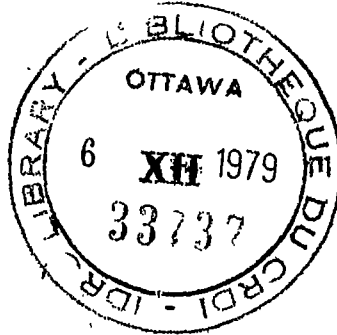


Report to IDRC



22 September 1978

31043

DEPTHNEWS SCIENCE SERVICE

An experiment in science writing in Asia

By MACK LAING

Editor

DepthNews Science Service, 1976-78

This is a report to Mr. Reg MacIntyre, Acting Director, Division of Publications, International Development Research Centre, 60 Queen St., Ottawa, Canada.

Purpose of the report: To outline the first two years of the IDRC-supported Manila-based DepthNews Science Service (DNSS) as an aid to IDRC in evaluating the project for possible future funding.

SUMMARY

DNSS produced about 250 science news-features during the two years. Usage by nearly 200 Asian newspapers was high, but no newspaper would pay for DNSS as a separate service. Raising the price of the total DepthNews Asia service and passing the increase to DNSS is one suggestion for generating income. IDRC stopped funding DNSS in late August 1978. The Press Foundation of Asia continues the service with a new editor under reduced funding. IDRC should not lose contact with the experiment, since DNSS is unique in Asia and seems to have no counterpart in Africa or Latin America. At minimum, IDRC could help with funds for travel, training and other single-shot grants.

ARCHIV
070:600(5)

L 3

IDRC-doc-145

DEPTHNEWS SCIENCE SERVICE: an experiment in science writing in Asia

INTRO

In response to a request, as early as mid-1975, from Amithaba Chowdhury, then Chief Executive of the Press Foundation of Asia (PFA), IDRC funded what was to become the DepthNews Science Service (DNSS) for two years, from July 1976, and provided an editor, Mack Laing, then and now an assistant professor of journalism at the University of Western Ontario's School of Journalism, in London, Canada.

WHAT WAS TO BE DONE

1. To launch an airmailed newsfeature service focussed on science, technology, medicine, health, nutrition, engineering, population and other technical subjects as they relate to Asian development.
2. To see whether DNSS could be sold to Asian newspapers as a separate news service to at least partially offset expenses.
3. Through distribution on the mailing lists of PFA's general feature services, DepthNews Asia (DNA) and DepthNews Special (DNS), DNSS was to show Asian editors the newsvalue of development-related science stories and to show general writers that science is an interesting and important coverage area.
4. To recruit potential Asian science writers.
5. To assist what was then the PFA library in choosing quality science clippings from Asian newspapers for Sci-Ref File, an IDRC-supported fortnightly, 50-clipping collection for distribution to science writers to help writers form their own mini-libraries.
6. To provide training, through seminars and editorial feedback, for Asian science writers.
7. Having launched and tested reception of the service, it was to be handed over to an Asian editor to continue.

WHAT WAS DONE

1. THE PRODUCT: Solid

DNSS became Asia's first science news service. It achieved quite wide Asian coverage for about 250 science newsfeatures produced over the two years. Production was about three stories a week. A short-item column, Sci-Tech Asia, was started in November 1977, but has not caught on as a column. A series of occasional guest columns by scientists withered on the vine.

2. INCOME: None

Despite the general success of DNSS itself, it could not be sold as a separate news service. Even the few relatively rich Asian newspapers would use the service, but would not pay for it.

3. USAGE: High

Usage showed relatively high newspaper interest. Highly encouraging interest was also noted among newspapers printed in languages other than English. Like DNA and DNS stories, DNSS stories eventually filtered down to be used in a total of nearly 200 Asian newspapers in seven languages.

4. WRITER RECRUITMENT: Uneven

A few new writers were found and a few regular DepthNews Asia correspondents (basically political and economics writers) were converted, but the recruitment was tough and copy flow from correspondents was spotty. DNSS suffered from lop-sided geographical coverage--good volume from Sri Lanka and India, on one side of Asia, and from Manila on the other, but with great coverage gaps between, for countries such as Thailand, Korea, Singapore and Indonesia.

5. SCI-REF FILE: Useful

This useful idea fell on troubled ground when a 60 per cent interest in the PFA library was sold to a group of Manila businessmen who formed Asian Reference Systems (ARS), a reference-information service to be sold to Asian business and other groups. The businessmen became disenchanted with ARS and held back salary and other support. Many library staff were laid off. Sci-Ref File appeared only irregularly. Some new hope was being offered in this situation as I left Manila.

6. TRAINING: Encouraging

Thirty-five writers attended the four-day Seminar for Asian Science Writers in late November 1977. A few became DNSS writers; some regular correspondents developed a new interest in science coverage; all said they found the training program useful.

Critical review of stories and individual feedback to writers, though time-consuming, strengthened story and writer.

An Asian Science Writers' Association (ASWA) was formed. It continues with very active interest and has received a one-year IDRC launching grant.

In cooperation with ASWA, the Philippine Pediatrics Society announced in July 1978 what are probably Asia's first prizes for science writing. Three awards, to become annual, of 3,000, 2,000 and

1,000 pesos (\$461, \$308 and \$154 Canadian) will be first presented in November 1978 for writing in the field of child health. (The first prize would be more than two months basic pay for a seasoned Manila reporter).

As a spin-off from the DNSS editorship, I was awarded one of three plaques for stories generated by the weekly multi-media research seminars of the University of the Philippines and a certificate of appreciation for a lecture on science writing given to government information officers.

7. PRESENT: Steady

DNSS continues under Paul Icamina, a science writer hired from Manila's Daily Express. Paul has been designated Special Science Writer, DNSS. There seems no reason why DNSS should not continue as a successful part of PFA under Paul. PFA Chief Executive S.M. Ali seems determined to keep DNSS going. I will continue to keep close contact with DNSS and ASWA. One continuing contact is S.M. Ali's interest in my writing a manual on science writing for Asian reporters.

WHAT THE EXPERIMENT "PROVED"

The strength of the experiment--perhaps its single measurable strength--lies in the widespread usage DNSS stories achieved. The proof lies in the clippings. We have them--lots of them.

It could have been quite different. Editors could have been "turned off" by detailed and often lengthy descriptions of chemical and other processes. Indeed, sometimes these hard-fought-for details were excised out, but the basic stories still stood; 1,000, even 1500-word features, found ink regularly. One early outstanding example was a 3,000-word state-of-the-art story on leprosy which was printed by a Manila evening tabloid. It covered three newspaper pages.

So DNSS showed that newspapers would use stories with a deliberate science-technology focus. That is distinct from the more general focus of DepthNews Asia development stories which also included technical angles and which were also widely printed.

To a certain extent, the experiment also showed that some Asian journalists could become interested in science writing when the subject was introduced gently--perhaps even in disguise--though the reception was not forceful enough or widespread enough to make any broad statement confidently.

Meanwhile, DNSS and the spin-off experiment that the fledgling Asian Science Writers' Association represents combined to show up considerable and largely unexpected enthusiasm among both the converted--the established science writers--and writers in fields such as business where writers often touched on science. The ASWA movement is so far confined largely to the Philippines, though

it has officers and members in a few other Asian countries.

Meanwhile, pockets of scientists and writers for government science-related agencies were found in both the Philippines and Indonesia. South India has a very active group of science writers. I suspect other groups will surface. One part of the bait will be The Yenri Principle, ASWA's newsletter, now in charge of DNA reporter Adlai Amor, who also developed a keen interest in science writing.

PROBLEMS

There were more problems found than pinnacles reached. In priority and magnitude, the problems come under these three M's-- Money, Morale and to some extent, Management. All are linked.

1. MONEY: Some scheme has to be found whereby DNSS can generate its own income, however modest. This is necessary to:

1. justify its continued and separate existence within PFA.
2. to give its new editor some room to move, to plan and to reward DNSS writers, the last being the only sure way to ensure continued copy flow from outside Manila.
3. to offset at least some expenses
4. to enhance future requests for funding as an income-generating operation rather than as a mendicant cottage industry.

S.M. Ali and I have a continuing friendly disagreement on how DNSS might have brought in some income. S.M.'s idea was that, early in the game, when the fish were on the interest-hook, I should have messaged editors that this new service they seemed so willing to print would henceforth be available for cash, even token sums. This approach was left too late, he argues, and by the time we asked for money, editors had taken DNSS for granted as a bonus to the regular DNA package in which DNSS was delivered.

That may be so, but in a July 1977 Asian swing, 10 months after DNSS was launched on a regular basis, my direct question to editors--"How much can you pay for this service?"--brought only groans and tales of economic woes and cutbacks. I saw no reason to believe the answer would have been different after two months of DNSS operation nor do I think it would be much different now.

At minimum, DNSS needs a better salesman than I am.

One possibility would be to keep DNSS as a separate service in the DNA package (it seems foolish to mail it separately), but to

raise the price of the entire package. That now varies from \$US 4,000 to \$US 5,000 a year for our few top-money customers; would they pay more and could PFA channel the difference to DNSS?

Another way might be for Paul Icamina and the correspondents to do fewer stories of greater quality, then offer these as special stories at nominal but fixed rates or variable rates according to each newspaper's circulation, that income to go directly to DNSS.

A short-lived scheme was suggested once to our Singapore correspondent. The idea was that one of his stories, unsuitable for DNSS, might be marketed by DNSS on his behalf--DNSS to keep half of any resulting payment. The plan was aborted by the correspondent's uncomplimentary opinion of the magazine chain I had in mind. The scheme remains untried.

I suppose it is unlikely to work, partly because it would change the nature of the DNSS editor's job from journalist to marketing expert. Some DNA correspondents already complain that trying to sell DepthNews and other PFA products (e.g., Data Asia, Banker's Handbook, Asian Press and Media Directory) already leaves them little time to write DNA or DNSS stories.

Just as I left Manila, Paul Icamina and I were working on a special series of articles to be commissioned by an outside writer. We planned to offer the series to newspapers on the DNA network at some token sum--\$US 100 to \$200 for five articles, for example. Six sales at \$200; pay the author \$200; DNSS clears \$US 1,000. That experiment still ongoing.

2. MORALE:

The morale problem is linked to money.

PFA apparently pays well enough to hold its few (four or five) senior and part-time DepthNews editors. All are from the Manila newspaper scene. Few have worked regularly abroad.

Lack of money bars PFA from any infusion of new blood. Despite Manila's relatively lower cost of living, relocation costs alone prevent PFA from moving new staff into Manila from more developed centres of Asian journalism such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, or even from elsewhere in Southeast Asia, if suitable and willing staff could be found.

While the DepthNews desk does a good job with what is often unclear, poorly-written correspondent copy, one suspects these and other tasks have become routine and uninspiring for most editors. The office has little spark; most times it is tomb-quiet.

Some relief from this situation has been found in short-term training internships for visiting Journalists. These are supported by other organizations. For example, the Luce Foundation

in one case or even the IDRC-supported DNSS editorship. There are projected "loans" of staff from Australia.

But the situation is a reversal of the heady, early optimistic years of PFA staff hiring in which PFA operated as a close-knit high-spirited team of some of the best Asian journalists.

Lack of money hinders any system of incentive payment under which a correspondent might be given a bonus for a good story or a deskbound editor might be rewarded for extra work or a bright move. DNSS, with the budget to do it, tried occasional bonuses with excellent results in increased newsflow from correspondents.

The main present reward is travel. Office staff get occasional morale-raising trips abroad, usually financed by United Nations or other agencies to cover conferences dealing with development.

Chief Executive S.M. Ali travels widely, too much, he says, for his liking. By necessity, these trips are always financed by outside agencies and S.M.'s necessary PFA business travel must be done along the conference trail.

Much of the morale problem stems from a lack of communication within the Manila office and much more so between the office and the correspondents.

Example: PFA worked out a deal which allowed editors a few hundred words a week to query correspondents by Reuters wires and which allowed correspondents to transmit one or two of their more urgent stories a week to Manila. But this ended after several months when PFA could not pay the Reuters bill.

Example: S.M. Ali introduced a series of weekly staff meetings to discuss ideas for stories and to comment on the weekly package, but these meetings were not held when S.M. was away.

The rather sudden departure in early 1977 of senior staff editor Dennis O'Leary (a Filipino-Chinese-American, of all things) was a blow to communications with correspondents. Dennis's job of keeping up correspondence with the outside-Manila offices, nearly a full-time job, had to be taken over by Executive Editor Noli Jara. It seems to have been passed down the line, from one newly hired assistant editor to another.

No doubt these editors did their best at this job, but there was no travel money for them to visit correspondents and however the communication job was done, a major complaint of correspondents was lack of feedback from the office.

The improvement of this aspect of DepthNews operations should be a prime goal. It is one area which could be upgraded at

little additional cost, though it does take time.

Another situation linked to this communication problem, and inevitably connected with the lack of money, was that correspondents were not always paid promptly. Bills for simple office expenses in the bureaus, such as those for secretarial services, went long overdue.

The Jakarta office was particularly disgruntled by what it considered non-payment of PFA obligations. In its turn, PFA was miffed at Jakarta's lack of production. Both sides stopped talking. The silence became nearly complete, with Jakarta limiting its functions to translating news stories for use in Bahasa newspapers.

The same delayed payments were a feature of the Manila office. Occasionally, even salaries for the whole office had to be delayed a day or two.

While slow payments and a juggling of creditors seems common throughout Asia, it was obvious that PFA was in a continuous financial struggle and that this was having an effect on morale.

On the other side of the coin, the fact that correspondents did stay with DepthNews speaks highly of them. There was a high sense of commitment to PFA which, in most cases, was kept alive despite the lack of money. In Manila and in some bureaus, for example, it was nothing for senior officers to reach into their own pockets to pay urgent PFA expenses or to hold creditors at bay until the next injection of funds came through.

3. MANAGEMENT:

It seems a universal axiom that when journalists attempt to manage a business, financial trouble always lurks just over the horizon. Something there is in the journalist which does not like a balance sheet.

PFA has been run by journalists since it began 10 years ago. There was a series of setbacks for which no one can be blamed but fate, business recession and Asia's increasingly authoritarian national governments.

Some background: one setback was martial law, which has continued in the Philippines since 1972. Among other effects, this killed the Manila Times. It was then Asia's largest-circulation newspaper in English. It wielded considerable influence. Its publisher, Joaquin Rocas, was a PFA trustee.

Though newspaperless, he still is a trustee and strong friend of PFA, having served his time in Camp Crame as a guest of the state in the early martial law days, as did early DepthNews editor

Johnny Mercado, now with FAO's regional office in Bangkok. While it is not politically oriented, or censored, PFA walks a narrow path around the Marcos government, which frowns more than it smiles on PFA.

In Singapore, Lee Kwan Yew killed the PFA-connected Singapore Herald early in PFA's life. A personal plea by PFA in Singapore for Lee to reinstate the paper drew not only a refusal, but destroyed any PFA chance for a connection with the powerful Singapore Straits Times group.

This has crossed national boundaries to exclude PFA and DepthNews from any strong connection with the New Straits Times in Malaysia. DepthNews and DNSS are widely used in Malaysia's Business Times, an NST paper, but the only other customer in Kuala Lumpur is The Star, a racy tabloid with its own part-time and largely unpaid science columnist (now being actively recruited by DNSS).

Business recessions, price rises that came with the 1973-74 oil crisis, investments of the original PFA endowment which did not pay off as well as expected--all these and similar factors combined to weaken PFA's original vigor.

My arrival in Manila on July 16, 1976, coincided with a period of what might be termed "absentee management" at PFA.

Amithaba Chowdhury, who had been PFA chief executive since its beginning, was then in transition from that post to become publisher of a new Fortune-like business magazine, Asian Finance. Though it is edited in PFA's Manila office by two brilliant Indians, the business office is in Hong Kong.

Until S.M.'s hiring as chief executive in March 1977, Amit could spend only about 10 days a month in Manila. Almost every PFA move had to wait for his signature.

In November 1977, S.M. came down with hepatitis. He still tires easily, though he forces himself to take long business trips and to deal with constant financial headaches. During his absences for at least two or three months a year, day to day office business is run by Romy Abundo, who mainly handles DepthNews Philippines, and general secretary Lolita Llarina-Vergara. One suspects that many decisions are left for S.M.'s return.

This largely non-delegating way of doing things seems to be part of the legacy left by Amit. I think it fair to say, from observation, that Amit ran a type of "godfather" operation. Naturally, it had several factors perhaps peculiarly Asian.

By this I mean, briefly:

1. Due to PFA's early optimistic burst of hiring, the organization got stuck with at least some deadwood. It would be un-Asian to fire these people. But it was quite Asian that at least a fraction were related, the originals having engineered jobs for their kinfolk. In Asia, loyalty in an employee is prized above competence. PFA employees became members of a family. Amit was the kind-hearted godfather.

Example: a careless PFA janitor set a garbage fire between two broken-down PFA cars. The fire went out of control and burned up one car. Luckily, it did not burn down the office. The car was old and out of commission, but PFA may still have had hopes of resurrecting it. Not only that, this Fiat was Amit's favorite car, one he'd bought in Italy. S.M. was by then in charge and contemplated firing the janitor. But Amit, who was visiting, talked S.M. out of it.

2. Some debts, old promises and verbal "contracts" made up another part of the legacy. S.M. seemed to have a number of these surprises to deal with.

It seems that in Asia, an employee promised a raise, for example, will wait patiently and quietly for it to come. When it doesn't, he will become restive, but will not mention his problem directly. S.M.'s problem was that he didn't know of some of these past promises. (The "raise" example is my invention to make the point briefly).

3. Amit's enthusiasm, personal charm, perennial optimism and strong leadership qualities meant that every PFA innovation was his. The legacy from this is the tomb-quiet office and an almost automaton staff waiting to carry out the next idea.

Please don't get me wrong. What I'm calling Amit's "legacy" was absolutely well-intentioned, deriving from a passionate belief in the PFA cause. Were it not for him, there probably would be no PFA today. There are many excellent aspects of the legacy, not the least of which is that PFA and DepthNews are well known in publishing circles across Asia.

But now at home base, some of the well-meant moves of the past 10 years have led to morale and management problems. S.M. is struggling with these and there is some evidence that he is delegating more responsibility and seeking new ideas from his staff.

Even more of this will have to be done. One reason alone: S.M. is not in vigorous good health and there are many strains. One suspects that S.M. would like to be free of this stress, but has committed himself to getting PFA on an even keel before he allows himself to look for a new assignment.

Ideally, the financial management of PFA would be taken

over by a trained business manager who would oversee the budgets for PFA enterprises. Once the journalists understood the budget they had to work with and determined what they could do with it, they could get on with producing PFA's news-products: DNA, DNS, Data Asia and DNSS. In theory at least, such an arrangement would avoid present short-term confusion and go some distance toward solving the morale and management questions of the future.

THE FUTURE

In writing this report, I have discussed money, morale and management for PFA as a whole because these factors affect the future of DNSS and the evaluation of IDRC's future investment in the DNSS experiment.

IDRC did not continue its support of DNSS beyond Aug. 31, 1978. The support from about April 25, 1978 seemed to be an extension of contract--to my surprise, since I was working on different dates.

PFA now supports DNSS completely, at reduced funding from that requested of IDRC and under reduced objectives.

S.M. Ali considers the DNSS experiment a success. He says it will continue--as a separate service under PFA--as long as PFA can support it.

PFA's stated financial commitment to DNSS ("stated," since at my request a contract was put together for Paul) will expire a year after Paul took over, i.e., about mid-July 1978. What happens to DNSS then is anyone's guess.

This much seems certain: since DNSS is now funded totally by PFA, the extension of DNSS beyond July 1978 depends on whether PFA is up or down financially at that time.

Among PFA's chances for financial improvement are the strengthening of its recent connections with Australia. PFA's Media Magazine was sold in 1978 to the Melbourne Age group under publisher Ranald MacDonald. Since about May 1978, PFA has been marketing a package of "guest columns" through this Australian group. This could be a breakthrough in gaining new income. PFA's annual meeting was held in Australia in early 1978. Ranald MacDonald was elected a PFA trustee.

S.M. Ali also hopes for new income from Persian Gulf countries. One possibility he mentions is a connection with a publisher in Teheran.

It could be that these new potential income sources allow PFA to progress or at least to bring the ship back to some even financial keel.

However, if these sources do not develop as hoped, and if PFA remains in a financial bind, there seems a good possibility that PFA will begin to regard DNSS as a luxury.

Should this occur, I would not predict the immediate demise of DNSS, since I respect S.M. Ali's promise to keep it going. However, without some income of its own or without PFA funding at the present level, DNSS would probably have to be cut back. And this could mean a slow dissolution of DNSS to the point where it could become a mere label.

I am sure IDRC does not want to see this happen after a two-year IDRC investment in launching the service. But it could happen and this is why I am urging continued IDRC support for DNSS.

HOW IDRC MIGHT HELP DNSS

I think IDRC should review the whole DNSS experiment and reconsider its reasons for ending funding.

I have presumed the cut-off was due to Canadian government cutbacks, but I have only seen reference to this in a brief letter which also mentioned a shift of emphasis to domestic projects in the Division of Publications.

But there may have been other reasons. The lack of financial response from Asian publishers may have been one, for example.

One benefit of such a review might be to clarify the status of the experiment within the Division, the better to assess similar projects in future.

Another good effect might be an outline of the project as IDRC saw it--unless this has already been done--which could go to PFA, enabling PFA to see where the project might have gone wrong. Or, if it didn't go wrong, outlining for PFA, in more detail, the economic constraints which forced IDRC into the cut-off.

In effect, this would encourage PFA in its belief that DNSS was basically a good project worthy of continued PFA funding, and an experiment still being watched with interest by IDRC.

If IDRC wanted to hold its door open to other PFA funding requests for DNSS, so much the better, but the key at the moment, I think, is not financial commitment or promise, but continued contact.

There are "milestone" events in the history of DNSS that IDRC might use in keeping up this contact. One is the IDRC-sponsored Seminar for Asian Science Writers held in Manila in the last week of

November 1977. As I understand it, PFA wanted to call a similar meeting, but is holding it off to early 1979, partly due to lack of funds and partly because the date follows too closely on the PFA Assembly, which meets in October in Colombo (1978).

If PFA does hold some sort of training session for science writers, IDRC might try for some input, no matter how small, simply to show interest.

supply a resource person

There are other plans afoot for science writers to gather at preliminary regional meetings toward eventual coverage of the UN Conference on Science and Technology for Development in Vienna in August 1979. One such meeting is tentatively planned for Singapore in January 1979. Should this come off, a Manila-Singapore travel grant for DNSS would help cement the idea of IDRC interest and at little cost.

IDRC could provide a modest annual prize for excellence in science writing in Asia, perhaps to be administered through ASWA, with three Asian and two Canadian judges. Travel within Asia for coverage of Asian science would be one of the best forms of award. I note for information that a British publishing house, Pergamon Press, has recently established a \$US 2,000 award (apparently for world competition, or Third World) for use by a science writer to cover either the Singapore or Vienna meetings just mentioned.

A challenging notion, but with some foreseeable difficulties, might be to use DNSS as a training centre for Asian science-writing interns and, even more ambitious, to attempt an exchange program whereby the DNSS editor might trade jobs for a month or two with a counterpart on an Asian newspaper. The difficulties include the problem of finding a counterpart on any but Manila papers (Australia might be a possibility) plus differences in national salaries, cost of living and occasional language problems. The possible IDRC involvement here might be travel costs or some contribution toward offsetting cost of living differences.

Occasional travel grants for DNSS news-gathering outside the Philippines would relieve the lop-sided coverage problem mentioned earlier, which persists, according to a Sept. 14 letter from Manila. The same letter says Paul is now story-hunting in the Philippine south, under sponsorship of the government's National Media Production Center. IDRC travel funds would help relieve this DNSS dependency on a national Asian government. The dependency on funds from Canada, being more remote, would help upgrade DNSS credibility with Asian papers outside the Philippines.

Though they may not be allowable under IDRC's general policy of undertaking experimental "packages," here are two other sample suggestions for uses of one-shot IDRC grants:

1. installation of a second telephone in the DepthNews office, where a dozen people now use the one line

2. a small grant for a simple brass sign for the PFA entrance

to announce the presence of PFA, DNSS, DNA, DNS and Data Asia. PFA has apparently never got around to setting aside money for such a luxury, though this is PFA's tenth anniversary.

The general principle I'm suggesting here is that single-shot, specific and fairly small grants, rather than long-term funding, might be how IDRC could help DNSS most, between now and next July, the point at which PFA will either continue, reduce or eliminate (I can't imagine the latter) its DNSS funding.

But at the moment, I suggest contact is the key. In other words when the baby is left on the doorstep and its bottle has emptied, the mother need not return every week with a full bottle, but she might inquire about her offspring's health and growth from time to time. More than money, this is what DNSS needs now-- continuing official interest.

WHY IDRC SHOULD SUPPORT DNSS

Aside from the possibility of "rescuing" the initial IDRC investment, the arguments can be given in point form:

1. Despite its present inability to generate income, DNSS is well launched and continues, at the moment, to be well known in Asia

2. DNSS has been taken over by a young and dedicated editor who believes in the DepthNews concept and who gave up a chance at a year's study in United States to take this job.

3. Though S.M. Ali cannot guarantee PFA's long-term financial support of DNSS, his support of DNSS as a separate service under PFA is genuine.

4. While morale within PFA may be low and its management rooted in journalism rather than business, the DepthNews staff continues--under great difficulties--to somehow maintain the momentum of DepthNews and the concepts behind it.

5. The Asian Science Writers' Association (ASWA) is completely independent of PFA and DNSS and merely contracts for secretarial and other services from PFA. Despite this, DNSS is a rallying point for ASWA. ASWA came into being at the IDRC-supported seminar which was prompted by the existence of DNSS. IDRC's welcome launching grant for ASWA, without the continuation of a DNSS grant, thus seems a bit off balance, since DNSS and ASWA are parallel, though independent.

6. It must be understood that while DNA, DNSS and other PFA operations such as Data Asia can properly be classed as "cottage industries," the term is not a denigration, but a source of pride and strength. This operation is lean. There is little waste. Ideas

and material are recycled in many directions.

Although it would benefit from a business reorganization, the fact is that these people are doing wonders with the little money they have to work with. The return on a small investment put into a cottage industry of this kind is enormous, even though the results may be, admittedly, intangible.

7. Finally, DNSS is unique. It operates within a unique and established framework--the DepthNews Asia network of nearly 200 Asian newspapers in seven languages. No other trans-Asian news service filters down to the outback weeklies, since there is no profit in this. The small papers do receive material from subsidized national news organizations, inevitably government-oriented and internal to the particular country.

Under the roof of PFA, with good connections to various national press institutes, DNSS enjoys a commanding position for the organization of national or multi-country training programs. In the case of seminars, DNSS has an experienced, built-in secretariat in PFA's administrative staff.

In its daily work, DNSS has a ready-made web of correspondents--tenuous on science coverage perhaps--but still there to be used or expanded. Many of the correspondents operate from established PFA offices, sometimes in major newspaper buildings or near national press institute and national wire service offices. In other words, these PFA offices are real centres of information, not just the changing addresses of roving freelancers.

As far as I can determine, there is nothing to compare with the set-up in which DNSS operates--not in the whole of Africa or Latin America. Science news services are quite rare even in the developed world. Even the traditional Western wire services, with their enormous budgets, do not provide complete coverage of these developing areas. Far from it. And when these Western services do attempt Third World analysis, their orientation is heavily criticized by the countries they write about.

Meanwhile, here is the potential of having Asian development-related science and technology covered by Asians for nearly the whole of this largest of all continents which is home to one-half the total world population.

In summary, it's not a matter of which basket to put your eggs in. PFA, DNA and the experimental DNSS are not only the best basket; they are the only basket.