

# REFLECTING THE REAL WORLD 2

HOW WE CONNECT WITH THE WIDER WORLD  
A report looking at how UK television and new media portray developing countries.

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The challenge should be that the world out there has never been more important, we have never lived in a smaller planet. The challenge for producers and directors is to find new ways of getting audiences to watch. There's a democratisation of media happening going on in which viewers are taking a more active role and playing a part. Talking about quality is a bit of a red herring because it's like comparing the quality of a night down town with the quality of a night in the country. Let's not get hung up on the quality of the content. The web are very transactional and have a much broader definition of what used to be called broadcasting. There is an appetite for the unfamiliar. I think commissioning editors are afraid to take risks now with international programmes, because the chances are they won't get the ratings. I don't think there is a genuine effort to find out what is good about Africa, what people are doing at an ordinary level, even where there are repressive governments, what ordinary people are doing to cope. There is a general philosophy here of doing stories that no one else will do and hearing voices which have not been heard. I think we're pretty damn lazy about the way we make films about the rest of the world and I don't think that directors, producers, commissioners have addressed the problem of the rest of the world in the same way as they've addressed the issue of how you renew documentary at home. Television needs to move on and everyone's grappling with how to do that. There is an appetite for the unfamiliar but the interesting thing is that broadcasters tend to mediate that in familiar ways because it's safe. My views of the Iraq war were fundamentally changed by YouTube. What concerns me about the foreign affairs reporting industry is that it becomes an industry very much like tourism. When can the foreign correspondents be foreign?

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# FOREWORD

As broadcasters we've reached the point where it seems pointless to keep referring to how the world we are meant to reflect is an ever-shrinking one. We use phrases like "global village", "interdependency" and "globalisation" to refer to a world that has never seemed smaller to journalists. As true as this is, I suspect all of us feel that in terms of outlooks, views and beliefs, people and societies have also never seemed more divided, polarised and further away. It's a contradiction that is going to re-define the world of international news reporting, and as this report makes clear, it's also one of the biggest challenges facing broadcasters and journalists.

There is still a belief that media reporting of global issues and events are about quantity; how many hours, programmes and reports appear on television, radio and newspapers. It's a system aimed at measuring how committed journalistic organisations are to the developing world. But one issue which cannot be quantified, but which I believe is critical at this time, is why reporting of the developing world is in our national interest. Why should reflecting the world be at the very heart of our public service commitment as broadcasters; whether in news and current affairs, drama or features?

Since 9/11, there can no longer be a faraway war in a distant land of which we know nothing. The effects and consequences of trends and events in every corner of the world have a direct bearing on all of us. Is Darfur simply another horrible story of bloodshed in a remote corner of Africa...or is it also one of the first civil conflicts of our age borne out of conflict over scarce resources as a result of environmental degradation and the effects of global warming? Is Zimbabwe simply another African example of the tyrannical rule of a despot driving his economy and people into the ground in order to remain in power? Or is it about good governance, the failure of regional organisations like the African Union to criticise one of their own, and why the West threatens tyrants in some countries but not in others?

Media organisations, whether traditional broadcasters or new media platforms have shown innovation in how they deliver news and views of the world, pioneering different formats and remaking old ones. But what this report highlights is how all of us have to think about why it's what we deliver that really matters – the content. It's hard to pretend that what is happening in a country like Iraq does not directly affect us. It does. It affects our security, our global reputation and the relevance of international legal organisations like the UN. In the future, reflecting the world will be as much about recognising it as a central part of our *raison d'être* as broadcasters and part of the national interest, rather than just quantifying how much of it we do each year.



Rageeh Omaar  
Broadcaster



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In *Reflecting the Real World* we examined how UK broadcasters and audiences had responded to a heightened news and political focus on the developing world, particularly Africa, during 2005. The report concluded that broadcasting had shown some important examples of both leadership and creativity in its representations of the developing world. But, the authors asked, could this be sustained?

Since 2005 the UK broadcast landscape has continued to evolve and change at a rapid pace. The BBC has secured a smaller than expected licence fee settlement and, as digital switchover approaches, Channel 4 says it will not be able to deliver its public service commitment without some kind of subsidy. Meanwhile, the proliferation of digital television channels continues to squeeze and fragment audiences for all mainstream channels.

But the evolution of new media technologies outstrips even the pace of change in the broadcast world and new routes to information about the wider world are opened to audiences daily. The uptake of broadband internet access continues to increase whilst digital cameras, camcorders and camera phones enable citizens to produce their own media. Through social media sites such as MySpace, BeBo, and FaceBook, millions of people create, discuss and share content on a wide variety of topics.

For decades it was television that provided a window on the world for UK citizens but the debate is no longer restricted to whether one broadcaster or another provides more or better information about the wider world. Audiences can now find their own routes to making sense of the world. But

have passive audiences already deserted television to become curious and self-motivated global citizens or in an age of information overload do we underestimate the potential for television to remain the key source of information about the wider world for the UK public?

### TELEVISION

All the broadcasters we interviewed agree that UK citizens live in an increasingly globalised, interdependent world, and it's the duty of programme-makers and commissioners to inform the public about how that interdependence impacts on their lives.

News broadcasters remain strongly committed to covering international stories but growing competition means that each has to find its own distinctive approach. However, there's a consensus that most stories still need a UK angle to engage a UK audience.

Peter Barron of *Newsnight* is concerned that 'the foreign affairs reporting industry' means that international journalists don't always get to the real stories. And Sorious Samura from Channel 4 calls for a wider range of voices: 'When can the foreign correspondents actually be foreign?'

From *Newsnight* and *Channel 4 News*, there's a sense that their audiences relish the range and complexity of international stories and that audience participation through email and the web is broadening the range of stories they air.

However, all our interviewees agree that documentaries are going through a disappointing phase – there's a lack of ambition and risk-taking.





In the words of Angus Macqueen, Channel 4's Head of Documentaries: 'I think we're pretty damn lazy about the way we make films about the rest of the world.'

Some of our interviewees feel that the way forward is to develop more formatted shows, to bring large audiences to international topics. But Jo Clinton-Davis, now at ITV, calls on fellow commissioners to show more courage and imagination: 'We serve audiences up more and more mediation, because it's safe, but at the same time you can see that there's an appetite for authenticity.'

Many of our interviewees say there's little effort made or space given to unmediated representations of everyday life in the developing world. 'I don't think there's a genuine effort to find out what is good about Africa' is the view of Dali Mpofo, Chief Executive Officer of the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

Dramas and feature films like *Blood Diamond*, *The Constant Gardener* and *The Last King of Scotland* are regularly cited by interviewees looking to illustrate the potential to present complex ideas and stories from outside the UK, to mainstream audiences.

## NEW MEDIA

As pressure on the mainstream broadcasters grows, they are turning increasingly to the internet to maintain their audiences. Both the BBC and Channel 4 also believe online content needs to be linked to existing broadcast content. Anthony Lilley, from Magic Lantern Productions, rejects this model, arguing that many broadcasters have not yet

understood that the structure, culture and language of content on the internet are fundamentally different, and can't simply be bent to the will of television.

It is partly the unfiltered nature of the internet which Lilley says appeals to many – including himself: 'My views of the Iraq war were fundamentally changed by YouTube. I was broadly negative but not that engaged until I went and looked at what was actually going on for real and what these guys were dealing with every day.'

The bottom-up nature of the web means that groups traditionally kept out of the heavily-regulated platforms such as television and radio have been able to embrace the internet with enthusiasm and success: alternative media, civil society, personal publishers, even extremist groups.

In contrast to traditional broadcasting, new media also offers a different way of connecting UK audiences with international stories and people in other countries. In the words of Peter Armstrong, Director of OneWorld.net: 'Broadcasting, if you think about it too narrowly, you think about it as information. You're telling the public something. All the things that are happening on the web are very transactional now, you're meeting people, you're buying, you're selling, you're building things together, you're making new relationships, you're living, essentially. That's a much broader definition of what used to be called broadcasting, or what the media is about.'

Participation is central to new media. But, with the proliferation of available media, some of our interviewees worry that society threatens

*Tribe*, BBC2



to lose its coherent civic discourse, by diluting collective and shared experiences which have traditionally characterized broadcast media. There's also a concern that the more choice you give viewers and listeners the more they're going to cocoon themselves in their existing opinions and preferences.

#### **FOCUS GROUPS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE – WHERE DO THEY GO TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE WIDER WORLD?**

The television is usually switched on when they're at home and it's their main source of news about the wider world. The young people we spoke to are media-savvy, but when it comes to news and current affairs, their information comes primarily from television, not the internet. They tend to be more interested in local and national news, but international stories do attract their attention when significant events take place in distant places, like the tsunami or Iraq, or when they have a family or personal connection with a foreign country.

They use the internet regularly, but usually for social networking. It becomes a supplementary medium for news when, for example, images and events are controversial, like the scenes of torture by soldiers in Iraq. Then, they choose sites with links to offline media, like BBC Online or Guardian Unlimited. YouTube is also popular, but it serves a different role – it's not regarded as a trusted source of information, but seen as somewhere to go to find material that isn't available elsewhere. They trust television more than they trust newer online sources of information.

Feature films like *Blood Diamond* emerge as surprisingly influential amongst the young people we interviewed. Although they did not show a natural interest in international stories, their discussions told more of frustration in trying to make sense of the wider world than indifference. We were left with a strong impression that they want more from the media than fleeting images, spectacular stories, stereotypical depictions and narrow visions of global reality.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Television needs to raise its game, think more strategically and show a willingness to experiment and take risks to continue to engage audiences with stories from the wider world.
- News and current affairs programmes have demonstrated imagination, and an appetite for innovation. Other genres – especially documentary and drama – need to be bolder and more ambitious and seek out new ways of telling international stories.
- In our daily lives, the division between domestic and international is increasingly breaking down. Television could lead the way in reflecting this and exploring ways in which stories about contemporary Britain are often already stories about the wider world.
- Programmes which feature the wider world should cater for a range of audiences, not just those who already have a strong interest in global themes. Special attention needs to be paid to new formats and to populist drama – both have the potential to reach big mainstream audiences.





- The BBC has a new remit to 'bring the world to the UK' – it should develop a more 'joined-up' approach to international coverage, using the resources of the World Service and BBC World to help inform the UK audience, and build on existing links between UK communities and the wider world via its Nations and Regions output.
- Creativity is the key to maintaining the interest of established audiences and reaching new ones. Viewers are looking for depth and authenticity. To achieve this, broadcasters need to seek out a wider range of voices both on and behind the camera.
- Specialists – including NGOs – need to build trust with broadcasters and help them to tell stories and explain complex issues. NGOs have a valuable role to play in helping to inform broadcasters about emerging and urgent stories in the wider world and in enabling them to access and reflect a broader range of perspectives.
- More opportunities for pollination of ideas and collaboration across genres and with outside experts need to be found. If risk-taking and experimentation is to be encouraged, broadcasters need to devote more resources to the development process. Individuals who feel passionately – champions – also play a key role in promoting difficult or ambitious projects.
- UK broadcasters should continue to develop and improve their relationships with broadcasters and producers in the wider world, facilitating and encouraging direct commissions, co-productions and partnerships in order to increase the diversity and range of international programming available to UK audiences.

- The changing media landscape offers new opportunities to engage audiences with international stories, but genuine interaction should be at the heart of online content. In particular, it offers a unique opportunity for UK citizens to hear from and communicate with a diverse range of people from around the world.
- Television remains the main source of information for audiences – including young people – about the wider world. Broadcasters and NGOs should resist the temptation to direct disproportionate resources to online media.

*Once Upon A Time in Iran,*  
Channel 4

## Television needs to move on and everyone's grappling with how to do that.

Jo Clinton-Davis, Controller, Popular Factual, ITV1

# BACKGROUND

This report forms part of a long-term research project led by the International Broadcasting Trust in partnership with the CBA, Concern UK and the One World Broadcasting Trust. This new research reviews how public service television in the UK reflects international stories and topics, with a particular focus on coverage of the developing world. It also hears from young people about which media they use to find out about the wider world.

In our last report *Reflecting the Real World?* leading broadcasters and development experts questioned long held assumptions about media coverage of the developing world. Apparently as a response to a wider political focus in 2005 (G8, 20th anniversary of Live Aid etc.) there had been a perceptible shift in UK television coverage of Africa in particular. News reports had returned to disaster stories to track progress, complex issues such as trade, aid and debt were tackled in a popular way and 'major primetime slots were given over to diverse, more rounded and often celebratory coverage of the developing world'. Certainly the audience research in that report applauded programming which took more risks or felt more authentic.

*Reflecting the Real World?* acknowledged that broadcasting showed some important examples of both leadership and creativity in its representations of the developing world during 2005 but concluded by asking if this would be sustained.

Our aim in publishing this report is to consider whether television has continued to break new ground following the successes of 2005 and, in addition, to explore the impact that the changing media landscape is having on coverage of the developing world. This report asks if new media genuinely offers fresh opportunities for UK citizens to connect with the wider world and if so, are audiences using these opportunities?

# METHODOLOGY

This report is based on in-depth interviews with senior executives from UK television, digital media, and international development.

It also features a chapter based on focus groups with 18-25-year-olds in London and Leeds, carried out by the Institute of Communication Studies at the University of Leeds.

# INTERVIEWEES

Peter Armstrong, Director, OneWorld.net  
Georgia Arnold, Vice President, Public Affairs, MTV  
Peter Barron, Editor, *Newsnight*, BBC2  
Andy Bell, Director, Mint Digital  
Jo Clinton-Davis, Controller of popular factual commissioning, ITV  
Diane Coyle, BBC Trustee  
Maggie Cunningham, Head of Programmes, BBC Scotland  
James Deane, Head of Policy Development, BBC World Service Trust  
Andy Duncan, Chief Executive, Channel 4  
Flora Gregory, Editor, *Witness*, Al Jazeera English  
Anthony Lilley, Chief Executive, Magic Lantern Productions  
Angus Macqueen, Head of Documentaries, Channel 4  
David Mannion, Editor-in-Chief, ITV News  
Isabel Morgan, Executive Producer, Christian Aid  
Dali Mpofu, Chief Executive Officer, South African Broadcasting Corporation  
Maggie O'Kane, Editorial Director, Guardian Films  
Peter Salmon, Chief Creative Officer, BBC Vision  
Sorious Samura, Reporter, Channel 4 and Insight News Television  
Jon Snow, Presenter, Channel 4 News  
Nick Wilson, Director of Children's Programmes, Five TV





## INTRODUCTION

Public service broadcasting (PSB) in the UK has reached a crossroads. Several processes and events within broadcasting have led us to this point. The BBC has secured a smaller than expected licence fee settlement through to 2012, and is governed by a new body, the BBC Trust. Under its new charter, one of the core missions of the BBC is to 'bring the world to the UK'. As digital switchover approaches, Channel 4 is delivering increasingly stark statements about the continued viability of its public service commitment without some kind of subsidy, whilst ITV and Five have in recent years appeared to be shedding their already minimal commitments to public service content.

Ofcom, the industry regulator, has rolled out two initiatives in particular that signal its intent to open a new debate on how to maintain and strengthen PSB: the PSB Review, an assessment of how public service broadcasters are delivering on their commitments, and a discussion about a potential new public service media entity for the digital age – the Public Service Publisher, or PSP.

The PSB Review, published in early 2007, and the first review of its kind, reported that: 'The provision of programmes which help inform people's understanding of the world is the most important element of PSB amongst viewers, and is also the area perceived to be best delivered.'

But there's no room for complacency as the review also finds that, while news and current affairs are seen by audiences to be delivering on this remit, other genres are felt to be weaker.

### CHANGES IN THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

There are major changes occurring within the broader media and communications landscape which

profoundly affect the relationship of public service broadcasting to the audiences it serves, and of those citizens in their relationship to the wider world.

In recent months, the issue of audience 'trust' in television has been jeopardised as incidents of deception by some TV programmes have become apparent. In terms of international coverage, this may heighten the demand for more 'authentic voices' from the developing world to be seen on our screens.

Digital consumer devices are converging. This means that a range of previously separate functions is combined within one device. As these devices become more powerful and ubiquitous, it becomes easier for consumers to access, create and exchange media content.

Broadband internet penetration in the UK has now reached 69%. There are now more mobile phones than there are people, and 74% of the population now has access to multi channel television (all according to the latest government figures).

The proliferation of digital television is increasing competition between broadcasters for audiences. The massive explosion of channels, from dedicated channels for documentaries, wildlife, cars and NGOs, to ones aimed at specific audience segments, such as ethnic minority communities, religious minorities and teachers, is continuing to squeeze audiences for mainstream channels.

### MONEY'S TOO TIGHT TO MENTION

Advertising income is shrinking, and broadcasters say this inevitably impacts on the range and quality of programmes they are able to make: 'Let's be very realistic, it is very, very tough financially at the moment. The advertising market was down 6% last year.

*Tsunami – The Aftermath,*  
BBC2

I think we're pretty damn lazy about the way we make films about the rest of the world but I don't think that directors, producers or commissioners have addressed the problem of the rest of the world in the same way as they've addressed the issue of how you renew documentary at home.

Angus Macqueen, Head of Documentaries, Channel 4

All of us that are funded commercially are under enormous pressure. My real worry is it is going to get worse, not better.' Andy Duncan, Chief Executive, Channel 4

The BBC is under pressure too: 'How can we afford to be in all those places, do all those things on a licence fee settlement which is a lot less than we would have hoped?' Peter Salmon, Chief Creative Officer, BBC Vision

And at the BBC, there's an additional factor which, for the moment, is something of an unknown quantity – the new BBC Trust. It will undoubtedly have its own views on what should be prioritised: 'There are great things about a well-funded public sector broadcaster, but the argument against it has always been that it inhibits the development of a richer commercial centre, and the trick is trying to figure out what it is public service broadcasters can do in terms of expanding markets and stimulating innovation elsewhere without actually being so dominant that they act as a barrier to other people coming along.' Diane Coyle, BBC Trustee

#### CHANGING AUDIENCE VIEWING PATTERNS

As access has increased, audiences have undergone significant changes in when, where and how they choose to consume their media. The BBC, Channel 4 and ITV have all introduced video on demand services in 2007 so that viewers can catch up on programmes they may have missed. Technologies such as PVRs (personal video recorders), which in their current form can store 80 hours of broadcast television, have liberated audiences from the tyranny of the schedule. As one independent producer says: 'I just can't be bothered to remember I have got to watch *The*

*Apprentice* at 10 o'clock on Wednesday

You know, I have grown up with it, but suddenly it seems absolutely archaic that I can't go and click it on whenever my girlfriend and I have finished supper.' Andy Bell, Director, Mint Digital

#### A GENERATIONAL SHIFT?

There's a common perception that young consumers are turning away from TV to the web. (In chapter 3 of this report we talk to a group of young people about where they go for information about the wider world).

And it's not just the web – mobile phones present another platform for communication and consuming media, using a combination of SMS (text, photo and video), FM radio, internet access, and mobile TV. Increasingly, users in technology-rich societies will expect to be able to access the content they choose anytime, any place, any how.

#### CONTENT CREATION

Digital formats for media content, such as MP3, have made it easier for consumers to store and share media content. Digital cameras, camcorders and camera phones have enabled people to produce their own media. Until the advent of social media, however, it was quite difficult for ordinary people to publish their own films, photographs and other media on the internet.

Social media such as blogs – initially characterised as online diaries – combine the tools to create and upload content to the internet and the ability to publish it in a reasonably professional-looking form. Publishing tools such as Blogger, Flickr and YouTube have unleashed

- 1 *This World – The Tea Boy Of Gaza*, BBC2
- 2 *Rooted*, Five



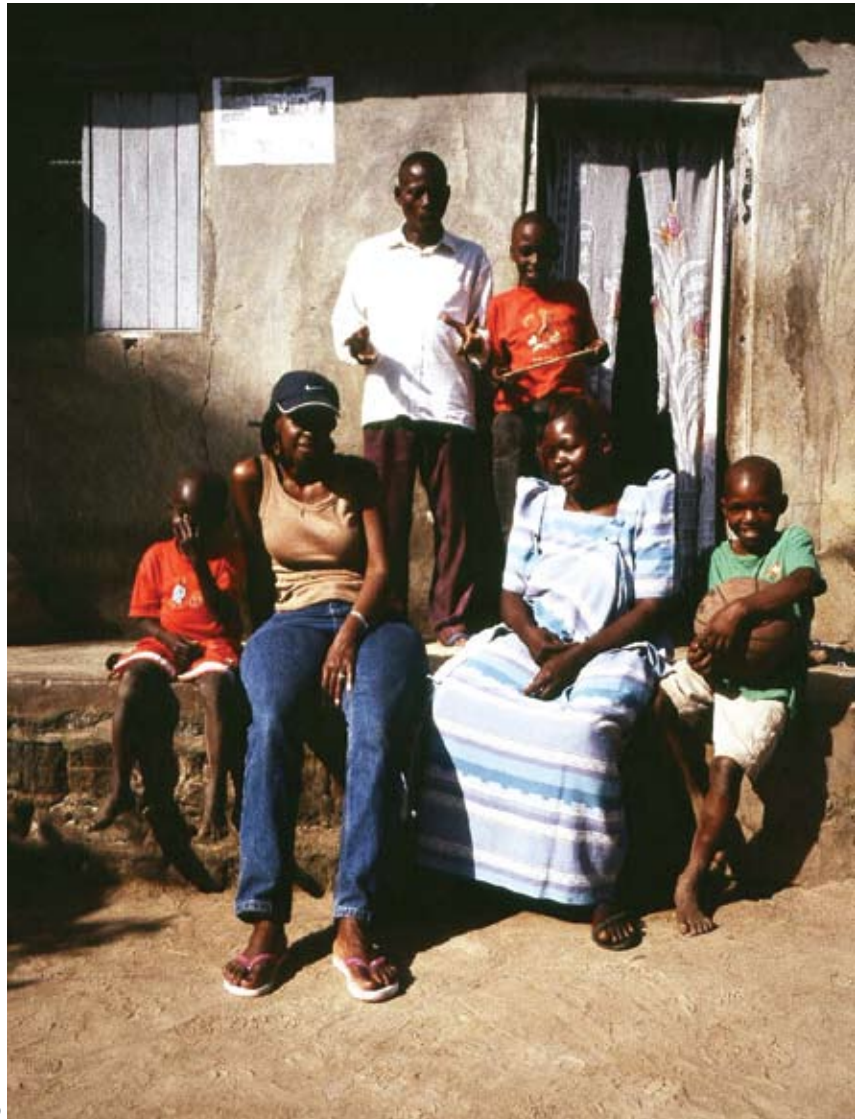
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a torrent of self-expression in many societies – some of which reaches larger audiences than traditional broadcast media can access. Social media also encourage audiences to tag or classify content, to interact with the content – and with the content creator – by leaving comments, or responses, and to share the content by ‘bookmarking’ it on social bookmarking sites such as ‘digg’ or ‘delicious’, where users share and comment on web pages they have seen.

This type of technology, known as Web 2.0, democratises the tools of publishing content online, and allows its users to organise into social networks. Through social networking sites such as MySpace, BeBo, and FaceBook, millions of young people based predominantly in the USA, UK, Australia and Europe chat online, discuss a wide variety of topics and share content.

Georgia Arnold from MTV injects a sense of perspective, saying that according to their latest research the vast majority of young people using social media in different parts of the world tend to watch and download rather than create and upload content.

The changes and forces described above all impact on television’s ability to ensure that it remains the key source of information about the wider world for UK citizens.



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## TELEVISION

How are leading figures within the UK television industry responding to the challenges outlined in the Introduction? All the broadcasters we interviewed this year agree on one thing: UK citizens live in an increasingly globalised, interdependent world, and it's the duty of programme-makers, commissioners and broadcasters to inform the public about how that interdependence impacts on their lives:

'The world out there has never been more important. We have never lived on a smaller planet. The challenge for producers and directors is to find ways of getting audiences to watch because it's important that they watch it. It's important that the wider public understands the way they plug into the world.' Angus Macqueen, Head of Documentaries, Channel 4

We intersect more and more in our daily lives with other countries through global networks of media, travel, migration, commerce, communication, language, and sport, but most of our television industry interviewees agree that there is not enough content on UK television that interrogates what this interdependence means not only for the UK, but for societies everywhere.

### THE NEWS

High quality news has long been at the heart of public service broadcasting and central to PSB has been a strong commitment to covering international stories:

'It tells us so much about the world in which we live and who we are and why we're where we are and why we relate the way we do. And it's a completely vital aspect of a kind of holistic

connecting up of human beings. And if we're talking about a globalising age, if we don't know what it is we're globalising with, it seems to me we ain't got much chance of making it in this new globalised world.' Jon Snow, Presenter, *Channel 4 News*

All the news broadcasters we spoke to are clear that they do not prescribe a quota for international news.

'I've stopped pretty much making that division in my head between so-called 'foreign news' and UK-based news because, more often than not, one has a direct influence on the other so it's just international news, it's a globalisation in the newsroom if you like.' David Mannion, Editor-in-Chief, *ITV News*

*Newsnight* is trying to move away from international politics and focus more on trends and processes: 'When we've gone abroad, we've concentrated too much on the politics of other countries, when actually the forces that are going on in the world are far more powerful than the forces involved in government.' Peter Barron, Editor, *Newsnight*.

Barron feels *Newsnight* can add value by 'just showing how things are done elsewhere'. 'Last year we did a series of programmes called *The Best Public Services in the World*, which obviously had a domestic focus in that we're all concerned about the performance of public services in this country. But we thought, "Why don't we look around the world to see what things are done well or interestingly and can we learn anything from what's being done there?" So we did films in Cuba, in Qatar, in Denmark and in Portland, Oregon,



about different aspects of public services, and then brought all those films together and showed them to professionals involved in those sectors in Britain, and had a big debate about it.'

But, according to the news broadcasters, most stories need a UK angle to engage a UK audience. Speaking at the time of the Ethiopian kidnapping crisis, Jon Snow says: 'I was in Ethiopia only three weeks ago for the African Union summit and now we are there again, not really out of interest in Ethiopia, but because five of our nationals are involved. And I'm not sure that even counts really as international coverage.'

The growing proliferation of news sources in the market is welcomed by David Mannion: 'Different news organisations are covering the world from different perspectives and I think that's a good thing.'

And Peter Barron feels that *Newsnight's* distinctive approach will ensure its continued relevance: 'We do take a perverse interest in following stories that maybe other people aren't or have ignored or feel that they can't get the pictures.'

David Mannion says he is proud of the work *ITV News* did on climate change – although he admits that broadcasters were generally behind the curve on the issue: 'We felt that there was a necessity to show the physicality of what's happening and that meant actually going to places where you can see what's happening. We've witnessed it ourselves and we're therefore able to tell the story from a first-hand perspective. None the less I think the news media didn't wake up to it as quickly as it might have done – but then neither did the rest of the world.'

#### THE IMPACT OF THE INTERNET ON TELEVISION NEWS

All three news organisations are experiencing the impact of the internet, especially in terms of how they interact with their audience.

*Channel 4 News'* audience, both in the UK and abroad, is becoming part of the apparatus of newsgathering, although it doesn't mean abandoning the processes of journalism: 'There's far more reaction online, than there ever was before. Now you get tips, very often contacts, very often it ends up on the screen. There is a democratisation of news gathering going on, in which the viewer is beginning to sense that they can play a part.' Jon Snow, *Channel 4 News*

The relationship of trust with viewers works better says Snow, when you genuinely engage. *Newsnight* has gone a step further by asking viewers to make two minute films in a competition called *OhMyNewsnight*, named after a pioneering participatory journalism website from South Korea called *OhMyNews*. Barron's favourite was a film about cocaine production in Colombia: 'It was genuinely a revelatory and fascinating film.'

Perhaps the most important shift that *Newsnight* and *Channel 4 News* in particular have undergone is summed up by Peter Barron: '*Newsnight* is not a programme that's on at 10.30 at night. *Newsnight* is a journalistic brand which can put material out at any time of the day or night.'

With some stories, *Newsnight* has gone "web-first", publishing its reports and films online before broadcast. One web first film, Paul Mason's report on mobile phones in Kenya, part of *Newsnight's Geek Week 2.0*, looking at trends in technology, was first released online.

*Saira Khan's Pakistan Adventure, BBC2*



But Barron, Mannion and Snow all believe that the internet does not call the business model and existence of news outlets into question. Crucially, news values persist, whatever the platform – TV, the internet, a phone, an iPod – and international news is more central than ever to these values.

If anything, the internet reaffirms the position of high quality news and the new relationship with the audience should reinvigorate the practice and relevance of news.

#### FROM THEIR OWN CORRESPONDENT?

Now that audiences can potentially access news directly from developing countries, is it still relevant for UK news programmes to report foreign stories using UK journalists rather than local journalists? A number of interviewees express robust views on this long-running debate.

Soriosis Samura, the documentary maker and winner of a One World Media award for his programme *Living With AIDS*, makes a plea: 'When can the foreign correspondents actually be foreign?' – a question we put to Snow, Mannion and Barron. Peter Barron's not convinced it would work for *Newsnight*: 'It's tough, isn't it, because most people don't make very good TV programmes. And to try to expect people around the world to get our style, or what it is we're looking for, what we find entertaining or engaging, is extremely tough. On the other hand, we definitely should be looking for opportunities like that.'

Jon Snow feels that 'there is a case for saying that to send a British pair of eyes to look and express it in a British vernacular may make more connections with a British audience'. David Mannion takes a pragmatic approach: 'I'm playing to a British audience, so what

I need are reporters of a high standard who could be indigenous to the country that we're in or need not be, it doesn't matter as long as they are of a certain standard and can do the job correctly.'

But Barron is concerned that international journalists don't always get to the real stories: 'What concerns me a lot about the whole foreign affairs reporting industry is that it becomes an industry very much like tourism. You turn up in Rwanda and the fixer says, "I thought tomorrow we'd go and see the skulls or the mass burial." There's a sort of checklist of places on every international story that the journalists are taken to.' Peter Barron, Editor, *Newsnight*

BBC Trustee Diane Coyle suggests that demographic and social changes in the UK audience might create a demand for change: 'It's a really good idea for people who run these news organisations to keep challenging themselves about these sorts of issues, and it probably will change over time, not least because the home audience is getting more diverse in many ways, not just in terms of their origin but their interests and their experiences and what kind of background information they have.'

From *Newsnight* and *Channel 4 News*, there's a sense that their audiences relish the range and complexity of international stories, which gives news programmes latitude to experiment and to access a range of different stories from other countries. But does this hold true for other genres on UK television?

#### FACTUAL AND DOCUMENTARY

If there is one sentiment that sums up the general assessment our interviewees make of factual and documentary content on UK television today, it's this: 'I think we're pretty damn lazy about the way

*The Girls from Belarus, ITV1*



we make films about the rest of the world and I don't think that directors, producers or commissioners have addressed the problem of the rest of the world in the same way as they've addressed the issue of how you renew documentary at home.' Angus Macqueen, Head of Documentaries, Channel 4.

Many of our interviewees express a frustration with what they consider a lack of interesting and creative content about international themes on UK television at the moment. When asked to name a programme that had particularly stood out for them over the previous year, most interviewees were unable to name even one programme without prompting. Some chose programmes from 2005 such as *African School*, or Sorious Samura's *Living With AIDS*. Many cited feature films such as *Blood Diamond*, *The Last King of Scotland* and *The Constant Gardener*.

The broadcasters we interviewed all say they are committed to international content on television, but there are differing views on whether audiences are intrinsically interested in the wider world: 'The challenge is getting people to understand why it matters, why they should be more interested in the developing world, why globalisation actually does mean that they ought to have an interest in not just China and India but all kinds of smaller and poorer countries as well.' Diane Coyle, BBC Trustee

Macqueen detects a certain complacency at all levels in television, and suggests that commissioners should be saying: 'Listen, that world out there is f\*\*\*ing important to people sitting on their sofas at home. "How do we get the people on the sofas to watch it?" instead of going, "Oh, the world out there is really important – we'll go and make a film" and they should watch it.'

Macqueen's boss at Channel 4 is equally forthright: 'I think it is more important than ever that people do have a good understanding of what is happening internationally. I just think having a better understanding of different cultures, how people live together in a more tolerant way ultimately is quite important and if people don't have some understanding or some exposure to what is going on in the rest of the world or different cultures, that is potentially quite dangerous.' Andy Duncan, Chief Executive, Channel 4

*Africa 05* represented the high-water mark for this kind of focus, and broadcasters were able for the first time to point to a reverse in the decline in content from developing countries, with more diverse voices and more coverage. Talking to key figures at the start of 2007, this seems to have been the television version of the dot-com bubble. Can they envisage ever seeing a creative resurgence that enables international coverage to surpass that of 2005?

#### SHOWING THE EVERYDAY

The frustration seems to stem from one key failing, says Dali Mpofu: 'I don't think there's a genuine effort to find out what is good about Africa, what people are doing at an ordinary level. Even in places where there are oppressive governments, what ordinary people are doing to cope with this.' Dali Mpofu, Chief Executive Officer, South African Broadcasting Corporation

Many of our interviewees say much the same thing – that there is little effort made or space given to unmediated representations of everyday life in the developing world.

'It's always about figures, about numbers. It's never about individuals. It's never about people with their

## What concerns me a lot about the whole foreign affairs reporting industry is that it becomes an industry very much like tourism.

Peter Barron, Editor, Newsnight

## There is a democratisation of news gathering going on, in which the viewer is beginning to sense that they can play a part.

Jon Snow, Presenter, Channel 4 News

# When can the foreign correspondents be foreign?

Sorious Samura, Reporter, Channel 4

## I don't think there is a genuine effort to find out what is good about Africa, what people are doing at an ordinary level.

Dali Mpofu, South African Broadcasting Corporation

own experiences, with their own individual situations.' Sorious Samura, Reporter, Channel 4

This also affects coverage of natural disasters: 'Viewers don't have that three dimensional sense of what life is like in the developing world, so when there's an emergency like the tsunami, they won't get a proper picture of the impact on the lives of people caught up in that sort of situation.' Isabel Morgan, Executive Producer, Christian Aid

### WHERE IS THE INNOVATION, RISK AND AMBITION?

Angus Macqueen believes documentary went through a creative reinvention that never made it into international programming: 'I sense we are at the end of a commissioning cycle – but it's easy to forget quite how at the beginning of the cycle some of these things were deeply original. *Faking It* was a really original format and told us something about class in Britain. Equally we forget quite how original *Wife Swap* felt when it started. And I don't feel that that's particularly happened about abroad. We still tend to send a reporter out – "go and do an ob doc film"'

It's pressure to gain and maintain audiences says Maggie O'Kane: 'Commissioning editors are afraid to take risks now because the chances are they won't get the ratings, everybody's under huge pressure to get the ratings.'

Nick Wilson from Five agrees that there is a definite pressure to deliver audiences. 'The first question that I have to ask about a programme is "What kind of audience is there for it?" and to be blunt there are programmes – the kind of programmes we may be talking about now – for which there is no audience, therefore you've got to find them and somehow you have to trick them

into watching and then hope that once they start watching they'll get interested and they'll come to it.'

### RATINGS

Commissioners have a double-edged role: taste-makers for the nation's TV stations, they are also looking for emergent trends and movements bubbling up from within society.

Peter Salmon notes the changes in UK society, in terms of racial diversity, social mobility and technological change, and asks: 'Does the BBC reflect enough of those cultures and is the BBC caught up enough in some of those new trends? There is the BBC staff. Who are we? What kinds of backgrounds have we got? Who are the people sitting around the table discussing the ideas that go into making programmes? How do you change the mix of attitudes, backgrounds, approaches, the kind of influences in the BBC?'

Jo Clinton-Davis speculates that the problem lies both in the audience, and in commissioners themselves: 'People take refuge in the familiar. It may be a retrenchment because there's so much bombardment by the media, and therefore you choose what you know. But there is also, I think, a growing appetite for the unfamiliar. The interesting thing is that broadcasters tend to mediate that in familiar ways. Somehow television needs to move on. And everyone's grappling with how to do that. That's the Holy Grail.' Jo Clinton-Davis, Controller of popular factual commissioning, ITV

### CHAMPIONS

The effectiveness of 'champions' with regard to international coverage was mentioned by a number of our interviewees. Such individuals who feel

- 1 *This World – The 12-year-old Cocaine Smuggler*, BBC2
- 2 *Sisters in Law*, Channel 4
- 3 *World Without Water*, Channel 4

passionately and will persevere with stories or projects, can make a real difference, enabling programmes that would not otherwise be made to reach the screen. Many such champions are within organisations, often in senior positions. Some are shaped by their own personal experiences of life and travel in the developing world. But Maggie Cunningham of BBC Scotland makes the point that champions can also come from outside of an organisation: ‘Lesley Riddoch, a Scottish campaigning journalist, set up a project called AfricaWoman and we’ve done a lot of work around that. When there’s a direct connection, and a champion like Lesley, things grow organically.’

### MEDIATING VIA CELEBRITIES?

Many of this year’s interviewees feel that British audiences are more likely to engage with international stories through a bridging reporter, presenter or celebrity.

But *Newsnight*’s Peter Barron calls the use of celebrities to drive international stories a “cheap stunt”. James Deane, of the BBC World Service Trust, feels that a reliance on celebrity faces and simplistic narratives to engage audiences runs the risk of a backlash when the realities and complexities of the development process can’t match expectations. Georgia Arnold, in contrast, feels that using celebrities strategically to reinforce MTV’s *Staying Alive* campaign messages is legitimate and has impact, but that her audiences are savvy enough to know when they are being patronised.

### FORMATS

Some of our interviewees feel that the way forward is to develop more formatted shows, to bring large audiences to international topics. ‘There is a danger

that there’s almost a requirement that everything be formatted and we have got to resist that. On the other hand, exploiting the audience’s appetite and curiosity for these things in a public service way is also quite clever and a quite stealthy way of extending the range of what people consume and what people enjoy.’ Peter Salmon, Chief Creative Officer, BBC Vision

Andy Duncan says that ‘your more traditional film or documentary, even though it can be incredibly well made, if it is a bit dry and dusty, frankly you just don’t get an audience to it.’ He looks forward to a forthcoming Channel 4 show produced by Silver River Productions: ‘Entrepreneurs from this country are going to Uganda and working with communities out there to try and improve what is going on.

*Secret Millionaire* which was a very public service programme and a rather interesting new format, also got extremely good audiences. We are quietly optimistic that something like that might be a rather fresh take on international issues.’

Jo Clinton-Davis, formerly Head of Commissioning at UKTV, now at ITV, calls on fellow commissioners to show more courage and imagination: ‘You can impose a populist idiom on which to explore these parallel universes. They’ve tended to be done in a rather clunky, rather worthy way. We serve audiences up more and more mediation, because it’s safe, but at the same time you can see that there’s an appetite for authenticity.’

Formats that succeed are seized upon and done to death, says Peter Salmon. It’s significant then that the BBC, having scored a conspicuous success with *African School*, is now pushing ahead with both *Indian School* and *Chinese School*.

Both fit into another tried and trusted model for covering other countries – through seasons of



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programming. This year, Britain's own place in world history has been a common theme. In this, the 50th year since Ghana's independence, the 60th since India and Pakistan's, and the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade, the colonial legacy weighed heavily on the minds of commissioners and editors – how to commemorate these events, how to relate them to our contemporary lives, and how to involve viewers both in the UK and more widely in marking these anniversaries.

Salmon is genuinely excited about the possibilities of coverage of the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and the World Cup in South Africa in 2010 – but fears that constraints on the BBC's expenditure mean making choices about what to drop, and concentrating coverage into “fewer, bigger, better” events or seasons:

Andy Duncan offers an alternative perspective, of using niche channels to achieve greater depth: ‘The Russia season we did on More4 was extremely good. Now you couldn't have done that on the main channel, and dedicated so much time to it.’

### DOES THE NEWS AGENDA CONTINUE TO DRIVE COMMISSIONING?

Although Maggie O'Kane makes it clear that it's the responsibility of broadcasters to continue to bring stories out of Iraq, she is aware that a general focus on news agenda countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan means there is less space for equally urgent or interesting stories from elsewhere: ‘Cuba's hugely interesting now, South America's interesting but you know the broadcasters have a limited budget and it's all been blown on Iraq. If you go in and say I've got a very interesting idea on Venezuela they'll say “what planet?”’ Maggie O'Kane, Editorial Director, Guardian Films.

But Angus Macqueen believes there's also a lack of creative thinking from producers: ‘We're doing a couple of very big, bold, brave things domestically. I'd love to be doing them abroad but the ideas aren't

there. Nothing's coming at the moment. The tendency is for people to still come in and see ‘abroad’ as being a report from Afghanistan.’

### MAKING A DRAMA OUT OF A CRISIS

Dramas and feature films are regularly cited, more so than ever before, by interviewees looking to illustrate the potential to present complex ideas and stories from outside the UK, Europe and North America, to mainstream audiences. Whether funded by Hollywood, as with *Blood Diamond* and *The Constant Gardener*, or by Film Four with *The Last King of Scotland*. Whether literary adaptations (John Le Carre, and Giles Foden), or starring bankable Hollywood superstars (Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett in *Babel*, and Leonardo DiCaprio in *Blood Diamond*), they succeeded in engaging audiences with contemporary stories rooted in the global South – even if the key protagonists were white.

Soriosis Samura, a consultant on *Blood Diamond* praises the film's exploration of character: ‘When you go to make a documentary or a current affairs story, you haven't got that space and time and money. But with a feature film you manage to delve deeper and create a situation where you can work more on characters and create sympathy and people will then engage deeper.’

At a time when cinema is managing to fund and turn out mass-market hits of this kind, our interviewees feel that television, in comparison, shows a distinct lack of ambition.

Docudrama, however, is a genre that has seen a resurgence, with Channel 4 in particular pouring resources into several high-profile productions dealing with global themes – *Hamburg Cell*, *Saddam's Tribe* and Nick Broomfield's *Ghosts*, about the Chinese migrants who drowned in Morecambe Bay when cockle-picking.



## CASE STUDY: AL JAZEERA ENGLISH

The still relatively young channel Al Jazeera English (AJE) presents an interesting case study, and touches on many of the issues raised in this chapter.

Flora Gregory, Editor of the *Witness* documentary strand, presented by Rageh Omaar, says that she has the “extraordinary luxury of a lot of hours” (6 shows a week), and therefore the possibility of “extraordinary freedom in covering little stories” from around the world. ‘I don’t have to focus so much in the way that UK broadcasters do,’ says Gregory, contrasting her current work with her previous experience on Channel 4’s *Unreported World*.

‘*Unreported World* had a brief which was pressure points in the world, and to make those pressure points relevant to a UK audience. The point about *Witness* is it’s about ordinary people’s lives, and how they’re affected by the bigger scheme of things.’

Sorious Samura’s worry that broadcasters aren’t interested in going back to previous stories doesn’t apply to *Witness*: ‘Over a period of time we will revisit some stories, because the luxury of the number of hours we do is that we can go back to see what has happened to either characters or particular stories, to see if anything’s changed.’

Gregory gives diverse examples of films her team has acquired and produced, from *Being Osama*, about men in Canada with the name Osama, to a film following two Bolivian boys over the course of their day’s work in a tin mine.

Flora Gregory speaks of her long-term goal to move from sending reporters and film-makers from Europe to cover the rest of the world, to using local reporters and film-makers: ‘There are film makers who are established and working to an old model, where somebody who’s a specialist in Africa goes to Africa and makes a story. Then we’re working on another model which is somebody who may have been born in, for example, Africa but is acting as a bridge. And then there’s the next stage, which is what we’re working towards, which is locals making their own stories.’

The channel has a commissioning website, [ajicommissioning.net](http://ajicommissioning.net), where producers across the

world, large and small, are encouraged to register and submit programme ideas. Gregory says it has broadened out AJE’s commissioning reach, and has given a focus and outlet to many talented film-makers across the world.

‘No one likes using pitching websites so you have to encourage them, but all broadcasters do it now and there’s a very good reason – just to create order out of chaos really, and have some process by which you can receive proposals, and make sure that they’re not neglected. And also because we’re international, if they’re all in one place we can discuss them. Proposals are coming from all over the world onto the website.’

This also allows her team to develop longer-term relationships with talented and passionate film-makers from around the world. She says that often AJE will acquire a documentary for *Witness*, and then will commission the film-maker to make films with more of a *Witness* ethos.

‘You’re trying to get to know filmmakers, and that’s a long process. We watch their work, we view what they have done, and if they haven’t done anything you have to help them. Most people have done something, and it’s often a campaigning video.’

‘We commission half and acquire half. The thing about the acquisitions is there are an enormous number of wonderful films, astounding films, and passionate film-makers. It just bowls me over.’

‘There is a general philosophy here of doing stories that no one else will do, and hearing voices that have not been heard. But it’s a long-term goal to bring voices alive. So where there are many countries that don’t have free speech, there’s an interim way of dealing with it, and then a long-term way, and you don’t know how long it’s going to take.’

Budgets are tight, however, at \$20,000-\$30,000 for a 20-minute film.

‘I just think people’s lives are quite interesting really. And seeing other people’s lives and what similarities and differences there are. But in the end *Witness* is just all about traditional story telling with characters, beginning, middle and end. The recipe’s very straightforward.’



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- 1 *Witness – Beirut Under Siege*
- 2 *Witness – Child Miners*



## NEW MEDIA

In the previous chapter, we have seen that broadcasters are failing to find new ways of engaging audiences with international stories. Does the internet genuinely offer a different way of connecting audiences to global topics?

'When the web arrived it immediately struck us that here was a medium with none of the disadvantages of television, in other words there was no gatekeeper, there was no high cost of entry, there was no national audience – it was a global audience. Whereas broadcast media traditionally have been moderately elitist and quite a small number of gatekeepers deciding what is broadcast, this felt like a people's medium and therefore was particularly appropriate to civil society and particularly appropriate to the kind of global issues that we cared about.' Peter Armstrong, Director, OneWorld.net

As platforms and devices converge, and as audiences grow used to content on the internet, mass use of internet platforms to watch and interact with content is growing.

Overall, television viewing is falling, particularly towards the younger end of the age spectrum. Viewing of video content online or on mobile phones is increasing. Pressure on the mainstream broadcasters is growing, and they too have turned to the internet to maintain their audiences.

But Anthony Lilley, from Magic Lantern Productions, and co-author of Ofcom's discussion paper on the Public Service Publisher or PSP, asks this fundamental question of broadcasters, faced with the different culture and structure of the internet: 'Do they need to change at all or

should they simply become better at what they're good at?'

### BBC AND CHANNEL 4 ONLINE

Peter Salmon sees the BBC's expanding new media presence as a way for users of the BBC to climb in through 'the windows and the doors of the BBC so that people can come in and either commune with some of the services they love, exchange stories with us as broadcasters or with each other.'

'Those of us that are now making programmes are thinking much more about ourselves as the content makers than we are as people who are obsessed with making a 9 o'clock BBC2 documentary. There was almost a kind of fetish about a slot and that first transmission. So much great content that we make is never seen again – it is crazy.' Peter Salmon, Chief Creative Officer, BBC Vision

Andy Duncan from Channel 4 also believes online content needs to be linked to existing broadcast content. 'You need strong cross promotion between mass market platforms, like traditional TV channels, otherwise these things exist in a vacuum.'

### THE INTERNET IS SPATIAL, STRUCTURED AND UNFILTERED

But Anthony Lilley rejects this model, arguing that many broadcasters have not yet understood that the structure, culture and language of the internet are fundamentally different, and can't simply be bent to the will of television. It's not just a question of TV being able to put on the clothing of the





internet, and remain fundamentally TV. 'We find a lot of our metaphors come out of architecture, much more than they come out of television. You talk about maps, you talk about site maps and you talk about architectures, you talk about routes, the way you might walk through. It genuinely is a virtual space vocabulary that we use. Broadcasters don't get any of that, they just don't understand that notion.'

Broadcasters are struggling to make the cultural shift that enables them to participate and prosper in the online world. The key shift is the giving up of control – handing it to individual users and communities of users.

'When the BBC talks about opening up to the next wave of digital revolution it talks about an empowered audience, but actually I don't think it's really got in mind to pass over much of the power to the audience. It's happy to have some input from the audience but it's always had that, people have always written letters or had phone-ins, there's nothing terribly new because they're now writing blogs or emailing instead of writing letters. The actual people deciding which emails are read and what programmes are made are still pretty tightly within the BBC commissioning process, so there isn't actually any empowerment of the audience.' Peter Armstrong, Director, OneWorld.net

But there are other models according to Armstrong. The Al Gore-backed internet TV site, Current TV, began transmitting in the UK in early 2007 via digital cable and satellite. One third of its output is voted for and scheduled by its audience:

'The audience actually decides which programmes are shown – they have what they call a studio and then all the programme people who submit indy films are on there, you can watch them and you decide to green-light this one and not that one, and then it's voted on, and certain ones are green-lighted more and then they're shown in a transmission, in a linear way – that's the real sharing of power.'

Georgia Arnold of MTV's *Staying Alive* describes a similar process of user-generated scheduling in 2006: 'The MD of MTV UK gave me MTV Flux for World AIDS Day and Flux actually is a perfect channel to use because it is about user generated content and so we brought in eight young kids from across the UK. Most of them actually knew very little about AIDS and we spent the day with them asking them to choose what material they thought was appropriate for World AIDS Day looking through our library. They chose videos, they did some new pieces and some vox pops.'

It is the unfiltered nature of the internet which Lilley says appeals to many – including himself: 'My views of the Iraq war were fundamentally changed by YouTube. I was broadly negative but not that engaged until I went and looked at what was actually going on for real and what these guys were dealing with every day.' Anthony Lilley, Magic Lantern Productions

It's not difficult to understand why groups traditionally kept out of the heavily-regulated platforms such as television and radio have embraced the internet with such enthusiasm and success: alternative media, civil society, personal publishers, extremist groups.

As Andy Bell, MD of digital production house Mint Digital, says: 'The web is really ground up, it is so

*The Mark of Cain*, Channel 4

# All the things that are happening on the web are very transactional now. That's a much broader definition of what used to be called broadcasting or what the media is about.

Peter Armstrong, Director, OneWorld.net

democratic that anyone can hook a server up to the web, you can get a web account for 10 quid a month that lets you host a domain and serve content. If you have got a good idea I don't think money should be what stops you.'

## PUBLISHERS, NOT BROADCASTERS

Peter Armstrong believes that, ultimately, the internet will fundamentally change broadcasting: 'Increasingly, broadcast media are going to become more and more like publishing. In terms of book publishing there's always been a perfectly good model where the specialist biography is worth doing for an audience of a few thousand. And I think if we have a few million people in the world who want to know in more depth, to hear from, exchange views with, interact with, feel solidarity with the rest of the world, then that's a very worthwhile service.'

This idea is one that resonates with other industry thinkers – and provides opportunities not only for content owners to reach wider audiences with their existing content, but also to generate revenue from those audiences, and potentially to circumvent the traditional broadcast and commissioning model in the production of new content. Sorious Samura is looking at this model to fund future documentaries.

The economics of new media certainly provides threats but also immense possibilities for broadcasters, production companies, and rights holders more generally, to exploit their considerable archives, once they are digitised. Storage is cheap, bandwidth is cheap, so it makes sense for content owners to make available and searchable as much of the content they own as possible, in order that it can be found, used and paid for.

In contrast to traditional broadcasting, new media also offers a different way of connecting UK audiences with international stories and people in other countries.

'Broadcasting, if you think about it too narrowly, you think about it as information. You're telling the public something, you're educating or entertaining or informing. But if you come right away from that to the other extreme, you see that it's communication, it's a transaction. All the things that are happening on the web are very transactional now, you're meeting people, you're buying, you're selling, you're building things together, you're making new relationships, you're living, essentially. That's a much broader definition of what used to be called broadcasting, or what the media is about. It's a kind of a living space. And if you think about a living space, in which people in developing countries are living alongside people

in so-called developed countries, then all kinds of interesting things happen.' Peter Armstrong, Director, OneWorld.net

## PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA DEBATES ABROAD

Anthony Lilley's question about whether public service broadcasters need to reinvent themselves in line with the digital age, or whether they should keep doing what they are good at, is one being asked by public service media elsewhere in the world.

In South Africa, SABC's Chief Executive Dali Mpofu says he is concerned that competition in the market is not serving the poorest and most marginalised. He sees new media as central in giving poor people a voice – especially in a country like South Africa which has more mobile phones than television sets.

In common with other interviewees for the report, Mpofu sees traditional forms of participation through phone-in and email-ins as formulaic and unsatisfactory. He wants SABC, and other African state and public service broadcasters to rally under a slogan of "broadcasting for total citizen empowerment":

'It's a whole big debate which we need to confront globally to ensure that the focus on the citizen is brought back. It's the people who have no other means of affecting change in their own lives that need broadcasting to air their grievances, so they are as vocal as possible.'

## NEW MEDIA: GOOD OR BAD FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH INTERNATIONAL ISSUES?

Participation is central to new media. But, with the proliferation of available media, some worry that society threatens to lose its coherent civic discourse, mass moments, and shared experiences which have traditionally characterized broadcast media.

'There's now a billion things that are making up the public sphere including a lot online, but these are also private spaces as well. Only some of these are leading into public conversations and some of them are leading into very fractured and fragmented conversations so the degree to which they are actually enlivening a democracy becomes much more questionable.' James Deane, BBC World Service Trust

Audience behaviour and the exercise of choice might bring negative effects too. Peter Armstrong voices a worry raised by many of our interviewees: 'The more choice you give viewers and listeners the more they're going to cocoon themselves in their existing opinions and preferences.'

Will we go home after work and find a documentary about northern Uzbekistan, as Angus Macqueen



speculates, or will we be content to be served up curated menus of programming via an EPG (Electronic Programme Guide)? Peter Armstrong thinks there will be online filters, curators, recommenders of content, and that this might lead to an entire cottage industry of people earning small amounts of income by sourcing content for audiences large and small.

Both media and civil society are trying to understand how ordinary people can become engaged, through online media, and take action, whether around a human rights issue, climate change, a local governance issue, a national political issue, or self-empowerment.

The assumption from many of our interviewees is that the internet, being perceived as a grassroots space, is where organic organizing happens. James Deane offers an opinion on why citizens have taken to this kind of connecting and self-expression in western democracies and also in less democratic developing countries: 'In the west, a large part of it is because of the reaction to concentration of ownership and a perception that fundamentally the media is controlled by very narrow sets of interests and it's very difficult to gain spaces within them. In a lot of developing countries, it's a reaction to the opportunity to gain public spaces independent of government.'

But he sounds a note of caution about relying on new media as an alternative space to the mainstream media: 'If we are getting ourselves into the position where we think that new media is the place where people make their voices heard we need to question that because I think there are real limits. It's not the same as a radio or television station being able to reach large numbers of people in terms of a public space – it's setting up specific communities.'

*Unreported World, Channel 4*



## CASE STUDY: *FOUR DOCS*

*FourDocs* is Channel 4's participatory documentary site, and provides a microcosm of the challenges for producers wanting to create work rooted in the values of new media, but having to work with traditional broadcasters. Anthony Lilley's company, Magic Lantern Productions, developed Channel 4's *FourDocs* site. The story of *FourDocs*, says Lilley, 'was a very general question about what is the future of documentary plus the internet? And the answer that had been given was, "what we'll do is we'll put television documentaries on the internet", to which my answer was, "Well, yeah and what else?" Then we started trying to locate *FourDocs* in the tradition of the mass observation movement of documentary. It's just a dilution of the notion of mass observation to get more and more people to contribute stuff about everyday life.'

The first major challenge was to convince Channel 4 that the system had to be open, not closed – and that the online space is different, and different rules apply: 'There's a softening of editorial stance for a broadcaster that says we are not going to block out, we're going to let in, and one of the processes that had to be really thought through with *FourDocs* was how you get a broadcaster that is used to basically filtering down to a 1 hour slot to understand that its standards can be applied in this new context.'

*FourDocs* includes an extensive set of training modules on film making, available free. Lilley identifies this as the broader reason why he regards *FourDocs* as a success in new media terms: 'We felt that it was really important that you give something back into the community, that you didn't just ask for their stuff, and this is why a lot of these broadcaster-led user-generated projects are not working because the broadcaster mindset is so exploitative. It is one-way, it's not exploitative in a nasty sort of way, it's just they don't perceive that there's any two-way relationship. So, if you look at the BBC's 1minute film site, they take the rights. With *FourDocs*, you keep the rights, we publish under a Creative Commons Licence.'

Angus Macqueen, Head of Documentaries at Channel 4, also sees *FourDocs* as something of a stepping stone into the television documentary industry: 'Commissioners must find ways to turn the talent that technology has unleashed – relishing the sheer lunacy and subversion of some of it – into programmes that large audiences still want to watch. We must then lure those 20-second computer consumers into our world.'



# YOUNG PEOPLE

## WHERE DO YOUNG PEOPLE GO TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE WIDER WORLD?

The television is usually switched on when they're at home and – surprisingly perhaps – it's their main source of news about the wider world. The young people we spoke to in the south and north of England are media savvy, but when it comes to news and current affairs, their information comes primarily from television, not the internet. They tend to be more interested in local and national news, but international stories do attract their attention when significant events take place in distant places, like the tsunami or Iraq, or when they have a family or personal connection with a foreign country.

## WHICH MEDIA DO YOUNG PEOPLE CONSUME?

### Television

All the young people we spoke to have access to a rich selection of media, but when they're at home, especially in the morning and the evening, the television dominates. The radio plays a complementary role, especially in the mornings or on car journeys.

'I tend to have GMTV on in the morning when I am getting ready so it's just on in the background.' (Female, Barnet, north London)

'I watch TV for news. When I'm getting ready for work in the morning, I watch Breakfast 24 and sometimes I will flick over to GMTV.' (Female, Leeds)

'When I'm at home I would watch TV. So I wouldn't go out of my way to look for news on the internet.' (Male, Barnet, north London)

When they want to find out what's going on in the world, the young people we spoke to watch the news on the main terrestrial channels: BBC, ITV and Channel 4. In general, they favour mainstream rather than niche channels:

'All terrestrial TV, particularly Channel 4.' (Male, Barnet, north London)

'For news, BBC or BBC Online, but for sports news I go to Sky Sports.' (Male, West Yorkshire)

'BBC 24 is alright – although they start repeating the news. But you can usually get what you want after a while.' (Female, West Yorkshire)

### The internet

Everyone we spoke to uses the internet regularly, though most do so primarily for interpersonal communication, especially email (and sometimes for MSN, Instant Messenger, Facebook and other social networking sites). The internet is only a supplementary medium when it comes to accessing news and current affairs. When they use the internet for news, they choose sites with links to offline media.

'When I want to see the headlines, I just check BBC Online.' (Male, Leeds)

'I go to the *Guardian*; it publishes information online before it goes in print.' (Male, Lewisham, south London)



'Newspapers online are easy to access, they are free...and you don't have to get dressed either.'  
(Female, Leeds)

The internet becomes a primary source of news and replaces television under certain circumstances: firstly, when they want to know what's going on and there's no news on television or the radio at that time.

'If I was going to look for specific news, I would go on my laptop, because it's on all the time.'  
(Male, West Yorkshire)

Secondly, when images and events are controversial – for example the scenes of torture by soldiers in Iraq:

'I think these clips can make you more aware. When I see images of the war in Iraq all the time, I just forget it's still going on because I'm absorbed in my own world. So, sometimes those scenes are a reality shock. It brings me back down to earth.'  
(Male, West Yorkshire)

Such images are widely circulated online but not everyone approves.

'My friends send me emails with torture clips. It's like saying: it's ok that these things happen by watching them.'  
(Female, West Yorkshire)

Thirdly, the internet provides young people with the chance to find out more about stories which interest

them or ones which don't feature in the television news bulletins.

'When Britney shaved her hair, I went online looking for photos.'  
(Female, West Yorkshire)

'You go online to look for stuff, but with TV and radio, it's things you don't really care about. You just listen to them.'  
(Male, Barnet, north London)

BBC Online is the most popular news source. YouTube is also popular, but it serves a different role – it's not regarded as a trusted source of information, but seen as somewhere to go to find material which isn't available on television or websites like BBC Online.

'YouTube is sometimes good, you could watch Saddam getting hanged on YouTube. I didn't watch it, but you can if you want to.'  
(Male, Islington, north London)

'You can look at graphic things – people put things on and you can really see what is going on sometimes.'  
(Male, Lewisham, south London)

A small minority of the young people we spoke to participate in online forums.

'I go on them for the conspiracy theories. It makes you think about events such as Diana's death or 9/11 or even the Titanic from a different light. You get access to material you would never see otherwise.'  
(Male, Leeds)

*Hotel Rwanda*, courtesy of  
Entertainment in Video

‘I do go on forums. It’s just about backing up what you think and getting support.’ (Male, Leeds).

‘I think that what blogs are for is to get a good feel for what is going on and what other people are thinking. That’s it. I wouldn’t read a blog and take it seriously.’ (Male, Leeds)

Probably the most popular online location is Google. Its extensive use reflects the desire to navigate the vast, and sometimes chaotic, online space. As some young people told us, they don’t have time to waste online, so search engines like Google take them straight to where they want to go.

‘I usually go to the first sites that come up on Google. Or if I see a trusted website I recognise, I go for that.’ (Female, West Yorkshire)

For young people with cultural and family connections to other parts of the world, the internet is a way of accessing viewpoints and information not available on UK sites, television and radio.

‘I was born in Israel so I always look up Israeli news pages because I don’t trust the BBC when it comes to that.’ (Male, Barnet, north London)

‘I use the internet to find out about things relating to church and religion. There are ministry sites, especially in America. You have a lot of people typing their views in there, so I go on the internet a lot for this stuff.’ (Female, Lewisham, south London)

#### Feature films

Television and the internet are the most regularly used media, but feature films emerge as surprisingly

influential amongst the young people we interviewed. The discussions we witnessed around films representing Africa –like *The Last King of Scotland*, *Blood Diamond* and *Tsotsi* – were long and intense, and they provoked heavy criticism of traditional media images of Africa.

‘Coverage of Africa in the media has always been bad. You never hear anything good.’ (Female, Leeds)

‘I think with Africa a lot of your education comes from the media. You see a lot of poverty out there. For example, on *Family Fortunes*, if the first question was “What do you associate with Africa”, I could guarantee the top two answers would be something to do with poverty.’ (Male, West Yorkshire)

Although they found the feature films dominated by violence, most young people could see their informative value.

‘*Hotel Rwanda* – I saw it in college. It’s good...quite shocking.’ (Female, Barnet, north London)

‘*Hotel Rwanda* is a really strong film. A lot of people who watched it were crying their eyes out. It’s really good. You get the facts as well.’ (Male, Barnet, north London).

What kind of news stories are young people are interested in? Films on Africa and other parts of the world might occasionally be part of young people’s media diet, but their interest in information and news is primarily grounded within the UK, their locality, and Anglo-American celebrity culture. We asked them which stories interested them the most.

‘When I heard there were tornadoes in London,

**I think what blogs are good for is to get a good feel for what is going on and for what other people are thinking.**

Male, Leeds

**I trust tv the most because you get the images and see where stories are reported from.**

Female, Leeds





I was immediately interested.’ (Female, Barnet, north London)

‘I remember reading a story about an octopus they found close to London, which was 36 metres long – it was disgusting.’ (Female, Barnet, north London)

Although the young people we spoke to did not show a natural interest in international stories, the accounts we heard told more of frustration in trying to make sense of the wider world rather than indifference. A number of them exhibited embarrassed confusion about world events – they felt they ought to know more.

On certain occasions, however, international news does attract their attention – for example when a major world event takes place like 9/11, the South Asian tsunami or Hurricane Katrina, or when there’s an event with particular significance for Britain, such as the war in Iraq.

These events remain vivid, especially the tsunami, but at the same time they feel remote from young people’s lives:

‘Obviously it’s going to tug at your heart strings, but it’s hard to put yourself in that situation really.’ (Female, West Yorkshire)

‘It didn’t have a personal element, whereas with the London bombings it was different. A lot of people know someone who knows someone, whereas with the tsunami, it was so far away.’ (Male, Barnet, north London)

Many participants made comparisons between the tsunami and Hurricane Katrina.

‘You’re not really connected to South Asia. You might see it on a postcard or something but you’re not connected, whereas with America, it’s such a big influence, you feel close to it. So, when New Orleans happened, I thought: this is happening and they aren’t doing anything. This is a major thing.’ (Female, Leeds)

*The Last King of Scotland,*  
20th Century Fox

For the South London group, both Hurricane Katrina and the tsunami reflect major global problems:

‘It was sad, all those people killed for nothing.’

‘The Atlantic has an alarm system but because those people in South Asia were poorer, they didn’t get any warning signs that would have saved their lives.’

‘If that happened on a Miami beach it would be different.’

‘It’s the inequality in the world... it brings it home on a large scale.’

‘It’s like what happened with Hurricane Katrina – some of the black and white people were just left there and all the rich people were taken away.’

The war in Iraq also initiated a political debate:

‘Blair and Bush were told not to go to war and they did, how come they are not being punished – what does that say?’ (Female, Lewisham, south London)

‘It would be nice to see Iraqis not getting the brunt of this war – people settling in and it actually working. Nothing is working in Iraq. I don’t know how Blair can sit there and say ‘I’ve done alright’.’ (Female, Leeds)

# Al Jazeera doesn't only cover wars, they cover places, and events, say in Congo. They will take you in a village and show you how people live.

Male, Islington, north London

However, whilst young people felt sympathy for the Iraqi people, they also revealed their fatigue with a story which is constantly on the news.

'It's being going on for years.' (Female, Leeds)

'There is that much kicking off all the time, it's hard to know what is going on.' (Male, Leeds)

## Trust/mistrust in the media

For the young people we spoke to, television is far more trusted as a source of information, than the internet.

'I trust TV the most because you get the images and see where stories are reported from.' (Female, Leeds)

'Lots of stuff on the internet is doctored.' (Female, Islington, north London)

'I personally don't care about what some guy in Alabama says online about global warming. I would rather have someone half intelligent who knows all the issues and can speak for five minutes about what they think it's about. TV filters more out than the internet.' (Male, Barnet, north London)

Although television is more trusted, young people are not uncritical.

'You can trust the BBC to an extent but you need to be aware.' (Female, Lewisham, south London)

'I think the media censor themselves – they have to. If they didn't someone else would anyway.' (Female, Leeds)

'It's hard to distinguish what you can and can't believe because sources are anywhere and everywhere really.' (Male, Leeds)

Knowing what you can and cannot trust is a big issue for the young people we spoke to and points to the importance of promoting critical media literacy.

## Al Jazeera: a different perspective?

A medium which emerged as a surprisingly common reference point was Al Jazeera. About half of the young people we spoke to are aware of Al Jazeera, and whilst only a small minority actually watch it, many use it to draw comparisons with mainstream media.

'I watch Al Jazeera – they show everything on the spot. If there is a murder taking place in Iraq or something, it is there on tv and then it's exclusive. That's what I like about it. With the BBC, they tend to cut out some violent scenes – obviously because they're considered as unsuitable.' (Male, Barnet, north London)

'Al Jazeera shows that the Government blocks information. So everything you get on the BBC might not be how it seems.' (Male, Lewisham, south London)

A proliferation of media seems to be leading to a more critical approach:

'I don't like Al Jazeera. It's a bit like CNN but worse. It's the little screen with bits all around. There's too much going on. I like to deal with one story and then go to the next one.' (Female, Leeds)

'My dad watches Al Jazeera a lot, but I can't stomach



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it. It's gruesome. It's not that I don't trust it, I do. I just don't like watching it. You don't see kids getting shot on BBC news, do you?' (Male, Islington, north London)

Talking to young people, left us with a strong impression that they want more from the media than fleeting images, spectacular stories, stereotypical depictions and narrow visions of global reality:

'Media go on about different issues, but they don't provide any solution.'

'They make it all sound like you'll just walk out and get shot. '

'Yes, they like to make you panic.'

At the same time, the media are seen as having the potential power and influence to make a difference:

'Al Jazeera doesn't only cover wars. They cover places and events, say in Congo. They will take you in a village and show you how people live. People should be shown that sort of thing. Maybe more people would then want to help if they saw others' lives. It might make the world a better place.' (Male, Islington, north London)

## METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted with six focus groups consisting of young people (aged 18 -25) who have access to a wide variety of media including the internet.

The groups took place in greater London, Leeds and West Yorkshire, and included young people in full time education, in work, and from various cultural backgrounds.

In each location, three groups were recruited, representing an urban affluent location, a culturally diverse urban location and a semi-urban location.

- 1 *Storyville, The Liberace of Baghdad*, BBC4
- 2 *Blood Diamond*, Warner Bros



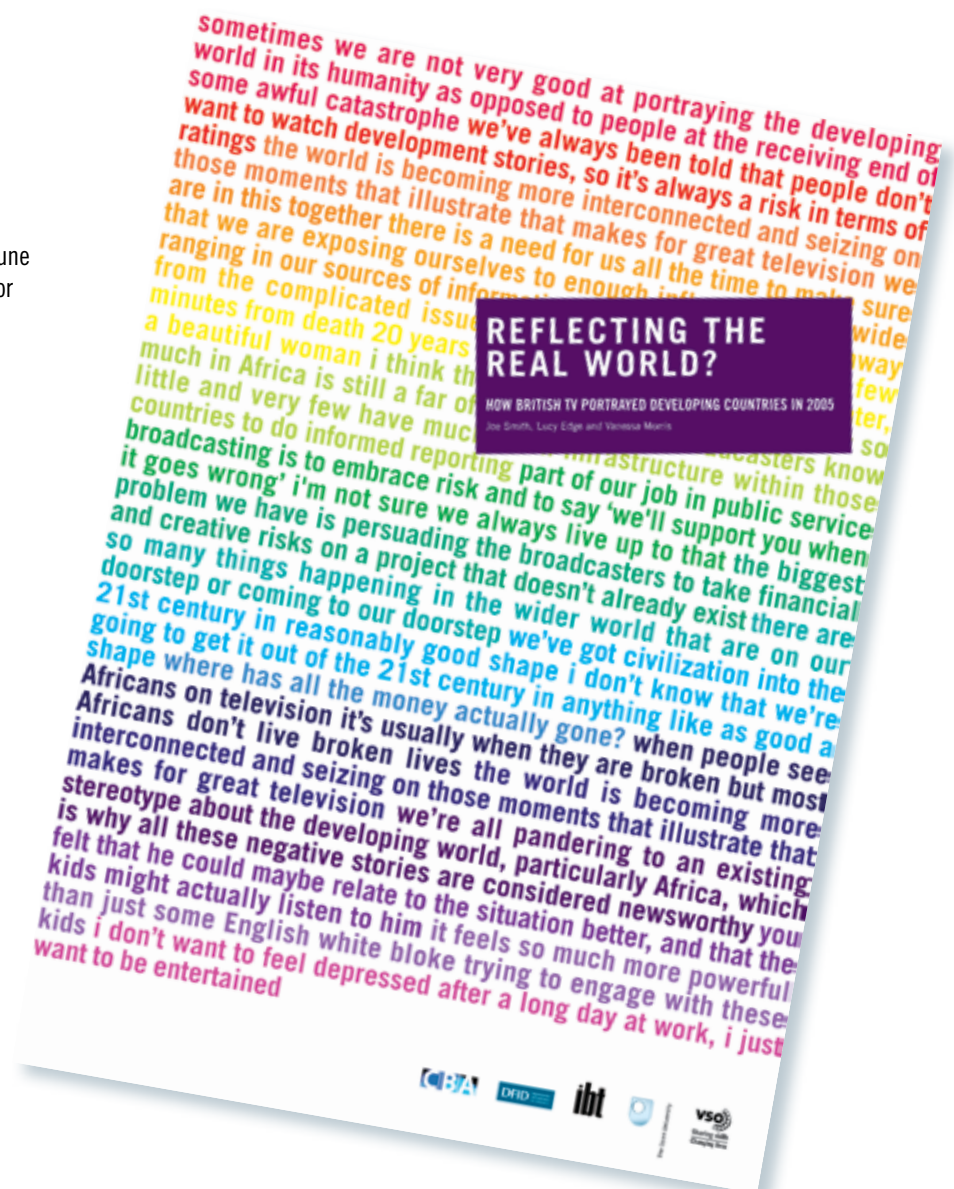
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# Reflecting the Real World?

The first report in this series looking at UK television coverage of the developing world was published in June 2006. Copies can be downloaded at [www.ibt.org.uk](http://www.ibt.org.uk) or [www.cba.org.uk](http://www.cba.org.uk)

Hard copies are also available from the IBT office.



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