



A Study of Media in Sri Lanka

(excluding the North and East)

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A Report by the Centre for Policy Alternatives
And International Media Support

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Contents

1	Introduction	ii
2	Country Profile	1
2.1	Map	1
2.2	General Overview	1
2.3	Political System	2
2.4	Socio Economic Overview	2
3	Media Landscape	3
3.1	Media Overview	3
3.2	Readership and Viewership	3
3.2.1	KAPS Data	4
3.2.2	Readership / Viewership Profile	6
3.3	Mainstream Media Profile	7
3.3.1	Newspapers	7
3.3.2	Television	9
3.3.3	Radio	11
3.4	Regional and Community Media	12
3.4.1	Regional Media	12
3.4.2	Community Radio	13
3.4.3	Provincial Journalism	15
3.5	Media and Information Communication Technology	17
4	Content Snapshot	20
4.1	Editorial Positions	20
4.2	Lead Stories	21
4.3	Election Reporting - Summary Findings	22
5	Tsunami and the Impact on Media	25
5.1	Tsunami within the Peace Process : Study Synopsis	26
6	Legal and Regulatory Framework	29
6.1	Media Freedom, Freedom of Expression and Information	30
6.2	Secrecy and Lack of Freedom of Information	32
6.3	Election Reporting	33
6.4	Community Radio	33
6.5	The Impact of Activism	34
6.6	Media Activism, Training and Support Organisations	35
6.7	Role of the International Community	36
7	Key Problems	38
7.1	Political Polarization	38
7.2	Media Freedom	38
7.3	Ethnocentrism, Religious Nationalism and Partisan Reporting	39
7.4	Reporting of Minority Issues, Human Rights and Social Issues	41
7.5	Journalists and Media Personnel	42

Sri Lanka is currently going through one of the most crucial periods of its post independence history. The civil war between the government and separatist Tamil nationalist guerrillas - the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which has claimed nearly 65,000 lives and retarded the country's development process for almost two decades, has seen its longest period of ceasefire. However, since the cease fire was signed in February 2002, human rights violations including political assassinations and recruitment of child soldiers as well as other violations of the cease fire agreement, have pointed to its vulnerability and fragility. In addition, there have been no direct talks between the Government and the LTTE since March 2003.

Both conditioned by and reinforcing the challenge of finding a peaceful settlement to the ethnic conflict, has been the frequent resort to the electorate to break existing political stalemate. Following the presidential election of 1999, Sri Lanka has had three general elections in quick succession - 2000, 2001 and 2004. The General Election in April 2004 brought to office a minority government under the banner of the United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA). To date, this government has managed to secure a bare majority of the seats in parliament. Its efforts however, to resume talks with the LTTE have not been successful.

In such a situation, the media plays a paramount role in defining the dimensions of challenge, identifying key actors and by shaping peoples' perceptions through the provision of information and analysis. The Sri Lankan crisis cannot be understood without bringing media in to the picture. In any resolution of a protracted ethnic conflict, as in the case of Sri Lanka, the mass media plays a vital if not decisive role.

Restructuring the state to accommodate the aspirations of all communities through a process of democratic transformation is a challenge currently faced not only by the state and critical non-state actors, but also by all segments of the Sri Lankan population. This challenge was only intensified further by the tsunami tragedy that devastated the island on 26 December 2004, leaving in its wake a series of new hurdles for the nation and its peoples to overcome.

In such a context, the media in Sri Lanka has a pivotal role to play in the creation and consolidation of democratic laws and practices, and of a culture of tolerance and diversity.

Accordingly, the Media Unit of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) of Colombo, Sri Lanka, supported by International Media Support (IMS) of Copenhagen, Denmark undertook this assessment of the media situation in Sri Lanka (excluding North and East¹), in order to identify capacity and constraints of the Sri Lankan mainstream and regional media.

CPA would like to take this opportunity to thank IMS, Denmark for making this study possible. CPA also expresses its appreciation for the valuable support provided by all media personnel, journalists and provincial correspondents of both the mainstream media as well as regional and community media institutions in the preparation of this report.

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¹ A report on the media situation of the North and East of the country was also produced through the same partnership in 2003 and is available at http://www.cpalanka.org/research_papers/Media_in_the_North_East.pdf

2 Country Profile

2.1 Map



2.2 General Overview²

Location:	Southern Asia, island in the Indian Ocean, south of India (slightly larger than West Virginia)
Independence:	4 February 1948 (from UK)
Executive / Legislative:	Chief of state & head of government: President: elected by popular vote for a six-year term (Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga since 12 November 1994);
Cabinet:	appointed by the president in consultation with the prime minister Unicameral Parliament (225 seats; elected by vote on proportional representation basis by district for six-year terms)
Population:	19,905,165 (July 2004 est.) <i>note:</i> since the outbreak of hostilities between the government and the LTTE in the early '80s, several hundred thousand Tamil civilians have fled the island
Ethnic groups:	Sinhalese 74%, Tamil 18%, Moor 7%, Burgher, Malay, and Vedda 1%
Religions:	Buddhist 70%, Hindu 15%, Christian 8%, Muslim 7% (1999)
Median Age / Age structure:	29.1 years; 0-14 years: 24.8%, 15-64: 68.2%, 65 and over: 7% (2004 est.)
Sex ratio:	0.96 male(s)/female (2004 est.)

² The World Factbook, available at <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html>

2.3 Political System

One striking feature of the Sri Lankan political system, in the more than four decades since independence, has been the existence of generally stable political parties. In general elections held during the period 1952 to 1977, two main political parties emerged, namely the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) who then alternately secured majorities and formed governments. Despite the introduction of Proportional Representation, the two party system continues to dominate politics. However, the two main parties were largely Sinhala based, resulting in additional party formation along ethnic lines.

By the late 1980s, three types of parties could be defined on the basis of ethnicity: the Sinhalese-backed parties including Marxist-based parties such as the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna - People's Liberation

Front (JVP) and the Communist Party (CP); a Tamil party system composed of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) - an 'umbrella party' formed in the '70s which included the Federal Party formed in 1949 and other minority-oriented parties such as the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) which enjoyed the support of the Indian Tamils; and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC).

In 2004, the electoral alliance between the People's Alliance (comprising SLFP and a number of minor parties) and the JVP formed the UPFA, which came into power through snap elections in April. The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) - a coalition of former TULF politicians under the direction of the LTTE - which won 20 seats in the north and east, was a significant new political formation that emerged from the elections of 2001 and 2004. Nine seats were also won by Buddhist monks who contested under the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU - National Sinhala Heritage)³.

2.4 Socio Economic Overview

	2003	2002	2001	2000
GDP growth rate %	5.9	4.0	-1.5	6.0
Inflation %	6.3	9.6	14.2	6.2
Budget deficit as % of GDP	8.0	8.9	10.9	9.8
Trade balance bln\$	-1.1	-1.4	-1.2	-1.8
Population (million)	19.3	19.0	18.7	18.4
Unemployment rate (%)	8.4 ⁴	9.1	7.9	7.6

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka

Though Sri Lanka shifted away from a socialist orientation towards market-oriented policies and export-oriented trade in 1977, the pace of reform has been uneven over the years. In 1983, ethnic disputes slowed the process of liberalization and economic diversification. The subsequent armed conflict between the LTTE and the Government in the northern and eastern parts of the country

continued into late 2001, causing severe economic and social problems in the country. In 1988-90, a violent uprising of the JVP led by educated but unemployed youth also caused extensive upheavals and economic uncertainty. However, average annual GDP growth was a respectable 5.2 percent over the 1990s⁵. Currently, Sri Lanka's most dynamic sectors are textiles and garments. In addition, the over 1 million Sri Lankans working abroad (90% in the Middle East) send home over US \$1 billion a year.

³ This is the first time in Sri Lanka's history that a political party fielded a list of candidates consisting only of Buddhist monks.

⁴ provisional, third quarter

⁵ Asian Development Bank, Country Assistance Plans - Sri Lanka, available at: <http://www.adb.org/Documents/CAPs/SRI/0101.asp>

3 Media Landscape

3.1 Media Overview

State-owned media

The state controls the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited (ANCL, or Lake House as it is popularly known), the biggest newspaper establishment in the country with approximately 20 publications in the three main languages. ANCL has the broadest outreach in terms of distribution networks and benefits extensively through state advertising. The state also controls the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (radio), the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (television) and the ITN radio and television network - i.e. 10 radio channels and three television channels - along with five regional radio stations.

Privately-owned

There are seven large private establishments that print a number of daily newspapers in all three languages. In addition there are also a number of private establishments that publish several weekend newspapers. Although radio and television were a government monopoly up to the mid-1980s several privately owned television and radio stations have now been established. The private sector owns four TV stations (with seven channels), and four radio stations (with 12 channels). The transmission capacity and reach of the private stations still remain far more limited than that of the state-owned electronic media. Thus, state owned electronic media, both radio and television, remains the electronic media with the widest reach (approximately 95% of the country).

Journalists

There are approximately 4,000 working journalists in Sri Lanka. Of this, approximately 2,000 are employed by media institutions on a full-time basis, while the rest work as provincial correspondents. No data is currently available on the exact number of freelance journalists in Sri Lanka.

3.2 Readership and Viewership

The most recent comprehensive survey exclusively on the mass media in Sri Lanka was carried out by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) Kandy in 1995/96⁶. The Knowledge Attitudes and Practices Survey (KAPS) conducted by Social Indicator, the survey research arm of CPA, does include data on media habits. However, this data is not comprehensive as it is not a study focused on media habits.

Much of the existent research on the media sector is carried out by market research organizations with a commercial focus. Further, the existent (limited) data is also exorbitantly priced, and is therefore beyond the reach of many working in the field of media reform.

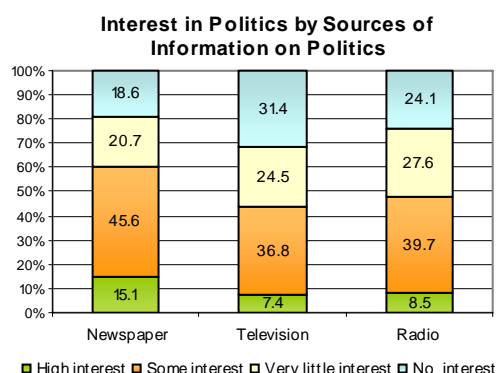
For example, when contacted by the CPA for the purpose of this study, one leading market research organization in Colombo quoted Rs. 57,500 (USD 549.65)⁷ as the total cost of purchasing approximately 15 data tables; a cost which we could not justifiably bear. As a result, the viewership and readership data presented in this report is unfortunately not comprehensive, and excludes some crucial information - much of which is in relation to the Tamil language media.

⁶ Baseline Study: Volume 1- The Mass Media in Sri Lanka, ICES, March 1996

⁷ 1 USD = 104.612 LKR (mid-market exchange rate as at 05.11.2004)

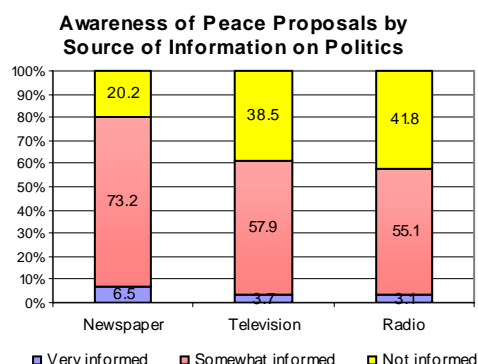
3.2.1 KAPS Data⁸

According to the 2003 KAPS survey data, television is the principle source of news for 57% of the population, followed by newspaper for 18%, radio for 18% and other sources for less than 10%. However, levels of interest in politics are highest amongst newspaper readers with 60.7% showing High Interest or Some Interest, followed by radio listeners (48.2%). Television viewers show the lowest level of interest in politics (44.2%).



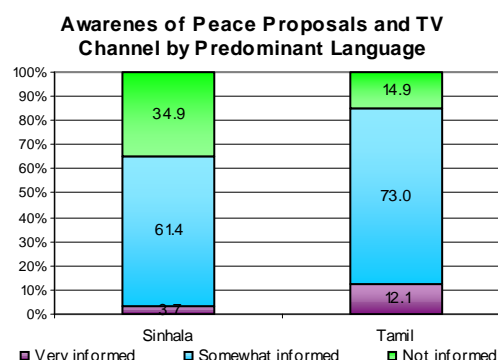
Newspaper readers also show the highest level of knowledge (both perceived as well as actual)⁹ regarding peace proposals discussed during GoSL-LTTE negotiations with 79.7% saying that they are either Very Informed or Somewhat Informed. Amongst television viewers and radio listeners, 61.6% and 58.2% respectively said that they are either Very Informed or Somewhat Informed.

Amongst television viewers¹⁰, more Tamil language viewers (85.1%) than Sinhala language



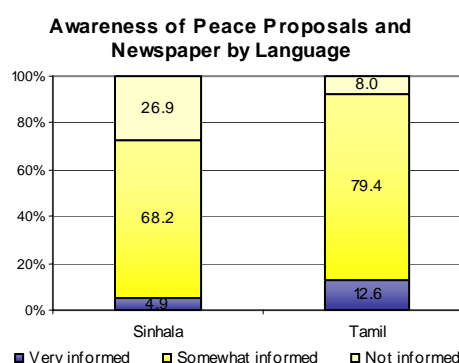
viewers (65.1%) said they are Very or Somewhat Informed regarding peace proposals that are being discussed. The same trend is seen amongst the newspaper readership. More Tamil language newspaper readers (92%) than Sinhala language newspaper readers (73.1%) said that they are Very or Somewhat Informed regarding peace proposals.

Amongst men and women, more men (25.5%) than women (13.7%) look to newspapers as the source



for political information. Television was cited as the source by 67.3% women and 55.0% men. Similar number of men (19.5%) and women (19.1%) cited Radio as their source of information.

Amongst men, the figures for Very Informed, Somewhat Informed and Not Informed regarding Peace Proposals are 5.7%, 68.3% and 25.9% respectively and while for women, the figures are 2.8%, 53.7% and 43.5% respectively.



⁸ Much of the analysis presented above was conducted specifically for the purpose of this report and is not included in the KAPS 2003 Final Report. Find additional information on media in the Final Report - Chapter 5, available at

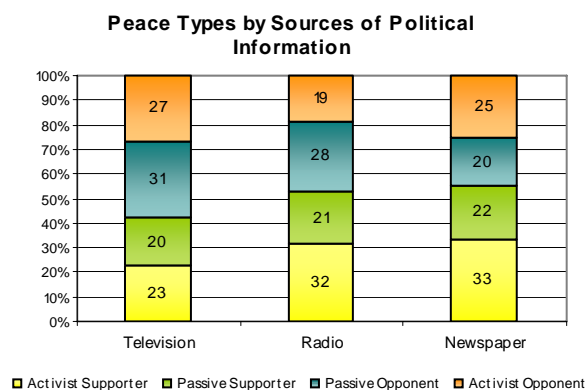
http://www.cpalanka.org/research_papers/KAPS_chapter_5.pdf

⁹ In addition to asking respondents how informed they are regarding the peace proposals in discussion, their actual knowledge on the issue was also tested by way of responses to a series of questions.

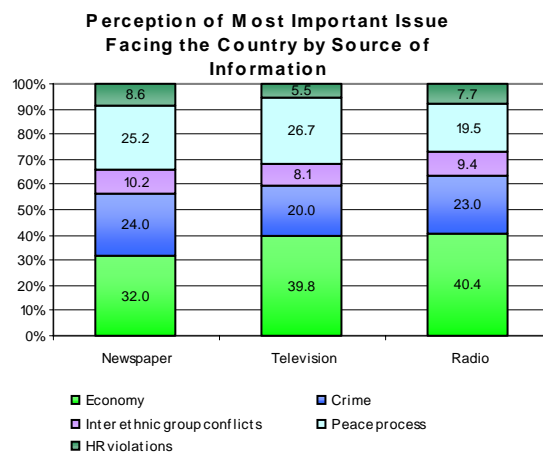
¹⁰ Save for two English language channels, all other television channels broadcast programming in multiple languages. Therefore the graph on television has been compiled on the basis of predominant language of programming. *Maharaja* Television broadcasts on two channels, one Sinhala and one sharing separate slots for Tamil and English programming. State-owned *Rupavahini* broadcasts on two separate channels, one with predominantly Sinhala content and the other with predominantly Tamil content. These channels or slots have been included under the respective language.

As Chapter 5 of the KAPS report points out using the graph below, those relying primarily on television for news are the least likely to support the peace proposals: 58% of primary television viewers oppose the peace proposals while 27% are Activist Opponents¹¹. In contrast, among those relying on radio for most of their news, 53% are

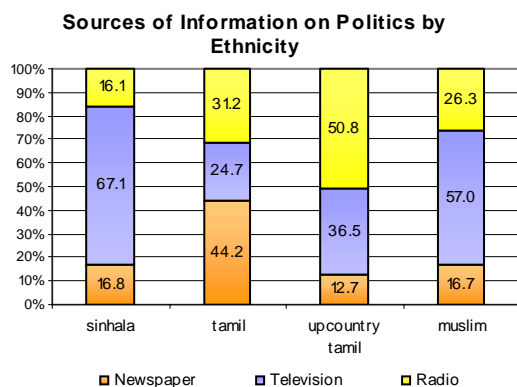
When asked if they have confidence in the mass media 54% of Sri Lankans said that they have confidence, while 19% said that they are undecided and 28% said they have no confidence. Amongst those who most often use the Sinhala language, 53.3% have confidence, 19.7% are undecided and 29.9% have no confidence in the



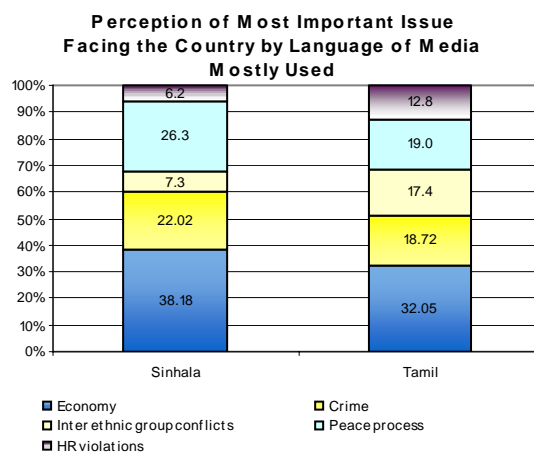
peace supporters including 32% Activist Supporters. Those relying primarily on newspapers are similarly inclined: 55% favor peace and 33% are Activist Supporters.



media. Amongst those who most often use the Tamil language, the figures are 68.4%, 14.1% and 17.5% respectively.



Respondents were also asked to state their opinion on the most important issues facing Sri Lanka at the time, and were provided the options seen below to rank in order of importance. The graphs that follow are based on the rank one issue stated by each respondent.



When asked if they agree or disagree with the statement that the media should be completely free to criticize the government, an overwhelming 85.6% of the sample population agreed, while 7% were undecided and 7.4% disagreed.

¹¹ Please refer the KAPS report available at http://www.cpalanka.org/research_papers/KAPS_chapter_5.pdf for further details and definitions.

3.2.2 Readership / Viewership Profile

Population by language: Sinhala 74%, Tamil 18%, other 8%

Literacy (age 15 and over can read and write): *total: 92.3% male: 94.8% female: 90% (2003 est.)*¹²

TV & Radio ownership¹³:

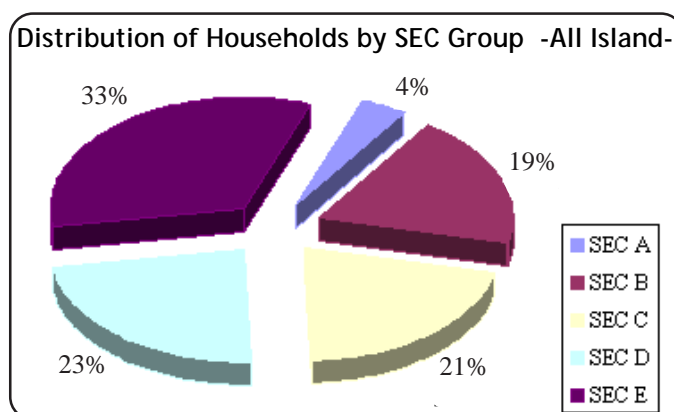
Television or Radio 90% (Households 3,330,000; Population 14,785,200)

Television 72% (Households 2,664,100; Population 11,828,160)

Colour 68%, Black & White 32%, Remote/C 58%, One TV Households 97%

Radio 80% (Households 2,960,000; Population 13,142,000)

Note: The pie chart below, compiled by Survey Research Lanka, is central to the rest of the report as many of the tables to follow are presented in terms of the Socio-Economic Classifications provided therein.



Source: SRL BrandScan October 2003

Socio-Economic Classification (SEC) of Households

Occupation of Main Earner	Educational Level of main Earner						Occupation Code	Education Code
	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6		
O 1	X	X	X	B	A	A	O 1 Professional / Snr. Management	E 1 No Schooling
O 2	X	X	X	B	B	A	O 2 Middle Management	E 2 Studied up to Grade 6
O 3	X	X	X	C	B	A	O 3 Junior Management	E 3 Studied up to GCE (O/L)
O 4	X	C	B	B	A	A	O 4 (Big) Businessperson	E 4 Passed GCE (O/L)
O 5	E	D	C	B	B	A	O 5 (Small) Businessperson	E 5 Passed GCE (A/L)
O 6	X	D	D	C	B	B	O 6 Clerical / Teacher Grades	E 6 Graduate & above
O 7	E	E	D	C	C	B	O 7 Skilled Worker	
O 8	E	E	E	D	D	C	O 8 Unskilled Worker	
O 9	E	E	E	D	D	C	O 9 Agriculture / Fisheries	
O 10	E	E	E	D	D	C	O 10 Pension	

¹² The World Factbook, available at <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html>

¹³ Source: NMS01/LMRB 2001 - Total Population (excluding the North & East) 16,400,000; Households 3,700,000

3.3 Mainstream Media Profile

3.3.1 Newspapers¹⁴

Type	Name of Newspaper (years in existence)	Chief Editor, (Male/Female); Tenure as Editor	Ownership / Group
Sinhala Daily	Lankadeepa (14)	Siri Ranasinhga (M); over 10 yrs	Wijeya group
	Divaina (23)	Meril Perera (M); 2 yrs	Upali group
	Dinamina (94)	C. Dodawatta (M); 06 months	ANCL
	Lakbima (05)	Jatila Welabada (M); 03 yrs	Sumathi group
Tamil Daily	Thinakkural (17)	V. Thanabalasingam (M); 07 months	Thinakkural publishers
	Veerakesari (25)	S. Nadaraja (M); 07 yrs	Express group
	Sudaroli (12)	N. Vithyatharan (M); 10 yrs	Udayan publishers
	Thinakaran (15)	K.V. Subramaniam (M); 10 months	ANCL
English Daily	The Daily mirror (06)	Lalith Alakoon (M); 06 yrs	Wijeya group
	The Ceylon Daily News (89)	Jef Wejisingha (M); 06 months	ANCL
	The Island (24)	Gamini Weerakoon(M); over 10 yrs	Upali group
Sinhala Weekly	Irida Lankadeepa (38)	Siri Ransinha(M); over 10 yrs	Wijeya group
	Irida Divaina (25)	Gamini Sumanasekara(M); over 10 yrs	Upali group
	Silumina (75)	Vajira Palpita (M); 03 months	ANCL
	Irida Lakbima (10)	Sundara N. de Mel (M); 04 yrs	Sumathi group
	Ravaya (08)	Victor Ivan (M); over 08 yrs	Ravaya publishers
	Lanka (03)	Thissa Nihal Wickramasinghe (M); 03 yrs	Lanka Multi Publishers
	Irudina (02 months)	Mahan Lal Piyadasa (M); 02 months	Lithira publishers
	Peraliya (07 months)	Nalin Mahesh Perera (M); 07 months	W.B Mulin Perera
	Dinakara (03)	Sugath Menerapitiya (M); 06 months	Shakthi publishers
	Divamina (01)	Meril Perera (M); 01 yr	Upali group
Tamil Weekly	Thinakaran Vara Manjaree (28)	Sivasubramaniam (M); 10 months	ANCL
	Virakesari (06)	V. Thevaraja (M); 07 yrs	Express group
	Sunday Thinakkural (25)	S. Bharathi (M); 07 months	Thinakkural publications
	Sudaroli (50)	N. Vithyatharan (M); 10 yrs	Udayan publishers
English Weekly	The Sunday Observer (74)	Jayathilaka de Silva (M); 03 months	ANCL
	The Sunday Times (39)	Sinha Rathnatunga(M); over 10 yrs	Wijeya group
	The Sunday Island (24)	Manik de Silva (M); over 05 yrs	Upali group
	The Sunday Leader (11)	Lasantha Wickramathunga (M); 11 yrs	Leader publications

Newspaper Circulation - 1996 - 2001:

Language	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Sinhala	88	109	119	115	119	122
Tamil	26	33	35	35	39	45
English	19	23	23	24	22	22
Bilingual	4	4	4	-	-	-
Total	137	169	181	174	180	189

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Statistical Abstract 2002

According to year 2000 figures, Sri Lanka (with 29 copies)¹⁵ was one of the 22 countries that sold below 100 copies per thousand population. Some other countries that fell under the same category were Ukraine (84), Lebanon (74) and Portugal (73) with higher-end figures, while Kenya (8), Peru (4), and Cameroon (0.5) were on the lower end of the spectrum.

¹⁴ Data as at November 2004

¹⁵ World Press Trends 2000, available at <http://www.ukeditors.com/articles/2000/August/News163.html>

However, when comparing the adult literacy rate in Sri Lanka around that time (91.9% - 2001¹⁶) to that of India for example (65.4% in 2001¹⁷), which sold 28 newspapers per thousand population, it becomes evident that the Sri Lankan sales figure is comparatively very low. A contributing factor is perhaps the cost of newspapers in Sri Lanka, which as the table below demonstrates, are still significantly higher than those of Indian newspapers.

Sri Lanka

India

Newspaper	Cost in US\$ ¹⁸	Newspaper	Cost in US\$ ¹⁹	Cost in INR
Sunday Times (E)	0.239	The Indian Express (E)	0.066	3.00
Sunday Observer (E)	0.210	The Hindu (E)	0.055	2.50
Daily News (E)	0.143	The Times of India	0.033	1.50
Daily Mirror (E)	0.143	Hindustan Times (E)	0.033	1.50
Sunday Lankadeepa (S)	0.239	Amar Ujala (Hindi)	0.071	3.25
Daily Lankadeepa (S)	0.143			
Veerakesari(T)	0.095			
Sunday Veerakesari (T)	0.152			

Profile of Readers of Sunday English Newspapers (%)

		Sunday Leader	Sunday Island	Sunday Observer	Sunday Times
<u>SEC</u> Group	A	48	34	26	35
	B	35	43	45	39
	C	9	19	14	13
	D	8	5	9	11
	E	0	0	6	1
SEX	Male	67	70	56	60
	Female	33	30	44	40
Mean Age (years)		45	43	35	38
Mean Education Level		Passed GCE(A/L)	Passed GCE(A/L)	Passed GCE(A/L)	Passed GCE(A/L)
Mean MHI (Rs.)		37300	23200	24400	28400

Source: SRL Media Facts July 2003

¹⁶ Sri Lanka – Human Development Fact Sheet, available at <http://hdr.undp.org.in/hds/HDFct/Sri%20Lanka.htm>

¹⁷ South Asian Voice – 2001, available at http://india_resource.tripod.com/census.html

¹⁸ 1 USD = 104.612 LKR (mid-market exchange rate as at 05.11.2004)

¹⁹ 1 USD = 45.1830 INR (mid-market exchange rate as at 05.11.2004)

Profile of Readers of Sunday Sinhala Newspapers (%)

		Silumina	Sunday Lankadeepa	Sunday Divaina	Sunday Lankbima
<u>SEC</u> Group	A	06	07	09	11
	B	25	23	27	32
	C	27	25	24	25
	D	26	23	24	20
	E	16	22	16	12
Sex	Male	49	54	53	54
	Female	51	46	47	46
Mean Age (years)		37	36	37	34
Mean Education Level		Passed GCE(O/L)	Passed GCE(O/L)	Passed GCE(O/L)	Passed GCE(O/L)
Mean MHI (Rs.)		8,800	8,900	9,400	9,800

Source: SRL Media Facts Jan 2001

3.3.2 Television²⁰

Language	Name of station (Years in existence)	Director (Male/Female)	Ownership
Sinhala	SLRC (22)	Nishantha Ranathunga (M); 06 months	State
	Sirasa (06)	Mano Wickramanayake (M); 04 yrs	Maharaja organisation
	Swaranavahini (08)	Jeewaka Edirisinghe (M); 08 yrs	EAP group
	TVLanka ²¹ (01 ½)	P.A.C. Abeywardena (M); 01 ½ yrs	Global Electroteks
	TNL (10)	Shan Wickramasinghe (M); 10 yrs	Teleshan Network Limited
	ITN ²² (22)	Newton Gunaratna (M); 06 months	State
Tamil	Shakthi (06)	Mano Wickramanayake (M); 04 yrs	Maharaja organisation
	Eye (05)	Nishantha Ranathunga (M); 06 months	State
English	MTV (10)	Mano Wickramanayake (M); 04 yrs	Maharaja organisation
	Art TV ²³ (09)	Arthur Senanayake (M); 09 yrs	IWS holdings
	ETV (09)	Jeewaka Edirisinghe (M); 09 yrs	EAP group

²⁰ Data as at November 2004

²¹ TVLanka is a hundred percent Sinhala oriented international channel aimed at the approximately 1.5 million Sri Lankans working overseas, of which approximately 90% are in the middle east

²² An ITN world service reaching the Middle East, Australia and parts of Africa and Europe was also launched in March 2004

²³ Previously known as *Dynavision*

Reach of TV Channels (%)

TV Channel	All	<u>SEC A</u>	<u>SEC B</u>	<u>SEC C</u>	<u>SEC D</u>	<u>SEC E</u>
Rupavahini	97.0	100.0	96.9	95.6	99.5	95.6
EYE	84.7	94.5	83.5	86.9	86.1	79.7
ITN	92.2	96.9	92.9	92.9	89.9	91.9
TNL	65.2	85.8	66.2	69.6	65.3	55.4
MTV/Shakthi	51.3	75.8	48.3	56.8	50.1	45.2
Swarnavahini	80.3	86.7	82.0	81.1	79.7	77.1
Sirasa	77.7	83.4	80.1	81.4	75.3	72.5
Dynavision	25.3	52.1	28.8	28.0	22.1	16.7
ETV	29.6	57.6	31.6	34.9	24.9	21.1

Source: SRL BrandScan October 2002

Audience (5yrs and above) Share of TV Channels Jan - Dec, 2001 - 2003

Channel	2001	2002	2003
Rupavahini	33.5	32.97	37.75
EYE	3.7	5.58	4.24
ITN	13.3	14.12	16.66
MTV	5.2	3.04	5.98
TNL	2.1	1.13	1.07
Swarnavahini	21.2	24.46	18.27
Sirasa	20.1	18.34	14.51
ETV	0.4	0.23	0.17
Dynavision	0.4	0.21	0.14

Source: SRL Media Scan 2003

Profile of Sunday News TV Audience (%)

		RUP(8 Pm)	ITN(7 Pm)	SWAR(8 Pm)	SIRT(7 Pm)
<u>SEC</u> Group	A	06	04	06	05
	B	22	19	33	24
	C	26	29	29	26
	D	23	25	14	19
	E	23	24	18	26
Sex	Male	45	43	66	49
	Female	55	57	34	51
Mean Age (years)		37	39	34	34
Mean Education Level		Upto GCE(O/L)	Upto GCE(O/L)	Upto GCE(A/L)	Upto GCE(O/L)
Mean MHI (Rs.)		8,400	8,000	9,300	8,900

Source: SRL Media Facts Jan 2001

3.3.3 Radio²⁴

Language	Name of station (Years in existence)	Director (Male/Female); Years in post	Ownership / Group
Sinhala	SLBC (37)	Hudson Samarasingha (M); 06 months	State
	Lakhanda ²⁵ (10)	Newton Gunaratna (M); 06 months	State
	Sirasa (10)	Mano Wickramanayake (M); 04 yrs	Maharaja broadcasting (PVT) limited
	Sri FM (04)	Jeewaka Edirisinghe (M); over 04 yrs	EAP group
	Isira (04)	Shan Wickramasinghe (M); over 04 yrs	Teleshan Network Limited
	Asura (06 months)	Shan Wickramasinghe (M); 06 months	Teleshan Network Limited (English)
	Hiru FM (05)	Reno De Silva (M); over 05 yrs	Asian Broadcasting Corporation
	Sha FM (02)	Reno De Silva (M); 02 yrs	Asian Broadcasting Corporation
Tamil	Shakthi FM (06)	Mano Wickramanayake (M); over 04 yrs	Maharaja broadcasting (PVT) limited
	Soorian FM (05)	Reno De Silva (M); over 05 yrs	Asian Broadcasting Corporation
	SLBC - Tamil (37)	Hudson Samarasingha (M); 06 months	State
English	SLBC - English (37)	Hudson Samarasingha (M); 06 months	State
	Yes FM (10)	Mano Wickramanayake (M); over 05 yrs	Maharaja broadcasting (PVT) limited
	E FM (04)	Jeewaka Edirisinghe (M); over 04 yrs	EAP group
	Gold FM (05)	Reno De Silva (M); over 05 yrs	Asian Broadcasting Corporation
	Sun FM (05)	Reno De Silva (M); over 04 yrs	Asian Broadcasting Corporation

Audience (12+yrs) Share of Radio Stations July 2003

	Station	%
Radio Sinhala	PAVANA	3.96
	SLB SWADESHIYA SEVAYA	10.35
	SIRASA FM	18.67
	HIRU FM	8.34
	RUHUNU	1.08
	SHA	9.04
	LAKHANDA	2.23
	RAJARATA	0.70
	SHRI FM	22.62
	RAJA FM	1.20
Radio Tamil	THENDRAL	3.77
	SOORIYAN	4.25
	SHAKTHI	11.21
Radio English	SLBC English SERVICE	0.24
	TNL RADIO	0.02
	YES FM	0.43
	E FM	0.36
	SUN FM	0.25
	GOLD	0.26

Source: SRL Media Facts - July 2003

²⁴ Data as at November 2004

²⁵ A Lakhanda world service reaching the Middle East, Australia and parts of Africa and Europe was also launched in March 2004

3.4 Regional and Community Media

3.4.1 Regional Media

Overview

Sri Lanka unfortunately has very little noteworthy Regional Media. The only substantial regional media being the four²⁶ state broadcast provincial radio services. These regional services are accountable to the Head of Regional and Community Services at SLBC and have no financial autonomy. The regional broadcasters are however required to generate local funds to meet operating costs through commercial sponsorship from the regions - a task found to be difficult by all stations. The stations tend to focus predominantly on cultural programming, education and entertainment as opposed to documentary reportage, news, current affairs or the exploration of social realities of each region.

Prevalence

North Central Province

Population: Predominantly Sinhala with a sizable Muslim and small Tamil population

Regional media: Print - none; Electronic - Rajarata Sevaya (SLBC)

Rajarata Sevaya (1979) - Language: Sinhala
Location: Anuradhapura District
Reach: North Central Province and parts of surrounding Districts
Transmission: 14 hours per day

The setting up of the Rajarata Sevaya in 1979 marked the beginning of decentralization of radio in Sri Lanka. Since then, the Rajarata Sevaya has grown to be one of the most popular provincial services. Broadcasting three news bulletins of their own (at 6.45am, 11.45am and 7.30pm), in addition to linking up the main news bulletins and certain political programs from SLBC, Rajarata enjoys some level of independence in programming. They also carry their own

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programming on agriculture, peace, poverty alleviation and development related issues, in addition to entertainment programs and has space for sponsored programs on gender, child rights, peace and governance related issues. Rates for sponsorship currently stand at approximately Rs. 8,000 (USD 76.47)²⁷ per hour.

Southern Province

Population: Predominantly Sinhala with a small Muslim and Tamil population

Regional media: Print - none; Electronic - Ruhunu Sevaya (SLBC)

Ruhunu Sevaya (1980) - Language: Sinhala
Location: Mathara District
Reach: Southern Province and some parts of the Uva, Sabaragamuwa and Eastern Provinces
Transmission: 12 ½ hours

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

Central Province

Population: Majority Sinhala with a large and influential Tamil (mainly plantation workers) population and a smaller Muslim population

Regional media: Print - Kandy News; Electronic - Kandurata (Mahanuwara) Sevaya (SLBC)

The Kandy News (1994)

Being one of the two²⁸ longstanding regional papers published in the country within the last decade, The Kandy News is a monthly newspaper

²⁶ Though the SLBC Jaffna Service (transmit from Palalay) is one of the four regional services, it falls outside the purview of this study and is therefore not dealt with in this report

²⁷ 1 USD = 104.612 LKR (mid-market exchange rate as at 05.11.2004)

²⁸ The other being *Udayan*, published in Jaffan, in the North of Sri Lanka

with a limited circulation of approximately 3,000 – 5,000 copies distributed within the Kandy District. The 16 page (tabloid size) paper is sold at Rs. 15.00 (USD 0.143)²⁹ per copy. Published by Media Vision (Pvt) Ltd, the paper is run by a 05 member staff that perform all tasks from reporting and editing to distribution at an approximate monthly operational cost of Rs. 100,000 (USD 995.91)³⁰ and an approximate monthly income of Rs. 150,000 (USD 1,433.87)³¹ through commercial advertising. The pro-peace paper also relies on donor agency and NGO sponsored peace and democracy related supplements along with commercially sponsored supplements as a source of income. The Kandy News has a regional development, governance, democracy and peace focus and currently carries articles in Sinhala and English languages. The paper is currently working towards including Tamil language material in the near future.

Kandurata (Mahanuwara)

Sevaya (1997) -

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

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

3.4.2 Community Radio

Overview

With its beginnings in 1981³² as Mahaweli Community Radio (MCR), a government effort to assist hundreds of thousands of people in the process of resettlement and readjustment which resulted from the Mahaweli Development Project³³, community radio in Sri Lanka expanded in the late 1980s to include small community services set up to serve particular sectors of the project, namely Girandurukotte (1986), Mahailuppallama (1987), and Kothmale (1988). MCR's production techniques were participatory and involved settlers in

However, community radio in Sri Lanka is in fact *not* truly community radio, in that the stations are administered and run by the government and not the community. The government also exerts control over content (no criticism of the government is allowed, keeping community radio artificially non-political).

planning, recording and editing programmes. Teams of producers, technicians and support staff were trained to work in the villages of the Mahaweli region using mobile production facilities.³⁴

In 1998, *Pulathisiravaya* was started to cater to the multi ethnic war-affected areas of Polonnaruwa, Ampara and Medawachchiya. The Uva Community Service (started in 2002) is the most recent addition, as well as the most independent and dynamic amongst the community services.³⁵

However, community radio in Sri Lanka is in fact *not* truly community radio, in that the stations are administered and run by the government and not the community. The government also exerts control over content (no criticism of the government is allowed, keeping community radio artificially non-political).

²⁹ 1 USD = 104.612 LKR (mid-market exchange rate as at 05.11.2004)

³⁰ *Ibid*

³¹ *Ibid*

³² Through the regional Rajarata Service in Anuradhapura

³³ The project, intended to irrigate a significant part of the dry zone and power to the national grid, involved the construction of a number of dams and the resettlement of persons whose land was inundated in the process.

³⁴ Sharni Jayawardena, *Radio in Sri Lanka, 2003*, an unpublished paper

³⁵ *Ibid*

Prevalence

Mahailluppalama - Location: Anuradhapura District
Language: Sinhala
Transmission: 03 hours a day
Reach: Anuradhapura District (a number of areas under the Mahaweli Project)

The station carries its own programs, particularly focusing on agriculture and related needs of the farming community. The station runs a very low-tech operation having only received computers recently.

Girandurukotte - Location: Badulla District
Language: Sinhala
Transmission: 03 hours a day
Reach: Badulla and Polonnaruwa Districts (a number of areas under the Mahaweli Project).

The station's reach is currently very limited due to the low transmission capability of old and outdated equipment.

Kothmale - Location: Nuwara Eliya District
Language: Sinhala and Tamil
Transmission: 12 hours a day
Reach: parts of Kandy and Nuwara Eliya Districts (over 60 villages in addition to the rural towns of Nawalapitiya, Gampola and Hatton)

Beginning transmission in 1989 for a few hours a day approximately 03 days a week, Kothmale community radio extended its broadcast to 08 hours a day in 1999. The morning broadcast has been commercialized so as to enable the station to meet its operational costs through commercial revenue. The station currently generates approximately Rs. 0.15million (USD 1,433.86)³⁶ per month in advertising revenue. However, financial management remains with the SLBC. (See section 3.5 for details of innovative community internet initiative by Kothmale).

Pulathisiravaya -

Location: Polonnaruwa District
Language: Sinhala
Transmission: 08 hours a day
Reach: parts of Polonnaruwa and Medawachchiya (north-central province) and Ampara (eastern province)

The station currently operates with limited programming capacity and resources, and focuses predominantly on agriculture related programming aimed at the farming community.

Uva - Location: Badulla District
Language: Sinhala and Tamil
Transmission: 18 ½ hours
Reach: has the widest reach amongst community stations, covering significant parts of the Eastern, Southern and Sabaragamuwa Provinces in addition to the Uva Province.

Jointly run by the SLBC and the Uva Provincial Council, the Uva community radio station is the most independent and influential community station in the country thus far. While carrying their own news bulletins in addition to linking up with the SLBC morning news, the station also broadcasts programmes on issues deemed sensitive, such as questioning actions of both government as well as opposition politicians and Trade Unionists.

Unlike in the case of other community services, the Uva service involves members of the community not only as content providers but also as broadcasters in both Sinhala and Tamil programming. This is done via the nearly 200 'Gnana Samaja' (knowledge societies) which have been set up across the province, representing a cross section of society, with an average membership of approximately 50 persons each

Set up with UNDP funding in order to facilitate increased community involvement in planning,

³⁶ USD = 104.612 LKR (mid-market exchange rate as at 05.11.2004)

implementing and evaluating its poverty reduction programs;³⁷ the station's approximately 20 strong multi ethnic staff (recruited from within the area) received training in computer-aided production techniques as part of the program³⁸. Program guidelines to strengthen editorial independence were also developed for the station with the assistance of UNESCO - the implementing agency³⁹.

Unlike in the case of other community services, the Uva service involves members of the community not only as content providers but also as broadcasters in both Sinhala and Tamil programming. This is done via the nearly 200 'Gnana Samaja' (knowledge societies) which have been set up across the province, representing a cross section of society, with an average membership of approximately 50 persons each. Approximately one fourth of these members have received basic training on the concepts of community radio and radio journalism. All programs are planned and scheduled with the involvement of the Gnana Samaja via radio 'facilitators' who visit the Societies in order to discuss potential stories, production mechanisms and scheduling details. The Societies are also given 30-minute slot in order to broadcast their own programming, with no editorial interventions made by the station.⁴⁰

The station broadcasts daily Tamil programs in addition to a full day Sunday Tamil broadcast. This bilingual broadcast, particularly reaching the Eastern Province, promotes and enables greater discourse and experience sharing between war-affected communities of all ethnic groups. The station also broadcasts cross-translated

programming from Tamil to Sinhala and vice versa.

Using the most modern (digital) technology amongst community broadcasters in Sri Lanka, the Uva community service currently operates at an approximate monthly cost of Rs. 0.3 million (USD 2867.74)⁴¹. The station relies predominantly on program sponsorship (as opposed to commercial spots) in order to keep programming content intact, while also meeting costs. The Uva service currently charges approximately Rs. 4,890 (USD 46.74)⁴² per hour for sponsorship.

3.4.3 Provincial Journalism

There are approximately 2,000 journalists currently working as Provincial Correspondents for mainstream media institutions in Sri Lanka. However, the majority of these correspondents are not full time journalists. ANCL is the only media institution which has a few provincial offices with a full time staff.

Each District has at least one provincial journalists' organisation. However, many of them are largely inactive and have very little influence with media institutions. Coordination and collaboration amongst these organisations is minimal and there is no common effort to strengthen the position of provincial journalists. In order to obtain an overview of the situation of provincial journalism, the challenges faced and their needs, the CPA Media Unit conducted interviews with Provincial Journalists' organizations from 05 Districts (representing 04 Provinces). The findings are as follows:

District	Provincial Correspondents
Monaragala	Approximately 40
Anuradhapura	Over 60 (less than 05 female journalists)
Kandy	Approximately 180 (few Tamil and Muslim journalists)
Galle	Approximately 40
Hambantota	Approximately 50

³⁷ Usha Vyasulu Reddi and Vineeta Sinha, *Sri Lanka*, ICT use in Education, available at <http://www.unescobkk.org/education/ict/resources/JFIT/metasurvey/countryreports/southasia/srilanka.pdf>

³⁸ *Ibid*

³⁹ Sharni Jayawardena, *Radio in Sri Lanka*, 2003, an unpublished paper

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

⁴¹ 1 USD = 104.612 LKR (mid-market exchange rate as at 05.11.2004)

⁴² 1 USD = 104.612 LKR (mid-market exchange rate as at 05.11.2004)

Capacity-building, Ethics and Access to Resources

According to the journalists, none of the media institutions have provided any training for provincial journalists over the last two years, including initial training. In general, media institutions in Sri Lanka do not provide training for staff reporters or provincial correspondents. While much of the media training is currently provided by the NGO sector, more staff reporters than provincial correspondents gain access to these training programmes.

None of the provincial correspondents have received a copy of the professional code of conduct from their respective media organizations, nor have they received any training on the code of ethics. For example, each journalist had filed at least one story related to suicide. However, they were not aware of any guidelines on suicide sensitive reporting. Most provincial correspondents lack even a basic training in journalism and are keen to attend a journalism course in their area.

Further, correspondents highlighted the need for newsroom facilities at the district level equipped with computers, scanners, internet and email access et al. The lack of easy access to such facilities currently impedes their work. They also highlighted the dire need for training in computer skills (and related technologies such as scanning, digital imaging and graphics), in addition to training in photography (as many provincial correspondents do their own photography).

Relations with Head Office

Coordination between the main offices and the provincial journalists is minimal and feedback from media institutions is limited at best. Correspondents highlighted the lack of regular contact with the Head Office editorial staff, including provincial editors. According to them, there is no guidance or direction regarding what news or features to cover, resulting in their reports often not fitting in with the framework or focus decided upon by the Colombo Offices.

They alleged that stories filed are not published in original form, but often changed by Colombo in order to suit political gain and alliances. The altered story is subsequently published under the correspondent's by line, resulting in loss of credibility and at times risk to personal safety. On the flip side, they also alleged that stories sent by provincial correspondents are often published

under Colombo staff by lines. They added that the Colombo staff at times report directly on provincial news via their own sources without consulting the correspondent, resulting in the news being inaccurate at times.

Remuneration

According to many correspondents, their average monthly income is between Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,000 (USD 4.78 and 9.56). They alleged lack of transparency regarding payment systems. The editor marks the figure for payment and can therefore mark up or down at will. The payment slips indicate only the amount paid and not the article(s) to which it relates. Many also alleged corruption, stating that they are expected to "please" the provincial editor.

The majority of provincial journalists are otherwise employed. Very few work as full time reporters and are therefore paid on the basis of published reports and photographs. A few even write for more than one media institution under their family members' names.

Impediments to Independent Journalism

Corrupt police and political interference are two of the key problems plaguing journalism at the provincial level. For example, illegal cultivation of Marijuana and illegal logging are two key problems in the Monaragala District. However, correspondents of the area are unable to carry out independent investigative reporting on these issues due to collusion between the police, politicians and owners of illegal business operations. Citing a personal example, a journalist stated that a high ranking police officer had recently "visited" his home and questioned him in relation to an article regarding illegal logging carried out by persons related to the said officer.

The majority of provincial journalists are otherwise employed. Very few work as full time reporters and are therefore paid on the basis of published reports and photographs. A few even write for more than one media institution under their family members' names.

The journalists pointed out that Head Office staff reporting on police related issues often contact the police directly, circumventing the provincial correspondent, and thereby leave room for the

police to suppress critical information. Further, due to alliances formed through such direct contact, it was alleged that the Colombo staff at times suppress or alter news reports that are critical of their ally officers.

Further, many provincial correspondents themselves maintain close relations with powerful politicians and police officials, often compromising their independence. This results in a lack of reports on police and political corruption and the filing of propaganda pieces as news to satisfy requests by their ally politicians.

Cultural and religious factors also have a significant impact on provincial journalism⁴³. For example, Anuradhapura is an ancient capital as well as an ancient Buddhist city, and is thereby culturally as well as religiously revered. Anuradhapura is also home to the main transit camp for the Sri Lankan military forces outside the Northern conflict zone. The city has a high level of prostitution linked to the soldiers being transported in and out of the conflict zone. However there are no stories written on this issue from any angle; nor are there any educational or awareness raising campaigns by the media, for example, on sexually transmitted diseases.

Cultural and religious influence manifests itself in two ways, namely self-censorship and imposed censorship. There is a high degree of denial and resulting self-censorship amongst provincial correspondents themselves, who do not wish to defile the city's reputation. In addition, according to the journalists, even if such issues were reported on, the reports are suppressed or altered by the Head Office.

The situation in Kandy, is another example of the impact culture and religion has on journalism and the media. Kandy is home to two of the most influential Buddhist Nikayas (administrative chapters), namely the Malwathu and Asgiri Nikayas. The two very influential leaders of these two chapters are held in high regard and are frequently consulted by almost all Sinhala political leaders. As a result, journalists of the area are in the habit of reporting these visits to the point of exclusion of newsworthy stories and investigative journalism. According to the

journalists, this problem is further exacerbated by the fact that coverage of these political visits is what is "expected of them" and thereby "encouraged" by the Head Offices. The ANCL, Upali Group, Wijeya Group and Sumathi Publications all have provincial offices in Kandy city with a full time staff.

Perceptions, ethnic divisions and lack of understanding are further factors which colour provincial reporting. This results in hardly any stories being filed on issues related to other ethnic communities, and their perspective being ignored even in those stories that are filed. Many provincial correspondents have not been to the Northern and Eastern parts of the country, and expressed desire to visit areas such as Jaffna and Vanni in particular.

3.5 Media and Information Communication Technology

The Internet age in Sri Lanka officially began in 1995 with Lanka Internet Services (Pvt) Ltd., providing the first commercial and unrestricted Internet facilities⁴⁴ via a local server based in Colombo. The market has grown considerably since, with over 30 companies currently holding licenses for Internet Service Provision, over 823,000 fixed access (Sri Lanka Telecom) telephone lines in service and over 86,000 internet and email subscribers to date⁴⁵; predominantly concentrated in Colombo, followed by Kandy and Galle. E-commerce in Sri Lanka is also at an infant stage, with a relatively small Internet ad market helping to sustain popular sites like InfoLanka.com, kaputa.com, Info.lk, wow.lk, Sirasa.com and TamilNet.

However, rural access to the internet remains quite limited due to the lack of access to facilities such as computers (which are still beyond the purchasing power of the majority) and connectivity in the rural areas.

Rates for net access through Internet Cafes currently stand at approximately Rs. 50 per hour (USD 0.51)⁴⁶ in areas such as Colombo, Kandy and Galle, while hourly rates range between Rs. 60 and Rs. 100 (USD 0.57 and USD 0.95)⁴⁷ in other

⁴³ See section 7.3 for further discussion on the impact of ethnicity, culture and religion on Sri Lankan media

⁴⁴ Sri Lanka was the first South Asian nation to open its doors to commercial and unrestricted Internet access (Computers Today, 1995)

⁴⁵ Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Annual Report, 2003

⁴⁶ 1 USD = 104.612 LKR (mid-market exchange rate as at 05.11.2004)

⁴⁷ *Ibid*

parts of the country. Though Internet Cafes are abundant in areas such as Colombo, Kandy and Galle, they are less prevalent in other parts of the country. In the more far-flung areas, access to the internet, and thereby even email facilities, are only available through communication centres, where the user is often not allowed to personally access the computer.

Almost all mainstream print and electronic media of all three language streams currently have web editions and websites⁴⁸ in vernacular languages⁴⁹, while many of the electronic media sites are interactive and provide for live streaming. While access to the web editions of the state print media remains free of charge, the Upali Group, Wijeya Group and Leader Publications levy an annual subscription fee of 10 USD. However, the vernacular state print dailies do not currently have web editions, and though the Sinhala and English language state weeklies have web editions, the Tamil language weekly does not. As a result, the Tamil language online readership has been totally excluded by the state print media.

Many media institutions (predominantly the print media) still have limitations to absorption of technology, such as low computer literacy amongst (particularly vernacular) journalists, the very limited availability of vernacular fonts, and the cost involved in purchasing these infrequently developed vernacular fonts (save for a limited number of fonts which are freely available for download). Further, no Unicode⁵⁰ compatible vernacular fonts are currently available, which severely limits vernacular language information exchange.

Provincial journalists in particular have limited access to the internet, predominantly due to the fact that computers are still beyond the purchasing power of many. If for instance newsroom facilities were made available at the district level with access to computers and internet, provincial correspondents would then be able to send in their stories via email (as opposed

to faxing or hand delivering as is currently the practice), thereby saving time and resources and improving efficiency in the handling of provincial news. Easier access to facilities such as email for instance would also enable greater coordination and communication between the Colombo based Head Offices and the provincial correspondents.

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

For example, the Kothmale Community Radio Internet project, implemented by UNESCO in collaboration with government ministries, the University of Colombo and a number of other organizations, uses community radio as an interface between the net and the community by introducing “Radio-browsing”, enabling indirect

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⁴⁸ Visit <http://www.infolanka.com/> for a listing of available links to mainstream media websites.

⁴⁹ However, the web edition of *Ravaya* has not been updated since 2002.

⁵⁰ Unicode is a standardized language format which assigns a unique number to each character in each of the major languages of the world, thereby making it possible to convert a document typed in say one Sinhala font, into another Sinhala font (as is possible with English language fonts for example), without any distortion of characters – which is currently not the case with vernacular fonts. Therefore the developing Unicode based vernacular fonts would also make it possible to email in vernacular fonts as well as to develop vernacular keyboards.

mass access to cyberspace through a daily one-hour interactive radio program.

Located in the central hills of Sri Lanka, Kothmale Community Radio serves a population of approximately 200,000 Sinhala and Tamil listeners from sixty villages and three rural towns.⁵¹ The “Radio Browsing the Internet” program broadcast daily, enables listeners to request the broadcasters to surf the Web on their behalf and transmit information in response. This information is explained and contextualized with the help of studio guest resource persons. The information is also made available in printed form.

The station also functions as a community resource centre, providing free community Internet access (at the station and two other community libraries) and as a community library with computer database of information essential for rural communities (hosted on the Kothmale server), CD-ROMs, downloaded literature and print materials. Trained volunteers at the station guide community members in web browsing, while also assisting the community to develop their own Websites and content.

Following in these footsteps, the Uva and Girandurukotte Community Radio Stations have also established three IT centres for the community in the Badulla District, with the support of UNESCO.

The Info-Share project is another new initiative that uses ICTs for peace building with the intension of bridging communication gaps between the main stakeholders in the Sri Lankan peace process through the use of ICT and innovative media, while also enabling public participation in the process. Info-Share hopes to eventually integrate and connect stakeholders in each village, city, region, or sector in the country, into multi-sector and holistic peace building processes that are flexible, continuously updated and instantly accessible to all parties.

Launched during the tail end of 2003, the project focuses on creating public and private Information sharing Networks or “shared spaces”, linking civil society organizations, government, political parties and other stakeholders through spaces such as “Sri Lanka Peace Partners” and “The Peace-building Library”, designed to provide a variety of information, resources and knowledge to assist in the design of better peace-building interventions. Info-Share also provides technical, training, logistical, strategic, project management, and content development support to these organizations and stakeholders.⁵²

⁵¹ Kothmale Community Radio/Internet Project: Expanding the Knowledge Base, available at http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/egov/kothmale_cs.htm

⁵² For more information visit <http://www.info-share.org/>

4 Content Snapshot

4.1 Editorial Positions

The editorial column of mainstream newspapers of all three language streams was monitored by the CPA Media Unit over a six month duration from March to August 2004, in order to establish the position held by each regarding some crucial social and political issues in Sri Lanka. The summary findings of the study are as follows:

Type	Name of Newspaper	The Oslo Declaration ⁵³	Anti-conversion Legislation ⁵⁴	Bi partisanship ⁵⁵
Sinhala Dailies	Lankadeepa	Pro	No Position	Pro
	Divaina	Critical	Pro	No Position
	Dinamina	Pro	Critical	Critical
	Lakbima	Critical	Critical	Pro
Tamil Dailies	Thinakkural	Pro	Anti	No Position
	Virakesari	Pro	Anti	Critical
	Sudaroli	Pro	Anti	No Position
	Thinakaran	Pro	No Position	No Position
English Dailies	The Daily Mirror	Critical	Critical	Pro
	The Ceylon Daily News	Pro	Critical	Pro
	The Island	Anti	Anti	Pro
Sinhala Weeklies	Irida Lankadeepa	Pro	Critical	Pro
	Irida Divaina	Anti	Pro	No Position
	Silumina	Pro	Critical	Pro
	Irida Lakbima	Anti	No Position	No Position
	Ravaya	Pro	Anti	Pro
	Lanka	Anti	Critical	Anti
Tamil Weeklies	Thinakaran-Vara Manjaree	Pro	Anti	No Position
	Virakesari	Pro	Critical	
	Sunday Thinakaran	Pro	Anti	No Position
	Sudaroli	Pro	Anti	No Position
English Weeklies	The Sunday Observer	Pro	Critical	Pro
	The Sunday Times	Anti	No Position	Pro
	The Sunday Island	Anti	Critical	Pro
	The Sunday Leader	Pro	Anti	Pro

⁵³ **Oslo Declaration:** On 05 December 2002, the Government and the LTTE agreed to explore a political solution within the framework of a Federal political system within a united Sri Lanka during the third round of talks held in Oslo between the two parties.

⁵⁴ **Anti-conversion Legislation:** The Jathika Hela Urumaya, a political party comprised of Buddhist monks, presented an anti-conversion bill to parliament in May 2005. Many organizations and individuals challenged this bill in the Supreme Court. The court ruled that the bill is not consistent with the fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution. In addition, the UPFA government too has drafted an anti-conversion bill, which has not yet been tabled in the parliament.

⁵⁵ **Bi partisanship:** Policy and implementation level consensus among the two main political parties (SLFP and UNP) on peace and governance issues Sri Lanka.

4.2 Lead Stories

The CPA Media Unit analysed the lead stories carried by each of the daily mainstream newspapers of all three language streams during the month of August

2004 in order to identify the issues focused on by each paper. The summary findings of the study are as follows:

Category		Sinhala ⁵⁶				Tamil ⁵⁷				English ⁵⁸		
		Lankadeepa	Divaina	Lakbima	Dinamina (state)	Thinakaran (state)	Thinakkural	Virakesari	Sudar Oli	Daily News (state)	Daily Mirror	The Island
Peace			1	1	4	10	10	12	11	6	3	1
Politics		6	3	2	12	8	11	7	10	8	10	9
Crime/ Conflicts & Violence	North & East	6	6	10	3	2	1		2		4	3
	Rest	5	5	4	1							
Defense			1	2			4	5				1
LTTE / Karuna		1	1				3	1	3		1	4
Economy		3		1						5	2	1
Other		4	8	5	5	1	3	8	6	6	5	6
Total Lead Stories (papers)		25	25	25	25	31	32	33	32	25	25	25

Category Content:

Peace: Peace Council, Govt - LTTE & other parties peace activities, Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA)

Political: Statements by President, political party leaders & members, Govt activities, political conflicts

Crime/ Conflicts & Violence: Murders, conflicts between LTTE & Karuna faction, violence in the East, violence in the South

Defense: Defense activities by Govt & SL forces

LTTE/ Karuna: Statements & other activities by both parties

Economy: All economic news

Other: Bribery & corruption, international relations and all leads that did not fall within the above categories

⁵⁶ Excluding newspapers of 09th October

⁵⁷ Including weekly newspapers. Some Tamil language papers carried two lead stories the same day

⁵⁸ Excluding newspapers of 09th October

4.3 Election Reporting - Summary Findings⁵⁹

Backdrop

The 2004 General Election was held after the lapse of only 02 years in office of the UNF Government out of the official 6 year period for which it was elected. A few months prior to the holding of the Election, on 03rd November 2003, the president took over three key ministries including the Media Ministry on the grounds of safeguarding national security, without consulting the Prime Minister. Hence the state run media institutions, which were under the control of the UNF Government were brought under the control of the UPFA opposition led by the President. It soon became apparent that the state media, which had until then been utilized in a manner unfavorable to the UPFA and favorable to the UNF, was being utilized in a manner favorable to the UPFA. The allegation of the UPFA had been that almost the entirety of the private media as well as the state media was operating in a manner partial to the UNF Government and critical towards it.

Under these circumstances the Government media became the opposition media, a phenomenon never experienced before in history. Thus from the announcement of the General Election and in the period leading up to election day, a clear line of demarcation was seen between the state owned or opposition media and the privately owned media.

Print Media:

Both state-owned⁶⁰ dailies and weeklies had a very clear pro UPFA and anti UNF bias in their reporting during the election period. 34 front page Lead stories and 06 Editorials were Favourable to UPFA, while 17 front page Lead stories and 15 Editorials were Unfavorable to UNF. There were no UNF Favorable editorials or lead stories in the State print media. The front page headlines in the state media were a mix of fact

and comment, making it difficult for the reader to discern one from the other. There were 101 UPFA Favorable (03 UPFA Unfavorable) and 45 UNF Favorable (14 UNF Unfavorable) front page photographs. Most of the UPFA propaganda photographs were clear, lively and had a better visual effect, while most of the UNF photographs were out of focus with less visual effect.

State dailies had 10 editorials on Election violence and 06 editorials on free and fair election. Coverage of Voter Issues by state dailies was minimal throughout the campaign. *The Sunday Observer* had three editorials in favor of state media being impartial and fair. *The Sunday Observer* Editor Mr. Laskman Gunasekara, was removed from the Editorship on 18th March after these editorials were carried.

The non-state⁶¹ print media showed a pro UNF bias during the election campaign period with the exception of openly pro UPFA *Lanka*, and the non-state Sinhala weeklies, which showed a pro UPFA bias. Overall, non-state print media showed more diversity and balance than state media in election reporting. Non-state media had 19 Editorials on free and fair elections.

In general, smaller parties received increasingly less coverage. There was no clear right to reply policy during the election period in any newspaper monitored. Although the Tamil public living in LTTE held areas are in need of voter education, the Tamil newspapers did not have any special focus on this. Overall, coverage of Women's Issues was approximate to or less than 1% in 19 news papers out of 26 news papers monitored, with the usual zero coverage changing due to the Women's day coverage on 8th March.

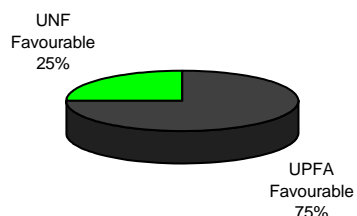
⁵⁹ Centre for Policy Alternatives, *Monitoring of Media Coverage: General Elections April 2004 Final Report*, 2004 available at http://www.cpalanka.org/research_papers/2004_GE_Media_Monitoring_Report.pdf

⁶⁰ **Monitored Newspapers : Dailies** - *Dinamina* (Sinhala language), *Thinakaran* (Tamil language), *Daily News* (English language); **Weeklies**: *Silumina* (Sinhala language), *Thinakaran Vaaramanjaree* (Tamil language), *Sunday Observer* (English language);

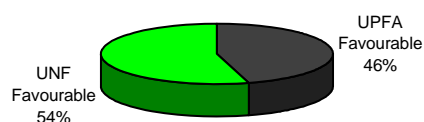
⁶¹ **Monitored Newspapers: Wijeya Group** - *Lankadeepa*, *Iridada Lankadeepa* (Sinhala), *Daily Mirror*, *The Sunday Times* (English); **Upali Group** - *Divaina*, *Irida Divaina*, (Sinhala), *The Island*, *The Sunday Island* (English); **Sumathi Group** - *Lakbima*, *Irida Lakbima* (Sinhala); **Ravaya Publications** - *Ravaya* (Sinhala); **Lanka Multi Publishers** - *Lanka* (Sinhala); **Leader Publications** - *The Sunday Leader* (English); **Thinakural Publications** - *Thinakkural*, *Gnairy Thinakkural* (Tamil); **Express Newspapers** - *Veerakesari*, *Veerakesari Vaaraveledu* (Tamil); **Udayan Publications** - *Sudaroli* (Tamil);

Space allocated to the unfavourable coverage of UPFA and UNF in the State and Non-State Media

NON-STATE MEDIA
- Unfavourable Coverage



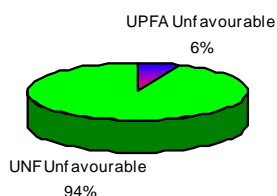
NON-STATE MEDIA
- Unfavourable Coverage



Note: The Charts above include both daily and weekly newspapers listed in the body of the report

Space allocated to the unfavourable coverage of UPFA and UNF in the State and Non-State Media

NON-STATE MEDIA
- Unfavourable Coverage



NON-STATE MEDIA
- Unfavourable Coverage



Note: The Charts above include both daily and weekly newspapers listed in the body of the report

Electronic Media⁶²:

In considering airtime allocated to each party, the highest airtime allocated to the UPFA (of the total air time allocated to news by the said channel) was by Rupavahini, followed by ITN, Sirasa and Swarnavahini. In considering the telecast of the news relating to respective political parties, Rupavahini and ITN carried a larger percentage of

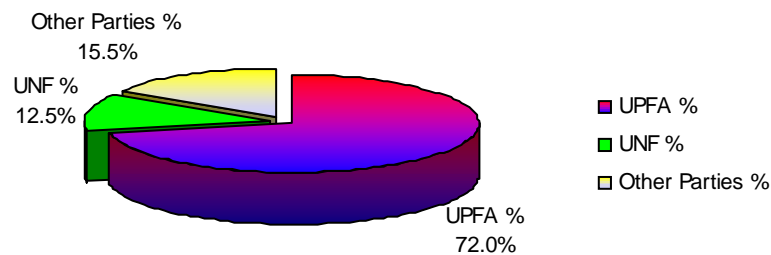
UPFA-related news, while Sirasa and Swarnavahini have telecast a smaller percentage. News relating to the UNF and other political parties were represented in a smaller percentage by Rupavahini and ITN while Sirasa and Swarnavahini telecast a larger percentage of news relating to the UNF and other political parties. However, comparatively, Sirasa was the most balanced channel in this respect.

⁶² The news reportage of the following Television Stations was monitored for its content and bias – Rupavahini and ITN (State-owned); Sirasa and Swarnavahini (non-state).

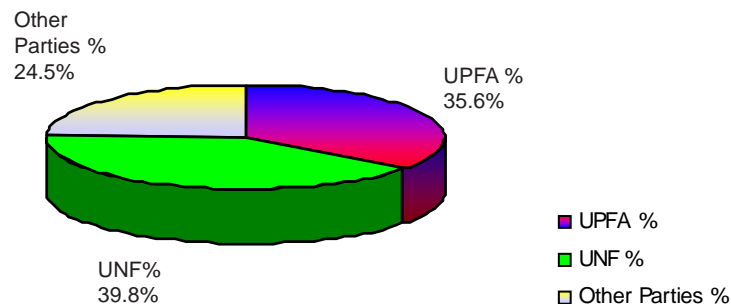
In reporting non-election related local news items (with the exception of sports news) Sirasa reported 82 items, which is 37.10% of the total of such news telecast by all TV channels. 102.36 minutes of air time was allocated to these items.

ITN telecast 56 items (25.33% and 58.11 minutes), Swarnavahini telecast 45 items, (20.36% and 102.20 minutes of air time) and Rupavahini telecast 38 items, (17.19% and 45.34 minutes air time).

Rupavahini News - According to the Time Allocated - %



Sirasa News - According to the Time Allocated - %



Advertisements

UNF and UPFA dominated the election advertisements. Advertisements by smaller parties were either non-existent or at a bare minimum. Only a few candidates from both UPFA and UNF dominated the advertisements by individual candidates. Only a minimum number of advertisements by any party were published in the Sinhala language newspapers of the state media. Some of the UPFA and UNF advertisements

raised ethical questions regarding political propaganda. For example, the advertisement by the UNF, featuring images of the President's late husband and their children; and others featuring "a soldier", who has lost his leg in battle. At the latter stage of the election, political advertisements appeared continuously for a 5 -10 minute periods during primetime programming and news inert alia. There were no guidelines or limits to political advertisements either in print or electronic media.

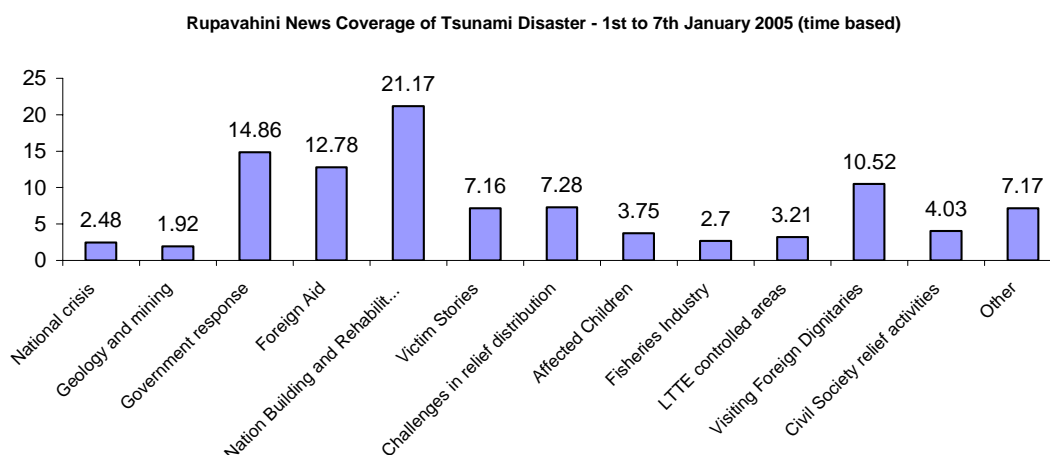
5 Tsunami and the Impact on Media

A number of Provincial Correspondents living in affected areas suffered loss of loved ones, homes, as well as their equipment. However, there is to date no exact count of the number of journalists affected, nor a collation of exact data on the damage suffered by them. According to an appeal for assistance made by the Sri Lanka Environmental Journalists Forum (SLEJF) in January, 121 provincial correspondents and their families were displaced, while a significant number suffered loss of houses and equipment. The Free Media Movement (FMM), following a series of field visits, identified 25 affected provincial correspondents and the Federation of Media Employees Trade Union (FMETU) had identified approximately 70 affected media workers. However, irrespective of actual numbers affected, information is a need of the hour, and therefore equipping journalists and building capacity in investigative journalism, particularly amongst provincial correspondents, is key at the moment in order to ensure transparent rebuilding and recovery efforts devoid of corruption. In keeping, FMM in collaboration with CPA conducted a one month pilot project with 17 provincial correspondents from affected areas on monitoring Tsunami relief and reconstruction efforts⁶³. FMM and CPA are currently in the process of seeking long-term support for the project.

None of the community radio stations are located along the coastal line and were therefore not affected by the Tsunami. However, due to the large number of displaced persons, the role of community broadcasting has been brought to the fore. In keeping, Internews⁶⁴ has launched 3 month 10 week community broadcasting project in collaboration with the state broadcaster SLBC. Currently using two mobile broadcasters, one for the Eastern Province and one for the South, and 32 journalists, 16 from SLBC and the rest from private broadcasters, the project aims to focus its program content on the needs of affected communities and vulnerable groups. Internews hopes to expand the project duration as well as its broadcasting reach and has a long-term objective of working towards strengthening and training community broadcasters to address the needs of affected communities.

However, irrespective of actual numbers affected, information is a need of the hour, and therefore equipping journalists and building capacity in investigative journalism, particularly amongst provincial correspondents, is key at the moment in order to ensure transparent rebuilding and recovery efforts devoid of corruption.

In order to examine the role played by the state electronic media in post Tsunami information provision, a short review of SLRC coverage was carried out by the CPA Media Unit from the 1st to the 7th of January. The following is a graph extracted from the study.⁶⁵



⁶³ Find a translated summary of the press releases issued under this project at http://www.cpalanka.org/research_papers/CPA_FMM_Post_Tsunami_Monitoring_Summary.pdf

⁶⁴ See <http://www.internews.org/>

⁶⁵ See the full report at http://www.cpalanka.org/research_papers/Media_monitoring_report_1_post_tsunami_coverage.pdf

5.1 Tsunami within the Peace Process: Study Synopsis⁶⁶

As at the third anniversary of the ceasefire agreement, the future of the peace process which includes the possibility of an interim authority, are compounded exponentially by the devastating Tsunami. Thus the 'present' is a most precarious time period for the future of Sri Lanka and its peace process, which is now indissolubly linked to the way in which both the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE handle the post-tsunami recovery process and related influx of international aid et al. As such, this study contains a quantitative and qualitative analyses of coverage on some key issues in the 'post-Tsunami' environment, in 221 papers (three languages) for the month of March.

Donor Involvement⁶⁷

A common trend in the reporting of donor relief, in terms of donor visits to the country and provision of relief by donor organizations, is that most media in all three languages generally provide a positive impression of donor activity. The English (68.67%) and Sinhala (65.6%) media are both relatively favourable towards the donor involvement, although the number of articles in the English media (both positive and negative) is significantly higher than in the Sinhala media. The Tamil media⁶⁸ shows overwhelming support for donor relations, Norwegian mediation, donor aid and international community pressure on the joint mechanism at 83.2%. Both in the English as well as Sinhala media, the Island and its sister paper Divaina prove to be the harshest critics of donor involvement, most of which is focused on donor pressure for a joint mechanism and Norwegian mediation.

In terms of the numbers, it appears that in general, the Sinhala, Tamil and English media report that there is little or no disparity in the provision of donor aid to the North, East and South of Sri Lanka.

Donor Activity	English Media				Tamil Media				Sinhala Media			
	Positive	%*	Negative	%	positive	%	Negative	%	positive	%	negative	%
Donor visits + pressure for J.M.	41	55	34	45	85	84	16	16	52	64	29	36
Norwegian mediation	7	54	6	46	27	84	5	16	16	55	13	45
Donor Aid	66	85	12	15	7	70	3	30	16	89	2	11

* In the above table all percentages shown are positive or negative articles as a percentage of the total in each language group

⁶⁶ For full study findings visit http://www.cpalanka.org/research_papers/Peace_Process.pdf

⁶⁷ Articles included on donor and international community (excluding iNGO) involvement, donor visits, donor pressure on joint mechanism, Norwegian mediation and disparity or no-disparity in donor relief.

⁶⁸ Due to unavoidable reasons only the lead, front page articles and the editorials in the Tamil print media for the 1st -9th of March have been monitored.

An illustrative example of disparity in coverage and the type of opinion conveyed to readership of the three language media is that of the World Bank country representative Peter Harold's alleged statement to the Sunday Times (6/3) that the LTTE controlled areas in effect constitute an "unofficial state". The public uproar in the south of the country, along with the outcry of the JVP for Mr. Harold to be expelled, is depicted in the three languages in starkly different ways. The English papers remain neutral on the issue in general. The Sinhala media portray the issue through articles about JVP instigated protests against Mr. Harold without much editorial comment on the issue. However, the most interesting portrayal of the issue is seen in the Tamil Media which downplayed the issue and offered defense for Peter Harold by attributing the supposed statement of Peter Harold to the JVP as something the JVP and the PNM have 'created' into an issue because the intention of the JVP is to stop aid from going into LTTE controlled areas. Neither the Sinhala nor the English media so clearly linked the JVP protests

(marginally) impression of the joint mechanism at 55.7%⁷⁰. The Divaina stands out at 57.7% against the joint mechanism, following its nationalistic stance, opposite to its more subdued (in terms of nationalistic fervour) English language sister paper (65% in favour of the joint mechanism). The Tamil media is cautious but supportive towards the joint mechanism at 66.7%⁷¹, especially the state-owned daily Thinakaran which is overly optimistic at 100% in favour.

A notable use of language in the English media centres on the persistent use of the word 'Tigers' (rather than the more politically favourable 'LTTE') by the Island and the Sunday Leader, which reiterate and remind the reader, the violent history of the LTTE and its label as a 'terrorist' group rather than a legitimate stakeholder in the peace process. The Divaina also speaks of the 'terrorism issue; in relation to the LTTE on its front page (20/3). However, it has been noted that in all the Tamil dailies, the word used to refer to the LTTE is 'Tigers', possibly implying a pride and continued identification of

		English Media		Sinhala Media		Tamil Media	
		Actual	% of Eng.	Actual	% of Sin.	Actual	% of Tam.
Joint Mechanism	Positive	61	76.25 *	44	55.69	46	66.67
	Negative	19	23.75	35	44.31	23	33.33
Muslim Inclusion	Positive	10	90.91#	8	88.89	4	100
	Negative	1	9.09	1	11.11	0	0

* Percentages shown are against the total of positive and negative in each language group for JM

Percentages shown are against the total of positive and negative in each language group for MI

against Peter Harold and his alleged statement, to donor aid.

LTTE/ GoSL Joint Mechanism and Muslim Inclusion

The general trend in portraying the proposed joint mechanism has been in a favourable light in all three media. The English media shows favour at 76.25%⁶⁹. The Island carries the most criticism, although most are statements detailing the JVP opposition to the joint mechanism published 'as is'. The Sinhala media also maintain a favourable

the liberation effort for Tamil people, as opposed to the derogatory implication when used by a Sinhala or English paper.

Along with the issue of the joint mechanism, emerges the issue of Muslim inclusion as Mr. Rauf Hakeem, the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, met with Ms. Ferrero-Waldner and the President to insist upon Muslim inclusion in any joint mechanism. The English media lends support to the cause of Muslim inclusion (90.9%). The Sinhala media widely supports the idea of Muslim inclusion (88.9%) even though the state-owned

⁶⁹ The breakdown of figures for the individual English newspapers is as follows – Daily News (95.65%), Daily Mirror (77.4%), Island (65%) and Sunday Leader at (66.7% against the J.M.)

⁷⁰ The breakdown of figures for the individual Sinhala print media is as follows – Lankadeepa (60%), Divaina (57.7% against the J.M.), Lakkima (62.5%) and Dinamina (66.7%)

⁷¹ The breakdown of figures for the Tamil dailies is as follows - Thinakaran 100%, Thinakural 65%, Veerakesari 63% and Sudor Oli 55.5%

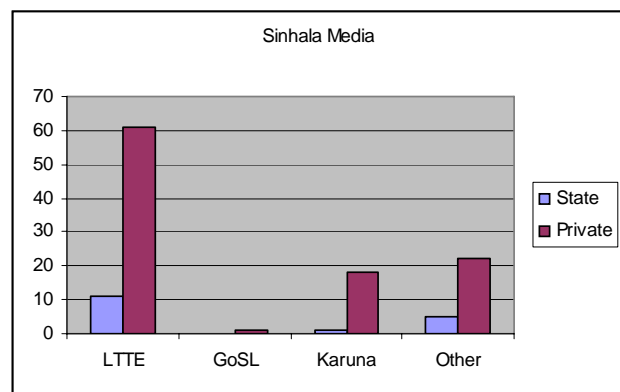
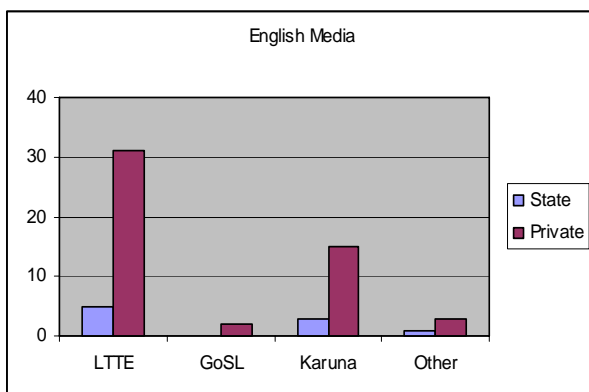
Dinamina completely avoids the issue of Muslim inclusion. The issue is given minor prominence in the Tamil dailies at only four news articles during the entire month. Perhaps the partiality shown for Muslim inclusion by the Sinhala media may be to counterbalance the LTTE's proposed position as the sole voice of the Tamil 'speaking' people in the North and East; a factor which the Tamil media perhaps prefers to omit or downplay to its readers.

Impacts on the Peace Process, Human rights and Cease Fire Violations

The buzz words of the month, joint mechanism and killings/armed attacks, lead to discussions or reports on the viability of the peace process and ideas of federalism/ LTTE proposed ISGA. The prevailing atmosphere implied by the English papers and Sinhala media tends to be favoring a federal solution while noting that the Government will not accept the ISGA. It is interesting that the Sinhala media carried almost double the number (45 in total) of stories as the English media, most of them depicting the JVP stance on the detriments of a joint mechanism which would lead to their exit from the

government, which may create instability and tensions in the peace process as a whole. In comparison, the English media had 23 articles in total on issues related to the ISGA or federalism/ devolution, with the Island notably cautious of the proceedings.

Human rights violations such as killings, abductions and armed attacks are obvious violations of the CFA. Public opinion may be swayed, altered about the future of the country and the future of the peace process by creating an atmosphere of suspicion and doubt about the 'true' intentions of the GoSL and LTTE by merely attributing blame for the CFA violations to different parties or discussing the impacts of such actions as furthering the peace process or leading towards war. The most important fact here is not just the incidents reported in the articles, but the way it is reported in the three different language groups. For example, the English media attributes all killings in the North and East to either the LTTE, Karuna faction or 'other' paramilitaries except for two incidents which are associated with the GoSL (Daily Mirror) at 60%, 30% and 6.7% respectively. The Island continually points the finger at the LTTE with such headlines as "Tigers continue killing spree".



6 Legal and Regulatory Framework

Press

The newspapers with the widest circulation in all three languages are owned by the state. A previously successful family run newspaper enterprise, the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited (ANCL) was “nationalised” under the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited Law No 28 of 1973, with the then government taking over 75% of its shares (vested in the Public Trustee), stating intention to broad-base ownership of the company by distribution of shares amongst the public. The ANCL Law provides that this should be done⁷²; however it has not happened to date. As a result, successive governments have used and abused their monopoly over these newspapers.⁷³ Conflict reporting has been a major area under government control and manipulation. There is no state control over the privately owned newspapers, except under emergency or PTA censorship (see below) when they are in force.

Broadcasting

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

appointment and removal of members of the corporation, including the director general. Similarly, the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC), the state television, was set up under and is governed by the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation Act No 6 of 1982, and also provides for the grant of licences for private television broadcasting. The Minister in charge appoints the majority of members of the corporation, while the rest are appointed by the Ministers

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

responsible for the SLBC and the National Film Corporation.

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

Experience has shown that relative freedom to operate will not automatically ensure balanced reporting amongst private broadcasters, resulting in many critics calling for the establishment of an independent authority to regulate both state and private broadcasting in Sri Lanka, with a mandate to ensure diversity in broadcasting.⁷⁴

⁷² Sections 5, 6

⁷³ A scheme divesting the shares of ANCL was proposed in 1995 by a Committee on broadbasing the ownership the company. However, this Report like many others has not been implemented thus far. It is believed that state interest in retaining its control over the press is too deeply entrenched to expect any effective change.

⁷⁴ The Broadcasting Authority Bill of 1997 attempted to change the system of media regulation. However, this Bill was challenged as infringing rights of free expression and held unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, mainly due to the level of state control over the proposed Authority.

6.1 Media Freedom, Freedom of Expression and Information

Sri Lanka Press Council Law

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

Further, the law prohibits publication of material deemed to be falling under the broad categories of obscenity and profanity, government decision-making, fiscal policy, official secrets and defamation. Section 16(1), prohibits publication of proceedings of Cabinet meetings without prior approval of the Secretary to the Cabinet⁷⁵. The act also prohibits the publication of any matter under consideration by a Minister or the government, any official secret (see below) or any matter relating to military, naval, air force or police establishments, equipment or installation which is likely to be prejudicial to the defence and security of the country.

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

Official Secrets Act

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

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

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

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

Emergency regulations

Emergency regulations have been one of the most powerful means by which censorship - particularly with regards to conflict reporting - has been achieved. The Public Security Ordinance No 25 of 1947 empowers the President to issue regulations that appear to him or her to be necessary or expedient in the interests of public security, the preservation of public order and the suppression of mutiny, riot or civil commotion, or for the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the life of the community. Emergency regulations take precedence over all other laws except the Constitution⁷⁶, and once emergency has been declared the fact of the existence of a state of emergency cannot be questioned in court.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ This provision, last used in the 1980s, has fortunately not been used in the recent past.

⁷⁶ Public Security Ordinance, section 7; Constitution, Article 155(2)

⁷⁷ Public Security Ordinance, section 3

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

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

- Editorial comment, feature stories, news reports on any subject should be submitted for approval to a competent authority
- There could be no publication of any matter which is under consideration or alleged to be under consideration by any Minister or Ministry
- No person may affix in a public place or distribute among the public any poster or leaflet without prior police permission
- No person shall bring the President or government into hatred or contempt or incite feelings of disaffection
- Printing presses could be sealed if public security, public order or essential services are threatened⁷⁸

Having been operative virtually uninterrupted for many years, emergency rule lapsed in July 2001 along with the search and arrest regime under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (see below). In this regard, Sri Lanka can be satisfied that the most repressive laws are being discontinued - at least for the moment - following the cessation of hostilities. However the constitutional and legislative provisions governing emergency rule remain unamended, allowing for the possibility of emergency being reimposed in the future in the event of a return to hostilities.

Criminal Defamation

Criminal defamation has been used extensively in the past in order to silence critical reportage and to persecute editors and journalists. For example, five cases were filed in the High Court of Colombo against Victor Ivan, the editor of the

Ravaya newspaper, at the beginning of 2002. Four other mainstream newspaper editors were also facing criminal defamation charges.⁷⁹ In 2002 Parliament unanimously passed a law abolishing criminal defamation (see section 5.5 for further details).

However the constitutional and legislative provisions governing emergency rule remain unamended, allowing for the possibility of emergency being reimposed in the future in the event of a return to hostilities.

Prevention of Terrorism Act

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

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

- (i) the commission or investigation of an offence under the Act, or
- (ii) "incitement to violence, or which is likely to cause racial or communal disharmony or feelings of ill-will or hostility between different communities or racial or religious groups"⁸⁰

without the approval of a competent authority (appointed by the relevant Minister),

Further, Section 2(1)(h) of the PTA provides "[Any person who] by words either spoken or intended to be read or by signs or by visible representation or otherwise causes or intends to cause

⁷⁸ Coomaraswamy, "Regulatory Framework for Sri Lanka Press" in *Studies on the Press in Sri Lanka and South Asia*, ed. GH Peiris, 1997, p 231

⁷⁹ **Sunanda Deshapriya**, *Media Freedom in Sri Lanka, 2002: Some Critical Issues*, available at http://www.ifj-asia.org/Sri_Lanka_Media_Freedom.html

⁸⁰ Section 14(2); the subsection also makes it an offence to distribute newspapers containing material falling into this category

commission of acts of violence or religious, racial or communal disharmony or feelings of ill-will or hostility among different communities or racial or religious groups... [shall be guilty of an offence]" .

Though at first it may not appear to be objectionable, incidents can be cited which demonstrate the potential for abuse of this law by the authorities. For example, in a case brought under the Act in 1996, an editor of the *Satana* (battle) newspaper and four others were detained as a result of an article on a defeat of the Sri Lankan army by the LTTE. In a more high profile case during the same year, the news director of TNL (television) was charged over a broadcast which stated that the LTTE had attacked security forces in the east, resulting in the forces fleeing. The Press and the human rights community, both domestic and international, created uproar over this particular suppression of broadcasting freedom, and the case was later withdrawn.⁸¹

Though the PTA has not been used for censorship as sweepingly as emergency regulations, the case of the TV news director brings to light the space for manipulation by provided for by the Act. It should therefore be reviewed and amended so as to tackle terrorism in a more rights-conscious manner.

6.2 Secrecy and Lack of Freedom of Information

Currently there is no legislation in force in Sri Lanka which specifically provides for freedom of information; a critical factor for the functioning of a true democracy. On the contrary, there are a number of legislative items which undermine the free flow of information to the public, including the Official Secrets Act, Official Publications Ordinance, Sri Lanka Press Council Law (discussed above) and laws relating to national security.

Prior to 2001, emergency regulations were issued, banning live television and radio coverage of the war, requiring government approval for the transmission of such news outside the country, empowering the authorities to detain journalists, block distribution of newspapers, seize property, and shut down printing presses. Independent

access to conflict areas was also denied, impeding accurate war reporting and limiting public access to conflict-related information. Much of the information disseminated at the time was selected information released either by the government, the military or the LTTE and allegations of manipulation, particularly of casualty figures and military setbacks, were rife.

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A prime example of such manipulation of information was the battle in Kilinochchi on 26 October 1998.⁸² By the 27th morning the government's first press release on the battle was issued, stating that 09 soldiers had died and 29 were injured. By the 28th casualty figures of the government had risen to 43 dead and 110 injured. The figures continued to rise through a number of subsequent press releases, taking the government 12 days and 10 military press releases (some issued twice during the same day with drastically different figures) to admit that nearly 1000 soldiers were either dead or missing in action by 1st November⁸³. The military's admitted death toll was lower than the figure that journalists had calculated from Red Cross reports, hospitals accounts and earlier sketchy reports from the defence ministry.⁸⁴ The LTTE exploited the

⁸¹ Coomaraswamy, *op cit*, pp 232-233

⁸² Sunanda Deshapriya, *Silent War*, 2001 (unpublished)

⁸³ *Ibid*

⁸⁴ *Ibid*

situation by claiming casualty figures higher than the government's.⁸⁵ The accuracy of this information remained in question, as there were no independent sources to confirm figures, resulting in the local mainstream media not reporting the battle in detail.⁸⁶

The culture of secrecy is institutionalised in Sri Lanka through various means, key amongst them being the Establishments Code, which sets out the norms of conduct binding to all public servants. While the Secretary or Head of Department is authorised to "use his discretion" in providing information regarding Government and Departmental activities to the press or the public which "may be of interest and value to the public", it goes on to state that "no information even when confined to statements of facts should be given where its publication may embarrass the Government as a whole or any Government Department or officer." All other public officers are prohibited from being interviewed or providing information to anyone including the press.⁸⁷

However, restriction of access to government-held information - often of vital importance to the lives of ordinary people - through both practice as well as legislation is seen not just in Sri Lanka but South Asia, resulting in a growing demand for Freedom of Information Law, both at the regional as well as national level. In Sri Lanka, a Freedom of Information Bill was prepared in collaboration by a number of interested civil society and media organisations (see section 5.5 for further details).

6.3 Election Reporting

The recent Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution sets up an Election Commission empowered to issue guidelines on fair reporting during an election period and to appoint a competent authority to oversee broadcasts by the SLBC and the SLRC (state radio and television⁸⁸), thereby preventing government manipulation of state-controlled media and enabling free and fair coverage of the election.

Though the Election Commission has unfortunately not been appointed to date (almost two years since the legal provision for it), the Commissioner of Elections is (until such appointment) given all the powers of the Commission; resulting in the appointment of a competent authority for the first time during the General Election held on 02 April 2004. In

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addition, the procedure involved in the appointment the competent authority is still in need of amendment in order to enable such appointment at the start of the election campaign.

6.4 Community Radio

There is currently no legal framework in the country to establish a community radio station that is in fact a community radio station—one that is owned and managed by the community. According to the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation Act, the Minister in charge of Media is empowered to issue licenses for the establishment of 'private stations'. The Act does not make any reference to community radio or television services. Given that independent media is viewed as being a threat - particularly in a context where social concerns are likely to take precedence over the commercial - governments have been reluctant to interpret this term liberally to include community media.

It is therefore necessary to better define existing legislation and introduce policy reforms that would unambiguously enable the setting up of

⁸⁵ *Ibid*

⁸⁶ *Ibid*

⁸⁷ Mark Fernando, "Is Whistle-blowing an Exercise of a Fundamental Right to Freedom from Corruption?" in *The Law Commission of Sri Lanka Commemorative Journal 2003*, p 83

⁸⁸ The Independent Television Network (ITN), though owned and controlled by the state, does not come under the purview of the competent authority.

truly community radio and television stations, owned and run by the community.

6.5 The Impact of Activism

Since the 1970s, when repressive laws and policies were brought into effect as a result of the conflict, civil society groups and media activists have been agitating to create an environment more conducive to media freedom. Some of the organisation involved from the early stages (with a more general human rights interest) included the Civil Rights Movement, MIRJE (Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality), Centre for Society and Religion, Movement for the Defence of Democratic Rights and Lawyers for Human Rights. Adding to these efforts, significant pressure from media activists and civil society organisations in the early 1990s, has led to a cohesive and effective movement towards changing the culture and laws related to media freedom over the last decade.

The then PA government, which incidentally came into power on a media reform platform, did not make a notable contribution, with no real impact resulting from a number of committees that were appointed to look into various aspects of media law and reform.⁸⁹

An earliest amongst the recent victories in legal reform was the 1997 repealing of the insufferable provision introduced in 1978 giving Parliament the power to punish for breach of privilege.⁹⁰

One of the most welcome changes to follow was in the area of criminal defamation. The Editors Guild, The Newspaper Society and the Free Media Movement, with the support of civil society organisations such as the Centre for Policy Alternatives and international organisations such as Article 19 and buttressed by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and

Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression⁹¹ and International PEN⁹², strongly advocated for erring media professionals to be brought to book under civil and not criminal procedures⁹³. They argued that penal provisions were being used state to for partisan purposes and to restrict information flow to the public.⁹⁴

A present priority in this area is the progressing of this Bill, providing people with a clear legal right to information which has often been unjustifiably withheld from them in the past.

In 2001, with the change of government, the campaign for reform by media practitioners and activists with civil society collaboration and international support, gathered momentum, coming to a head in 2002.⁹⁵ As a result, in June 2002 the Penal Code Amendment Act No 12 was passed, repealing criminal defamation laws and amending related criminal procedure. Shortly after, the Press Council Amendment Act No 13 of 2002 repealed section 15 of the Press Council Law, which made defamation an offence punishable by a maximum two year imprisonment.⁹⁶

Though not tabled in Parliament yet, the Freedom of Information Bill, prepared through joint effort by civil society and media organisations,⁹⁷ got as far as being approved by the Cabinet in December 2003. The Bill was expected to be placed before the Parliament earlier this year. Unfortunately however, probably due to the political uncertainty which hit Sri Lanka around that time, the Bill has got no further. A present priority in this area is the progressing of this Bill, providing people with

⁸⁹ Pinto-Jayawardena, "Freedom of Expression and Media Freedom" in *Sri Lanka: State of Human Rights 2003* – Law & Society Trust pp 136-137

⁹⁰ For instance, publication of defamatory statements reflecting on the proceedings and character of the House, or concerning any member in respect of his/her conduct as a member: Parliament (Powers and Privileges) Act No 21 of 1953 as amended

⁹¹ The Special Rapporteur in his reports to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, advocated the repealing of all criminal defamation laws.

⁹² A world association of writers with a 94 country membership, raised concerns regarding the use of criminal defamation legislation in Sri Lanka to silence the media through a memorandum in January 2002.

⁹³ Pinto-Jayawardena, *op cit*, pp 139-140

⁹⁴ *Ibid*. See also the resolution resulting from the International Colloquium on Freedom of Expression and Defamation held in Colombo in 1999

⁹⁵ Pinto-Jayawardena, *op cit*, pp 139-140

⁹⁶ *Ibid*

⁹⁷ These were the Editors Guild, the Free Media Movement and the Centre for Policy Alternatives.

a clear legal right to information which has often been unjustifiably withheld from them in the past.

Yet another victory in the area of media freedom resulting from efforts initiated in 2000 by the Editors Guild of Sri Lanka, the Newspaper Society of Sri Lanka and the Free Media Movement, was the establishment of the Sri Lanka Press Institute (SLPI) in October 2003 under a board of directors comprised of members of the three organisations. The SLPI spearheads a college of journalism providing media training and also appoints the self regulatory Press Complaints Commission (PCC). The PCC replaced the now abolished politically controlled Press Council which was in existence since 1973.

Evidence of the success and efficacy of this relatively new corrective mechanism however, is yet to be seen. However, the fact that the PCC as it now stands does not allow for consideration of the electronic media, is a point that has been raised as a matter of concern.

There is no mechanism through which the public can forward a complaint regarding unethical or factually incorrect reporting broadcast/telecast in the electronic media. The only remedy available to the public in this respect is civil defamation law, which is a lengthy and expensive procedure.

6.6 Media Activism, Training and Support Organisations

A number of journalists' organisations work for the advancement of the media profession in Sri Lanka. Key among them are:

The Free Media Movement (FMM)⁹⁸

Evolved out of the Standing Committee of Journalists formed in late 1991 as a collective enterprise of journalists and media personnel to critique and respond to moves by then government, the FMM has through the years become the watchdog of media freedom in Sri Lanka, defending rights of journalists and media personnel, calling for legislative reform, agitating against censorship and intimidation of media

personnel and standing for broad principles of democracy and human rights.

Editors Guild of Sri Lanka

The Editors Guild of Sri Lanka (EGSL) has a membership of 18 Editors and its main objectives include safeguarding editorial independence, protection and promotion of interests and rights of Editors, upholding freedom of the press and promotion of high standards of professional conduct. EGSL has been vocal in defending media freedom although not consistent. It has taken important initiatives on media law reform and ethical reporting.

The Newspaper (Publishers) Society

The News Paper Society of Sri Lanka comprises six News Paper groups, namely, Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited, Wijeya Newspapers Limited, Upali Newspapers Limited, Sumathi Newspapers (Pvt) Limited, Leader Publications (Pvt) Limited and Express Newspapers Limited. The main objectives of the society include the promotion and maintenance of high standards in journalism and the promotion of media freedom in Sri Lanka.

Electronic media institutions do not have their own collective.

There are number of trade unions of media workers and the Federation of Media Employees Trade Union (FMETU) unites all of them.

Federation of Media Employees Trade Union (FMETU)

FMETU is the largest non-partisan organization of journalists lobbying for press freedom and the rights of working journalists and others in the media sector in Sri Lanka. Eight trade unions operating in State-owned ANCL, SLRC, ITN and SLBC grouped together the trade union of Upali Newspapers (private) to form this federation of approximately 3,000 media personnel including journalists, technical staff, program producers and media workers.

Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association (SLWJA)

SLWJA is mainly a mainstream journalists' organisation, which has been established by a parliamentary act. It is not a trade union but an organisation with nearly 800 memberships. The SLWJA has not taken a stand on media freedom issues during the last few years and is mainly concerned with issues of journalists' welfare, such as pension schemes and free bus passes for Journalists.

⁹⁸ For more information on FMM, visit <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/23236/>

Amongst media organisations providing journalism and communications training are the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute (SLFI) and the Sri Lanka Newspaper Society and since late 2003, the Sri Lanka College of Journalism.

Sri Lanka College of Journalism

Established under the Sri Lanka Press Institute formed in 2003 with the broad objective of furthering democracy and independent thinking through the development of journalism and the integration of the newspaper industry, the College of Journalism is a centre of learning which conducts courses of study and training programmes on journalism.

The College of Journalism saw its first intake of students (30 students, 10 each from the Sinhala, Tamil and English language streams) for the one-year Diploma in Journalism in early 2004. The course covers basics of journalism, ethical reporting, conflict sensitive journalism training and training in ICTs amongst others. The students are also placed in various media institution as part of the programme in order to obtain practical training in an actual newsroom setting.

The entrance fee for the course was set at Rs. 100,000 (USD 955.91)⁹⁹ per head. This high fee deterred many journalists already in the field of media from applying for the course. Further, of the 30 students enrolled in the course, only 01 student has paid the full sum and only 03 others had paid a sum above Rs. 5,000 (USD 47.79).¹⁰⁰ A scholarship programmes has been made available in order to assist students who are unable to meet the cost. The College has also conducted two week-long training programmes for journalists on Newsroom Management (for print media journalists) and Interview Methods (for both print and electronic media journalists) thus far. Further, it hopes to conduct a training programme on ICTs including Web Hosting for journalists in the near future.

A number of local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) also provide training and capacity building for journalists and media personnel. Key amongst them are the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), the National Peace Council (NPC) and the Centre for Peace Building and Reconciliation (CPBR), while the Women and Media Collective also conducts some media training through their work which focuses on equality for women in Sri Lanka and changing attitudes about women's oppression.

The NGO sector is currently the key provider of training for journalists and media personnel. However, much of the training provided by these organisations have thus far been sporadic and often limited to a few workshops, resulting in the training not being continuous (thereby ensuring maximum impact) and available only to a small portion of the almost 3,000 journalist in Sri Lanka. Provincial journalists in particular often have very limited access to these training programmes. Therefore the need for comprehensive and continued training for journalists and media personnel still remains.

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6.7 Role of the International Community

A number of international organisations actively contribute towards improving the media situation in Sri Lanka by acting as watchdogs for media freedom and the freedom of expression, lobbying the government, conducting programmes for training and capacity building of journalists and media personnel and supporting civil society organisations working in the area.

Organisations such as International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) and Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF), working with local organisations such as the FMM, provide global news alerts on violations of freedom of expression and restrictions on media freedom, highlighting attacks on journalists, use of censorship and other restrictive laws, taking information on violations to a global forum and lobbying the government for action, investigation and redress. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) promotes press freedom by publicly revealing abuses against the press and by acting on behalf of imprisoned and threatened journalists. CPJ also lobbies the government on violations against media personnel and institutions.

⁹⁹ 1 USD = 104.612 LKR (mid-market exchange rate as at 05.11.2004)

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Other organisations such as Freedom House and the International Press Institute (IPI) through their annual country reports and watch lists, act as a yardstick on media freedom for both local and foreign organisations. In 2000, Sri Lanka was added to the IPI watch list as a result of the prevailing low levels of media freedom. However, based on the recommendations presented by a 05 member mission to the country later in 2003, Sri Lanka was removed from the IPI watch list due to improvements in the media situation.

Organisations such as the Commonwealth Press Union (CPU), Article 19, World Association of Newspapers, IPI and CPJ have made significant contributions in assisting media reforms, promoting freedom of expression and access to official information and actively lobbying the government for their implementation, by working closely with local organisations such as the Editors Guild. CPU has also conducted Media Monitoring exercises on election coverage in 2000 in Sri Lanka.

Article 19, CPU, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), PANOS South Asia play a key role through the active engagement of local and regional partners in organising international and regional seminars and conferences to promote

awareness, supporting advocacy campaigns, proposing recommendations and promoting declarations in areas such as media freedom, free expression and human rights.

In addition to raising awareness regarding restrictions and lobbying the government, a number of international organisations such as the Institute for Media Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS), International Media Support (IMS), Academy for Educational Development (AED), Office of Transitional Initiatives (OTI), Asian Media Information And Communication Centre (AMIC), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)¹⁰¹ and International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) actively engage in media training and capacity building for journalists and editors in areas such as conflict-sensitive reporting, journalistic ethics and skills, critical reporting and public services broadcasting through supporting civil society organisations working in these areas. The Sri Lanka Press Institute (SLPI) and the College of Journalism conducted by them in the south of the country is supported by The Norwegian Agency for International Development (NORAD) together with Swedish International Development cooperation Agency (SIDA).

¹⁰¹ The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) conducts a Media Research and Training Centre based at the University of Jaffna in the north of the country, an area in dire need of media capacity building. See: Centre for Policy Alternative, *Study of Media in the North-east of Sri Lanka*, 2003, pp 15-17

7 Key Problems

7.1 Political Polarization

With the nationalisation of the largest newspaper group in the early 1970s, the stage was set for government manipulation of the media. Since, the State media has fallen prey to the control of successive governments and is perceived as a vehicle for government propaganda. The appointment of favourable editors, news directors and senior managers by newly elected governments in order to fulfil partisan agendas is a (consistent) phenomenon that has shackled the state media over the years¹⁰². The legal framework compounds the situation by providing for substantial government control, particularly in the case of state television and radio, services which are also tightly controlled by the state in practice.

In general, a partisan media culture is deeply entrenched in almost all Sri Lankan mainstream media, making the media a part of the problem during a time of conflict (as opposed to part of the solution as it should be) by creating confusion and suspicion amongst the public.

The privately owned media in Sri Lanka has long been accused of being pro United National Party (the main component of the United National Front - the main party currently in opposition), due to family links with the former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe, resulting in the often heard claim that the government has no choice but to use the state media in order to air its points of view and thereby ensure balanced coverage of news and views.

This claim however does not stand, as the state (public) owned media has a duty to provide a *public* as opposed to a government or one-party service, ensuring unbiased coverage, in spite of the possibility that the private media may air views deemed one-sided.

7.2 Media Freedom

With the heightening of ethnic tensions and uprisals by the Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) youth movement in the 1970s, media freedom in Sri Lanka came under severe threat. The period that followed saw control being wielded over the media by the government, both through the use of repressive laws as well as widespread threats and attacks upon journalists and other media personnel for expressing views or publishing material that the authorities deemed undesirable. It has been documented that over 50 members of the media and artistic community have lost their lives as a direct consequence of their work during the past two decades, while many others have suffered physical attacks, harassment and loss of property, resulting in a considerable number of media personnel fleeing the country.¹⁰³

In addition to the government, both the LTTE (in the north east of the country) and JVP (in the south) also employed threats, attacks and murder in order to silence voices of dissent, exacerbating the culture of violence and fear. The LTTE permitted only the publication of pro-LTTE newspapers and a large number of media personnel of all three ethnic groups were attacked and killed for expressing opposing views¹⁰⁴; while a number of senior media personnel as well as persons selling government-owned newspapers were killed by the JVP during the 1987-89 insurgency in the south.¹⁰⁵

Though considerable improvement was seen in the area of media freedom since the peace negotiations and the ceasefire agreement (CFA) of February 2002 - both in terms of an easing of legal restrictions as well as the use of violence - a recent rift within the LTTE and seceding of an eastern faction led by Karuna, the Batticaloa-Ampara district commander in March 2004¹⁰⁶ saw the return of tensions and a spate of attacks by the LTTE on persons deemed to be dissidents,

¹⁰² Similar re-hauling of senior staff of state media institutions was also seen during the November 2003 takeover of state media by the President.

¹⁰³ Sunanda Deshapriya, *Media Freedom in Sri Lanka, 2002: Some Critical Issues*, available at http://www.ifj-asia.org/Sri_Lanka_Media_Freedom.html

¹⁰⁴ Article 19, *An Agenda for Change: The Right to Freedom of Expression in Sri Lanka*, 1994, p 4

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁶ http://www.eelam.com/freedom_struggle/ltte_press_releases/2004/PR20040306.html

informants and critics. These tensions led to the death of Bala Nadarajah Iyer¹⁰⁷ who worked on the editorial board of the Tamil-language weekly *Thinamurasu* and wrote a political column for the state-run Tamil daily *Thinakaran*.¹⁰⁸

In addition, though less brutal than before, the usual trend of politically motivated threats and attacks on media personnel and institutions and the related impunity is still at large.¹⁰⁹ For example, in July 2003, the Minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Mahinda Wijesekera threatened to kill Lasantha Wickramatunga, editor of *The Sunday Leader*, as a result of a series of articles published accusing the Minister of corruption. The threat was made while the Minister was in Parliament and in the presence of several other government ministers and parliamentarians.¹¹⁰

In February 2004 the Information and Communications Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar announced a decision to cancel the television broadcast license that was granted to the Asian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in 1995 - a move the ABC executives described as being "politically motivated".¹¹¹

In yet another example, a Young Asia Television crew was attacked while covering a political rally of the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) on 2 March 2004. The attackers seized and destroyed the news crew's tape and verbally assaulted the female member of the group who was identified as being a Christian.¹¹²

According to the Reporters Sans Frontiers annual report on Sri Lanka, at least 20 journalists have been physically attacked over the past year.¹¹³

7.3 Ethnocentrism, Religious Nationalism and Partisan Reporting

The media in Sri Lanka has historically been divided along ethnic lines, identifying with political movements and agendas that promoted their ethnic and religious identities; a trend which dates back to colonial times. In the 1860s,

Further, similar to the press, there is also little commitment on the part of both state and private electronic media to actively assist in creating understanding and easing ethnic tensions. However, this is partly due to the lack of a coherent national policy framework for broadcasting, which includes a commitment to diversity in programming in order to adequately portray the political, social and cultural dimensions of different communities, while ensuring editorial/programming freedom - particularly in relation to news and documentary broadcasts.

a number of reactionary Sinhala publications such as *Lanka Lokaya*, *Lakmini Pahana* and *Sandaresa* were started, taking a distinctly Sinhala-Buddhist stance.¹¹⁴ This religious and cultural focus was also mirrored in the limited Tamil media of the time.¹¹⁵ In the 1950s, the media played a significant role in bringing into power governments which championed the "Sinhala only" policy.

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.cpj.org/news/2004/Sri17aug04na.html>

¹⁰⁸ Senior journalist Aiyathurai Nadesan who worked for the national Tamil-language daily *Virakesari* for approximately 20 years was also killed in May 2004 in Batticaloa in the Eastern Province as a result of these tensions. (See <http://www.cpj.org/news/2004/Sri01june04na.html> for more information).

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.cpj.org/attacks03/asia03/sri.html>

¹¹⁰ http://www.cpj.org/cases03/asia_cases03/srilanka.html

¹¹¹ <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/56849>

¹¹² http://www.cpj.org/cases04/asia_cases04/srilanka.html

¹¹³ See *Sri Lanka - 2004 Annual Report*, available at http://www.rsfs.org/article.php3?id_article=10223&Validator=OK for details of attacks.

¹¹⁴ International Centre for Ethnic Studies, *Mass Media In Sri Lanka*, Baseline Study: Volume 1, 1996, p 10

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*

Currently, no Sinhala owned private mainstream media establishments publish newspapers in Tamil. The same is true for media establishments with Tamil ownership. None of them publish newspapers in Sinhala. Save for a few newspapers such as the *Daily Mirror* and *Lankadeepa*, which feature regular columnists who write on inter-ethnic perspectives, coverage of the perspectives of minority communities remain minimal. For instance, a complaint often heard by the Muslim community in the recent past was that their plight of being “caught in the crossfire” was completely ignored by the mainstream media. Little or no effort is also taken to translate and publish material published in other vernacular.

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Religious nationalism is a factor further impeding independent journalism in the mainstream media in Sri Lanka. In January 2002, the state owned English-language Sunday Observer destroyed 90,000 copies and dismissed senior journalist Asif Hussein, in response to an objection to one of the articles made by a Buddhist temple in the holy city of Kandy.¹¹⁶

The chilling impact of such religious nationalism can be argued in looking at another more recent example: a survey of the *Irida Divaina*, a Sinhalese Sunday paper between June to December 2003 (a period which recorded a large number of attacks on Christian churches, seemingly in protest against the conversion of Buddhists and Hindus to Christianity) revealed that articles propagating prejudices against Christians - demonstrating the latter as an

immediate threat to Buddhism - were published every week (93 in total) during the period.

Set against this backdrop, and allegations of murder surrounding the death of Venerable Gangodawila Soma¹¹⁷, the tail end of 2003 saw the emergence of a strong Buddhist nationalist agenda within mainstream politics. This emergence was also strongly reflected in the Sinhala language media and was particularly evident in the high coverage given to the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU)¹¹⁸ in coverage of the general election campaign in April 2004, particularly in the privately owned Sinhala language print media.¹¹⁹

While it is natural that any media has to keep its language audience in mind, varying agendas are pursued by the three language streams to an extent that further widens the existing chasm amongst the mainstream media.

As the Media Monitor¹²⁰ points out:

“Sri Lankan newspapers of the three language media cater to sets of individuals who inhabit different worlds and espouse different worldviews. Though the island is small, yet the gulf that separates these language groups appears to be ever-widening, particularly between the Tamil readership and the rest.

An analysis of the reportage of the North-East war demonstrates that these differences are not accidental or innocent, but rather, a reflection of deep ideological divergences that need to be brought to the surface and addressed directly for any lasting solution to the ethnic crisis to be meaningful and just.”

With regards to electronic media, both state and private radio and television stations run programmes in all three languages. However, as the *Report of the Committee to Advise on the Laws affecting Media Freedom and Freedom of*

¹¹⁶ RSF, *Sri Lanka – 2003 Annual Report* available at http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=6486

¹¹⁷ An influential Buddhist monk described as Sri Lanka’s first Buddhist tele-evangelist

¹¹⁸ A political party that fielded a list of candidates consisting entirely of Buddhist monks for the first time in Sri Lanka’s history.

¹¹⁹ Centre for Policy Alternatives, *Monitoring of Media Coverage: General Elections April 2004 Final Report*, 2004, pp 22-25

¹²⁰ Centre for Policy Alternatives, *Media Monitor*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 1997, p 6

*Expression*¹²¹ noted, there is currently no equitable balance between the three language services. The report notes:

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

A factor which could remedy the problem to an extent, would be the wider use of community radio. The SLBC currently provides facilities for a few community radio stations. However, as discussed before (in section 3.4.2), these stations are still controlled by the state and do not therefore have total autonomy in programming. They do not therefore adequately address community issues.¹²²

In this respect, it is pointed out that:

“A major bottleneck [in the expansion of community radio] is the discretionary broadcast licensing system that lacks transparency, accountability and consistency. As a result, the electro-magnetic spectrum – a public property – has been plundered by officials and politicians who have granted licences to relatives and business cronies.”¹²³

7.4 Reporting of Minority Issues, Human Rights and Social Issues

As evident in the following analysis of mainstream print media reportage of the conflict and related issues¹²⁴, the overall coverage of human rights, civilian, refugee and development related issues is low, while a difference in focus between the language streams is also apparent.

Type of Report	Sinhala Newspapers	Tamil Newspapers	English Newspapers
Actual Combat	78	52	36
Arrests (War related)	33	09	05
Civilian Issues	18	18	11
Refugee Issues	12	10	15
Peace Talks	14	07	00
Human Rights	03	16	04
Development Related	04	18	02
Other	86	17	02

¹²¹ *Report of the Committee to Advise on the Laws affecting Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression*, 1996, p 48

¹²² *Op cit*, p 38–39

¹²³ Nalaka Gunawardene, *Radio suffers as Colombo bosses call the shots*, 22/10/2003, available at <http://www.panos.org.uk/newsfeatures/featuredetails.asp?id=1160>

¹²⁴ *Media Monitor*, Centre for Policy Alternatives, Vol. 1, Issue 1, June 1997.

Coverage on women for instance, who had to face a great deal of challenges as a result of the conflict, featured very low (less than 5%) in media reporting of the conflict. In general, there is a strong state centric bias among the mainstream media with the party in power as well as party politics in general getting high coverage, while human rights, democracy, gender and minority issues do not get sufficient coverage.

7.5 Journalists and Media Personnel

The majority of journalists, particularly Sinhala and Tamil language journalists have had little or no comprehensive training. All mainstream newspapers in Sri Lanka have hundreds of provincial correspondents. They do not receive any journalism training from their respective media institutions. Journalism training and capacity building, particularly with regards to conflict sensitive journalism and ethical reporting is still a dire need within the media field in Sri Lanka. (see section 3.4.3 for a detailed discussion of problems faced by provincial journalists)

Salaries within the media industry are generally low in comparison to the commercial sector salary scales. This has been one of the key reasons for the brain drain suffered by the local

media industry. The lack of training has also impacted journalists' salary scales and the market value of the profession.

In general, Journalism in Sri Lanka is still a male dominated field, with a very low percentage of female journalists, especially in the vernacular media. By and large, very few women journalists take an active role in peace journalism, predominantly due to the highly gendered bureaucratic structures of media institutions, where the majority of women do not have decision making powers and have limited opportunities.

Further, Journalists in Sri Lanka do not have a Trade Union of their own. Almost all non state media institutions discourage their employees joining or forming trade unions. FMETU is mainly a collective of non journalist media workers' unions in the state sector.

Unlike in many countries, in Sri Lanka, journalists' accreditation identity cards are issued by the Ministry of Information and Media, upon request by the editor/director of the respective media institute. These cards bear the signature of the Director of Information. The individual media institutions also issue identity cards to journalists. However these are often not officially accepted by the state. The same procedure also applies with regard to provincial as well as freelance journalists, resulting in freelance journalists (at times) facing difficulties in obtaining their accreditation identity cards.

Details of Organisations

Centre for Policy Alternatives

Who we are

Media freedom, the public's right to know and the individual's fundamental right to freely hold and express opinions are inextricably linked with good governance and democracy. The Media Unit in CPA was constituted to further CPA's objectives of formulating policy options to inform and shape the practice and culture of governance in Sri Lanka. The Media Unit examines hopes to engender a socially responsible media by examining the content and form of media coverage, and by publishing 'Media Monitor', a journal highlighting problems with media reportage in Sri Lanka.

The Media Unit has worked with International Media Support (Denmark), IMPACS (Canada), the MediaWise Trust (UK), the Academy for Educational Development (USA), the Forum of Federations (Canada), UNESCO, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and a number of Sri Lankan media institutions, including the Free Media Movement (FMM), the Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association (SLWJA) and the Editors Guild in its interventions in Sri Lanka.

What we do

In 2005, the Media Unit hopes to engage in activities related to promoting the establishment of Public Service Media in Sri Lanka, providing training for media personnel and institutions on Conflict Sensitive and Ethical Reporting, developing Communication Strategies for Civil Society Organizations, promoting solidarity amongst media personnel and promoting Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Information.

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International Media Support

Our vision

To enhance peace, stability, democracy, freedom of expression and pluralism of the press in conflict and conflict threatened areas through rapid assistance to media practitioners and media institutions. The long-term strategic vision of International Media Support is to contribute to peace, stability and the development of democracy in conflict and conflict threatened areas. This is achieved through rapid interventions to promote and strengthen press freedom and professional journalism and to improve the working conditions of local journalists and media practitioners. The aim is to allow the population in endangered areas to exercise their right to express themselves freely - also in times of crisis.

Our principles of operation

IMS is committed to freedom of expression and related international human rights standards endorsed by the international community. IMS provides support to media, which promote democratic development

IMS promotes conditions for professional journalism to develop. IMS is a support mechanism for professional peers and strives not to be affiliated with unethical journalism

IMS promotes the role of the media in de-escalating rather than escalating a conflict

IMS provides assistance to independent media and to other media related institutions where professional journalism can be promoted

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