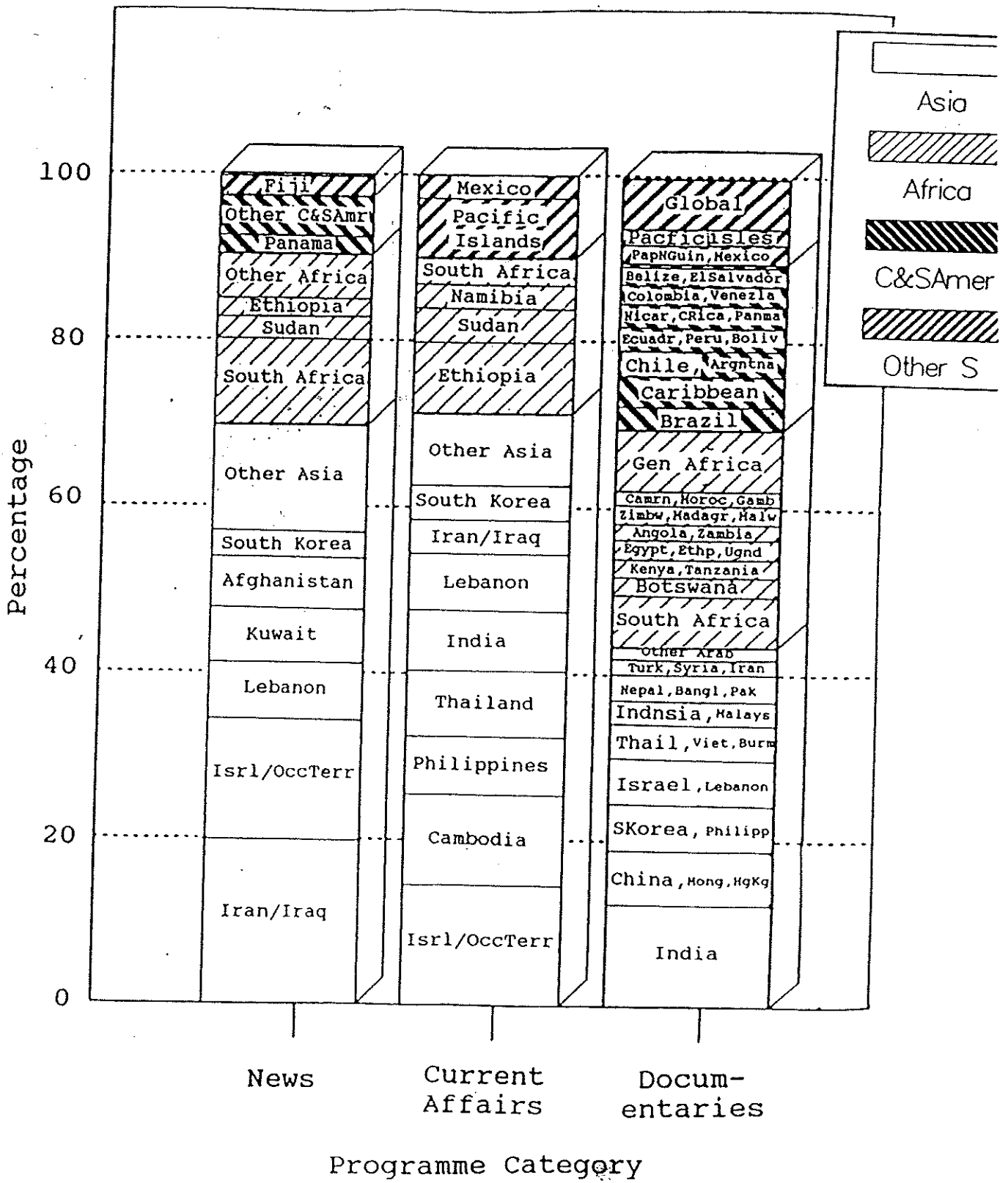
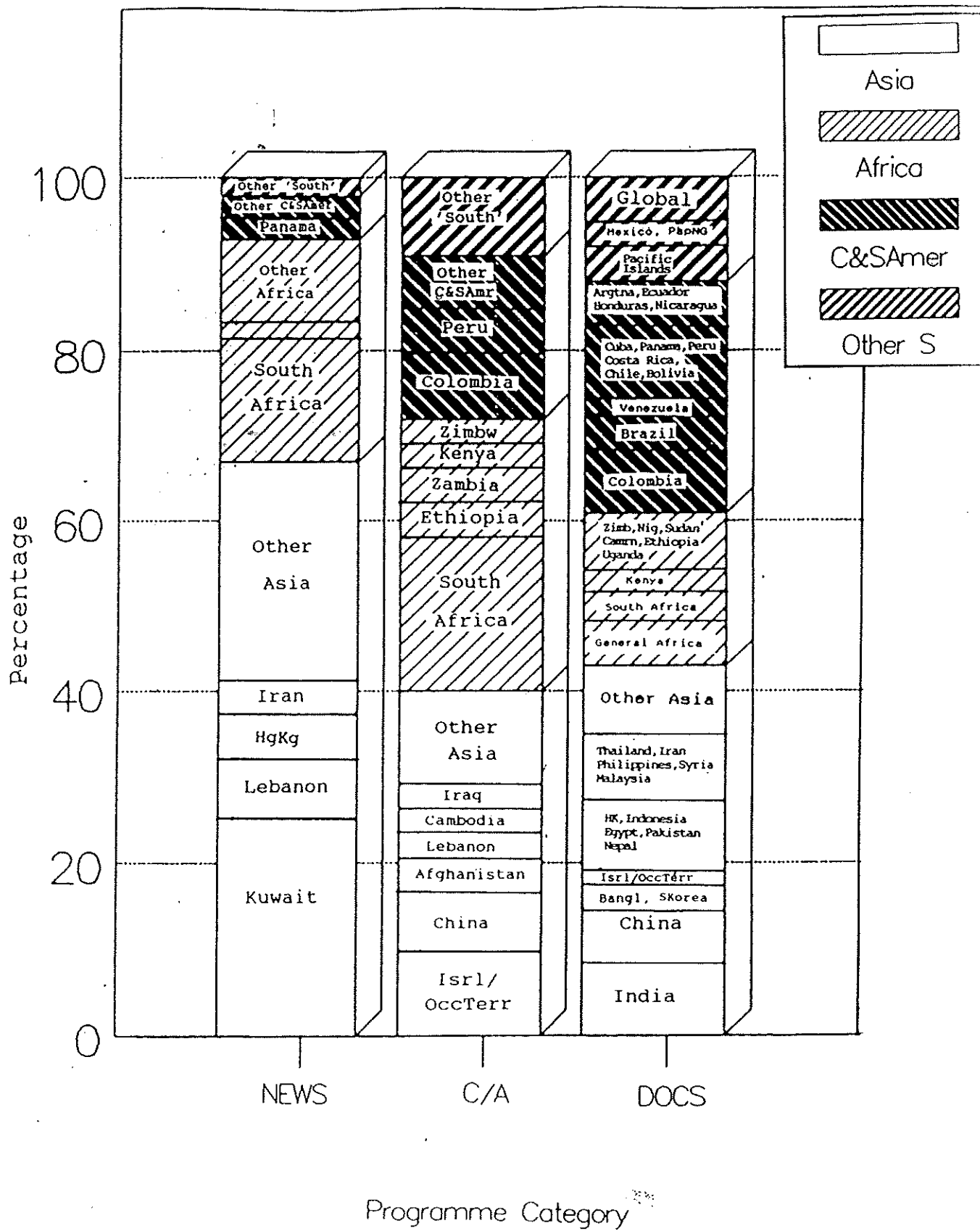




Table 11 Spread of countries, South, 1989-90



## Conclusions

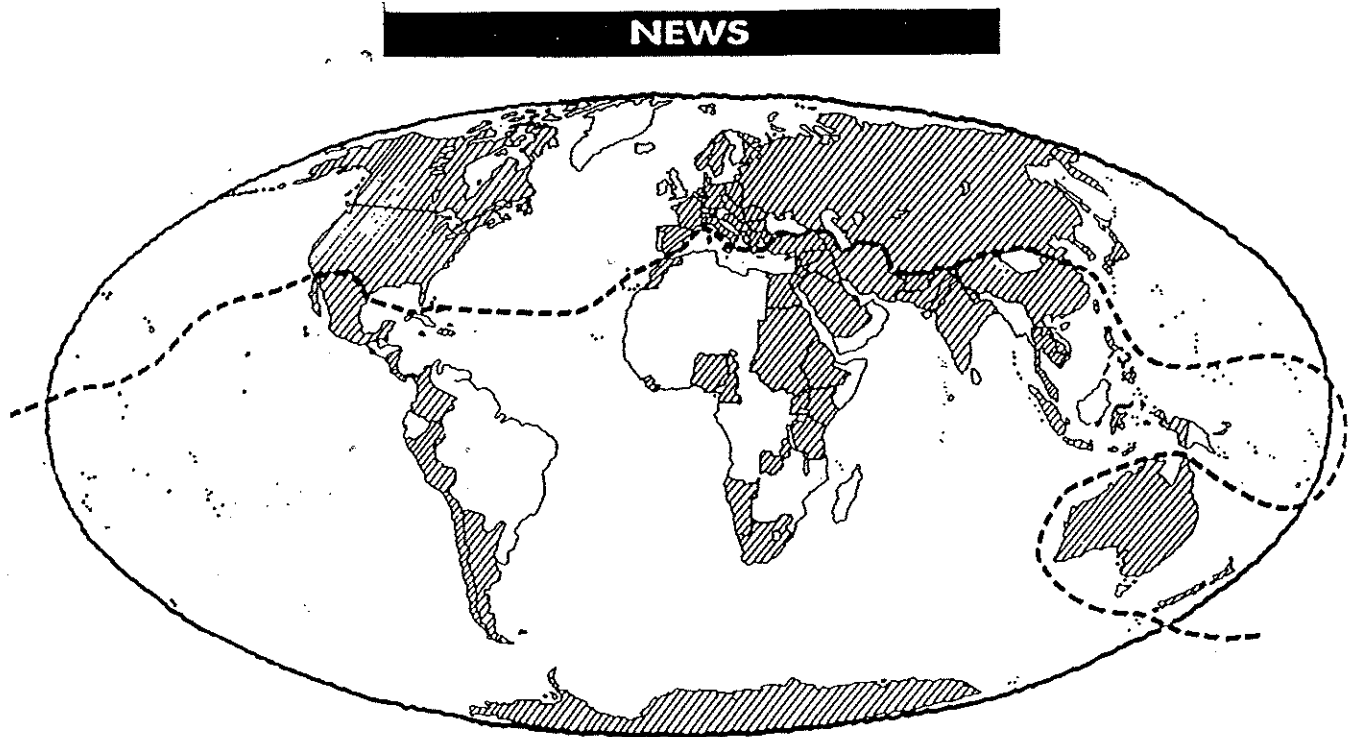
- \* Nearly two thirds of news coverage of the South during both years was devoted to a limited range of countries (Iran/Iraq conflict 19.9%; Israel/Palestine conflict 14.6%; South Africa 10.6%; Lebanon 7%; the Kuwaiti Airlines hijack 6.7%; Afghanistan 4.8% in 1987-88. The Gulf crisis 25.3%; South Africa 19.4%; Lebanon 6.4%; Hong Kong 5.4%; Iran 4%; Panama 2.2% in 1989-90).
- \* Documentaries achieved a much more even spread throughout the South. In addition, documentary coverage of the South included 15 countries given no mention in the news during 1987-88, and 20 countries given no mention during 1989-90.

The range of countries covered in the Southern hemisphere stands in sharp contrast to the limited range covered by news. During 1987-88 documentary coverage of the South included 15 countries given no mention on the news; during 1989-90 documentary coverage included 20 countries again given no mention in the news of that year.

The uneven distribution of news coverage over the three Southern continents (Asia, Africa and Central and South America) is shown by Tables 6 and 7. As Tables 10 and 11 illustrate, a large proportion of news coverage of the South concentrated on a very limited range of countries. From Tables 4 and 5 it is clear that the majority of coverage within this limited range was devoted to war and conflict situations.

Tables 12, 13 etc. give a complete breakdown of this coverage - comparing the number of individual countries covered by news and documentaries. Even without a further analysis of specific events or issues covered within each country, it is evident that news coverage of the South was drawn towards zones of war and conflict, leaving large areas uncovered: particularly in Central and South America. Issues of war and conflict were clearly not a priority of documentary coverage of the South: coverage was distributed more evenly among the three continents, over a much greater range of individual countries.

Table 12 Individual Countries covered by News, 1989-90  
 Shaded areas denote countries given coverage.



NORTH

CANADA  
 USA  
  
 ALBANIA  
 BELGIUM  
 BULGARIA  
 CZECHOSLOVAKIA  
 FRANCE  
 GERMANY  
 GREECE  
 HUNGARY  
 ITALY  
 MALTA  
 NETHERLANDS  
 NORWAY  
 POLAND  
 ROMANIA  
 SPAIN  
 SWEDEN  
 SWITZERLAND  
 USSR  
 YUGOSLAVIA  
  
 ANTARTICA  
 ARCTIC  
 AUSTRALIA  
 JAPAN  
 NEW ZEALAND

SOUTH

ARGENTINA  
 CARIBBEAN  
 CHILE  
 COLOMBIA  
 EL SALVADOR  
 NICARAGUA  
 PANAMA  
 PERU  
  
 MEXICO

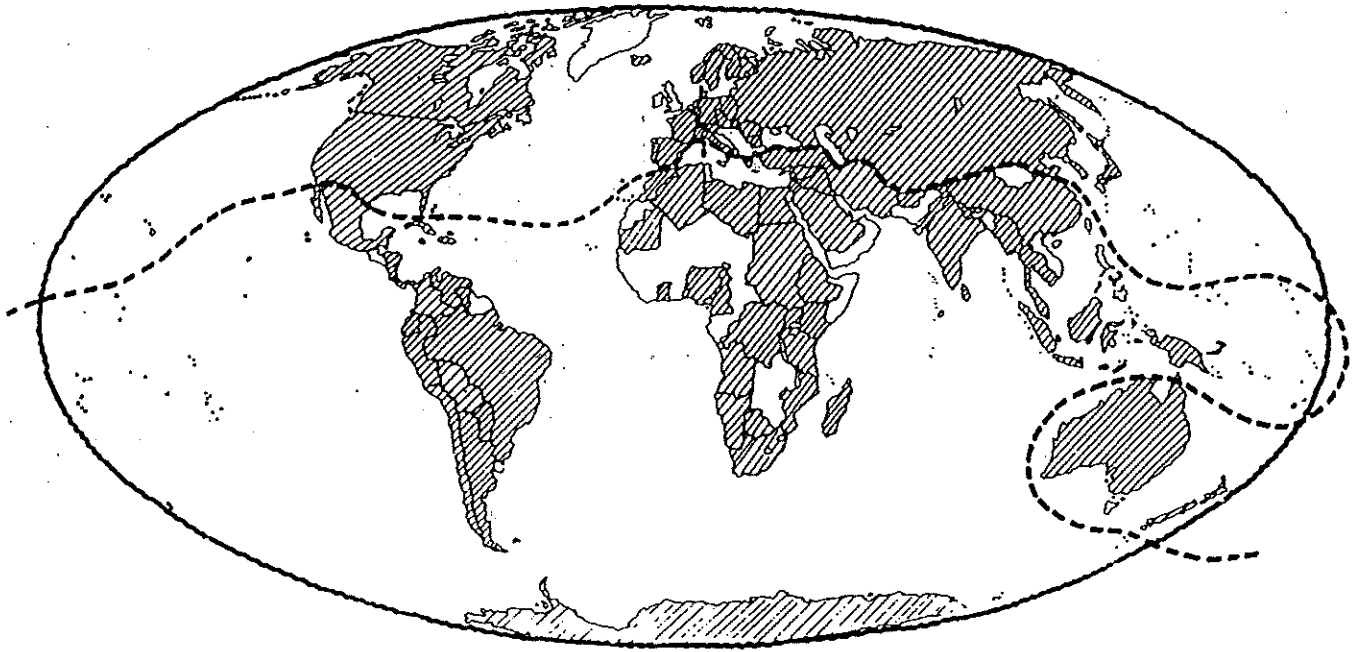
CAMEROON  
 EGYPT  
 ETHIOPIA  
 KENYA  
 LIBERIA  
 MOROCCO  
 NAMIBIA  
 NIGERIA  
 SOUTH AFRICA  
 SUDAN  
 TANZANIA  
 UGANDA  
 ZAMBIA  
 ZIMBABWE

AFGHANISTAN  
 CAMBODIA  
 CHINA  
 CYPRUS  
 HONG KONG  
 INDIA  
 INDONESIA  
 IRAN  
 IRAQ  
 ISRAEL / OCC. TERR.  
 JORDAN  
 KUWAIT  
 LEBANON  
 MALAYSIA  
 NEPAL  
 PAKISTAN  
 PHILIPPINES  
 SAUDI ARABIA  
 SOUTH KOREA  
 SYRIA  
 TAIWAN  
 THAILAND  
 TURKEY  
 VIETNAM

Table 13 Individual Countries covered by Documentaries, 1989-90

Shaded areas denote countries given coverage.

**DOCUMENTARIES**



**NORTH**

CANADA  
USA

AUSTRIA  
BELGIUM  
BULGARIA  
CZECHOSLOVAKIA  
DENMARK  
FINLAND  
FRANCE  
GERMANY  
GREECE  
HUNGARY  
ICELAND  
ITALY  
LEICHTENSTEIN  
NETHERLANDS  
NORWAY  
POLAND  
PORTUGAL  
ROMANIA  
SPAIN  
SWEDEN  
SWITZERLAND  
USSR

ANTARCTICA  
AUSTRALIA  
JAPAN  
NEW ZEALAND

**SOUTH**

ARGENTINA  
BOLIVIA  
BRAZIL  
CARIBBEAN  
CHILE  
COLOMBIA  
COSTA RICA  
ECUADOR  
GUYANA  
HONDURAS  
NICARAGUA  
PANAMA  
PARAGUAY  
PERU  
VENEZUELA

MEXICO

ALGERIA  
ANGOLA  
BOTSWANA  
CAMEROON  
EGYPT  
ETHIOPIA  
GHANA  
KENYA  
LIBYA  
MADAGASCAR  
MAURITANIA  
MAURITIUS  
MOROCCO  
MOZAMBIQUE  
NAMIBIA  
NIGERIA  
SOUTH AFRICA  
SUDAN  
TANZANIA  
UGANDA  
ZAIRE  
ZIMBABWE

AFGHANISTAN  
BHUTAN  
BURMA  
CAMBODIA  
CHINA  
CYPRUS  
HONG KONG  
INDIA  
INDONESIA  
IRAN  
IRAQ  
ISRAEL / OCC. TERR.  
JORDAN  
LEBANON  
MALAYSIA  
MONGOLIA  
NEPAL  
PAKISTAN  
PHILIPPINES  
SAUDI ARABIA  
SRI LANKA  
SYRIA  
TAIWAN  
THAILAND  
TURKEY  
VIETNAM  
YEMEN

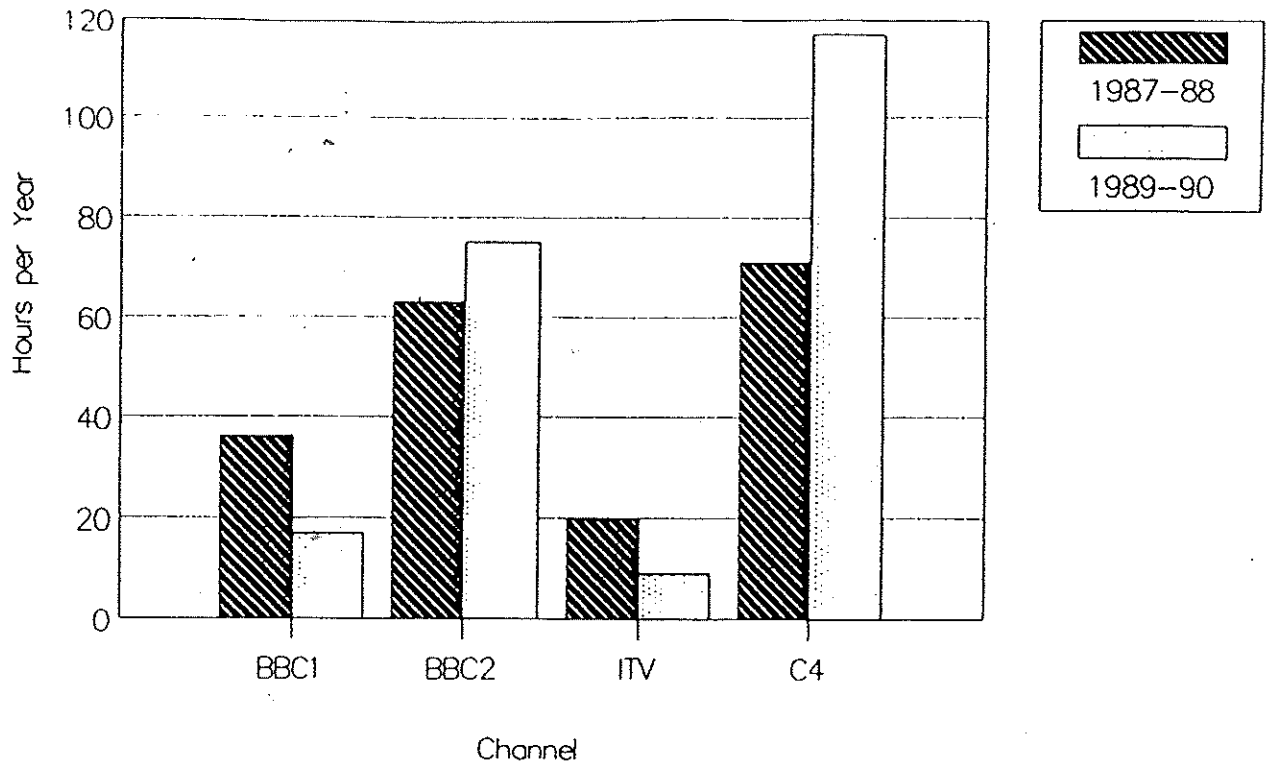
## Conclusions

- \* The most significant difference between the programme categories was their coverage of Central and South America: out of the 20 countries which received documentary but not news coverage during 1989-90, ten were from Central and South America.
- \* News coverage focused on areas of war and conflict, limiting the range of countries and distribution of coverage amongst the three continents. Documentaries covered areas of interest over a range of issues, broadening the spread of individual countries covered and effecting a more even distribution of coverage between continents.

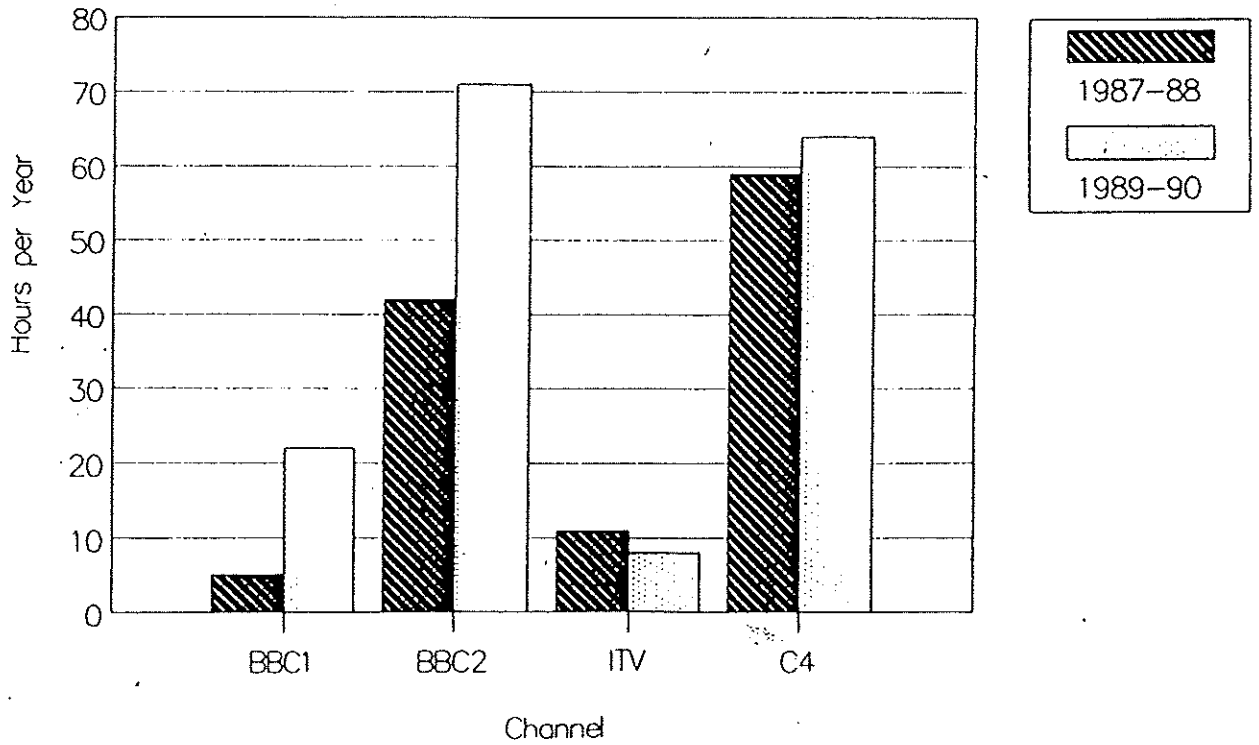
## PART FOUR: PEAK VIEWING

Tables 14, 15, 16 and 17 compare hours of documentary coverage scheduled at "peak" and "non-peak" viewing times, on each channel during 1987-88 and 1989-90. Peak viewing time (defined for this study as programmes starting between 6.30pm and 10.30pm) is important because programmes shown at this time attract much greater audiences than programmes shown at non-peak times (see 'Losing the Picture', Chapter 2 by James Firebrace).

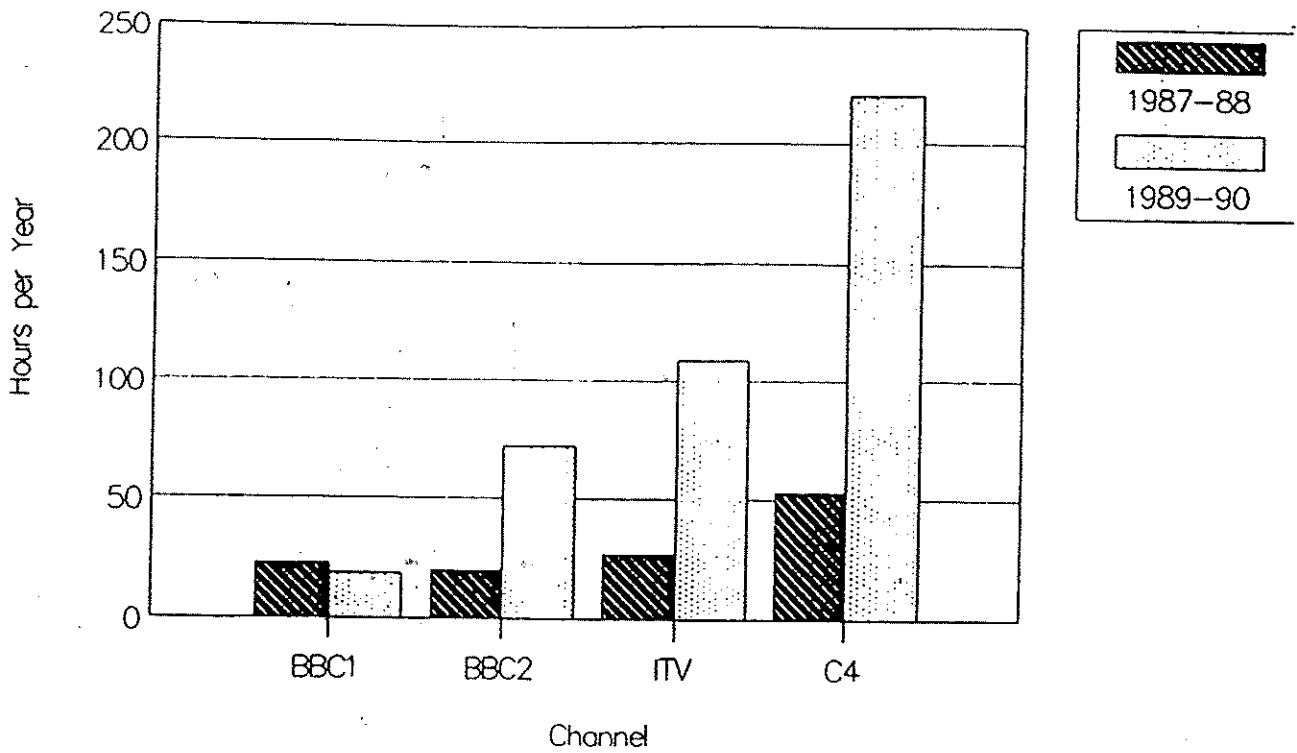
**Table 14** Documentary coverage of the North: Hours of Peak Programming



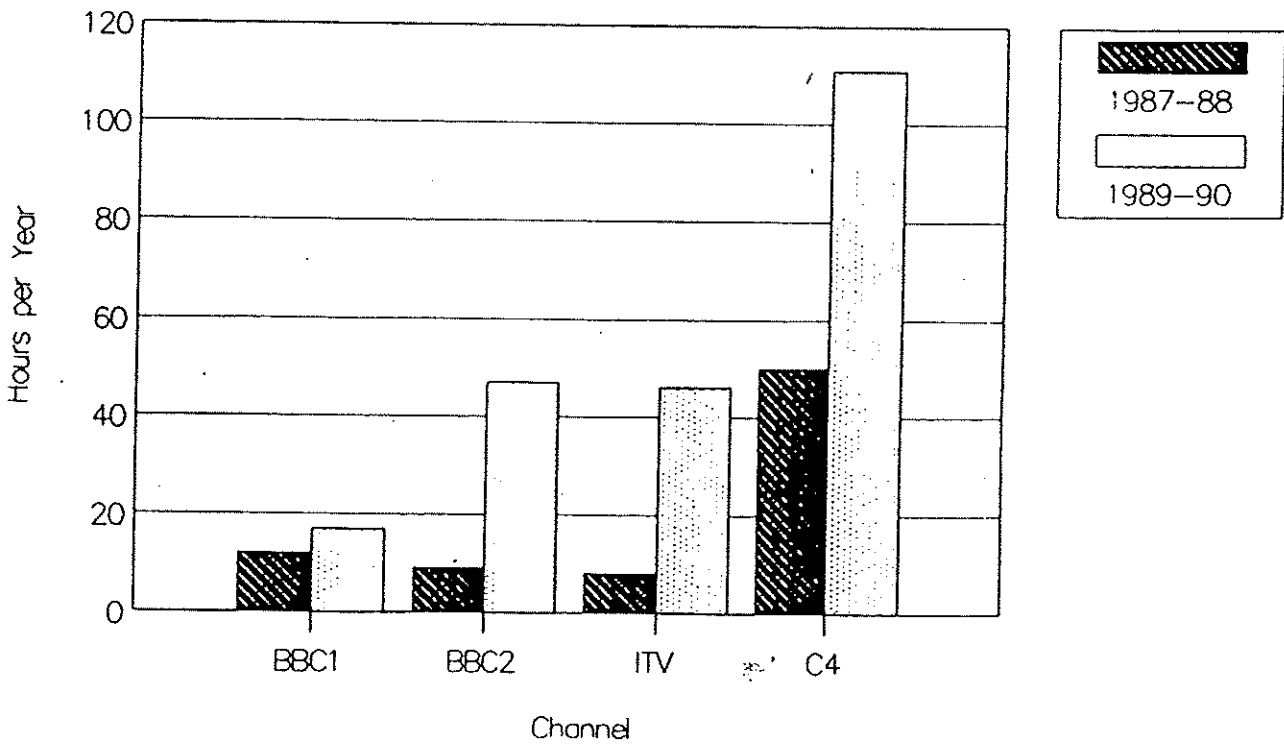
**Table 15** Documentary coverage of the South: Hours of Peak Programming



**Table 16 Documentary Coverage of the North: Hours of Non-Peak Programming**



**Table 17 Documentary Coverage of the South: Hours of Non-Peak Programming**





## Conclusions

- \* In both years studied Channel 4 and BBC 2 scheduled a significantly greater number of programmes on international issues at peak viewing times than ITV and BBC 1.
- \* There is a significant drop in hours of documentary programming on the North and South, scheduled at peak time on ITV between 1987-88 and 1989-90 (North: 87-88, 20 hours; 89-90, 9 hours; South: 87-88, 11 hours; 89-90, 8 hours). This slippage is also evident in BBC1's peak time scheduling of documentaries on the North (87-88, 36 hours; 89-90, 17 hours). However, there is a marked increase in BBC1's peak time scheduling of documentaries on the South (87-88, 5 hours; 89-90, 22 hours).
- \* An overall increase can be seen in hours of documentary programming at non-peak times scheduled on all channels, between 1987-88 and 1989-90.

## APPENDIX

### (1) The Categories: News, Current Affairs and Documentaries

For the purpose of this report three categories of programming were defined, based upon criteria broadly agreed by broadcasters.

Hard news programmes, the most straightforward to define, comprise short reports of, on average, two and a half minutes each. News programmes concentrate a large proportion of their coverage on locations where regular correspondents and crews are based. The main news programmes are transmitted daily on three channels (BBC1, ITV and Channel 4) between 5.45pm and 10.30pm.

Current affairs programmes vary in length: from the 27 minute World in Action (weekly on ITV, 8.30pm) to a full 54 minutes of First Tuesday (monthly on ITV, 10.40pm). Because they are responding to current events, current affairs programmes tend to be put together in a relatively short time (usually 2-3 weeks from the initial stages of research to completion). Whilst offering an in-depth analysis of the subject matter, their brief - to address a range of current issues - usually ensures they have a relatively short shelf-life, as with news.

Programmes within the documentary category are those which are researched, filmed and edited over a much greater period of time. This time can vary - from an average of 3-4 months for a single programme to a massive ten years for the filming of Adrian Cowell's series, Decade of Destruction (ATV and Central TV) which charted the destruction of the Amazon rainforest. In contrast to news and current affairs, documentaries are not responding solely to current events. The difference in this choice of subject matter and its treatment ensure a longer shelf-life for documentary programmes.

## (II) North and South

Continents and individual countries were divided into two broad areas: "the North" (industrialised countries located mainly in the Northern hemisphere, comprising Europe, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan), and "the South" (developing countries located mainly in the Southern hemisphere, comprising Asia, Africa, Central and South America, Mexico, the Caribbean and Pacific Islands).

## (III) Ireland

The report examines factual coverage of issues outside the UK. Making a distinction between news coverage of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland presented problems. A two minute news item, reporting, for example, the extradition of a suspected terrorist from the Republic to the North of Ireland, might comprise footage shot in both. Problems arose in making a distinction between material filmed in the Republic (and therefore outside the UK), and material filmed in the North (within the UK). For this reason it was decided not to include the Republic of Ireland in this analysis of international coverage.

## (IV) News and Current Affairs Magazines

News and current affairs magazines were not included in the research data because of the difficulties incurred in researching this type of programme format. It was impossible to assess with accuracy the length of each item in a magazine programme comprising several reports unless the programme was watched from beginning to end, and each item timed. News/current affairs magazines such as BBC 2's Newsnight or C4's The World This Week - are made up of longer reports than hard news programmes, usually lasting for about 10 minutes each. With few exceptions - such as The World This Week - they follow the style and content of the news: using regular correspondents and reporting on the main news stories of the day. Programmes in the current affairs category vary in length: from around 30 to 60 minutes.

#### (V) "Peak" Time Programming

A separate analysis of programmes scheduled during peak viewing hours was important, as programmes shown at this time attract much greater audiences than programmes shown at non-peak times. Peak viewing hours are generally agreed to fall between 6.30pm and 10.30pm.

#### (VI) Data Collection

Data for the analysis of international coverage by news was obtained from transcripts of News at Ten in the News Information Library at ITN. Data on the content of current affairs strands was gathered from programme lists made available by individual current affairs departments. Data on documentary coverage of international issues was obtained from the collection of back copies of the Radio Times and TV Times in the IBA library.

