

A REPORT ON THE SEMINAR

“CHALLENGES TO MEDIA ON POVERTY REPORTING AND MONITORING”

Organized by the World Association of Christian Communication–Asia region (WACC-AR)
and Martin Luther Christian University, Shillong.

The seminar was held on the **29th May, 2009 at Presbyterian Church of India Assembly Hall, Shillong.**

The guest speakers for the seminar were Ms. Patricia mukhim, Editor of the Shillong Times, Dr. Samuel Meshack of WACC-AR, Prof. Barth K Yeboah, visiting Professor of Social Works, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, Ms. R. Kurbah, Deputy Director, Meghalaya Administration Training Institute (MATI), Mr. Toki Blah, President, ICARE, Mr. Jason Marbaniang, and Ms. Dariker Kharkongor, research assistants on media and poverty.

The participants include media students and teachers from St. Anthony’s college, social work students and teachers from Martin Luther Christian University.

1st Session

The seminar started with an introduction and welcome speech by Dr. Glen C Kharkongor, Vice Chancellor of Martin Luther Christian University. He shared provoking thoughts on the responsibility of the younger generation to clean the mess done by the older generation in this poverty ridden society.

After this Ms Mukim took the stage and she spoke on ‘Media and Social Responsibility’. She emphasized on the role of media, highlighting three points which are providing credible information, education, and entertainment. She argued that social responsibility is not the onus of the reporters and producers of media but that of the consumers, them becoming media literate and maintaining high standards. She said that in the present time, the poor are powerless and the newsmakers are the powerful. In order to bring an equation to this relation, there is a need for the media and public to work together. Ms. Mukhim concluded by saying that media’s responsibility is to give voice to the voiceless.

Dr. Meshack was the next speaker and he spoke on the topic of the seminar i.e. ‘Challenges to Media on Poverty Reporting and Monitoring’. He gave a paper presentation, introducing the works of WACC in relation with poverty and media. He concluded by inviting all the institutes, individuals and media persons to partner with WACC in giving a stronger voice to the poor, marginalized, and the excluded in shaping local, national, and international decision making.

Prof. Barth K. Yeboah spoke on the ‘Need for Institutional Response to Human Needs’. He gave an explanation on social work profession and considered media as a social institution to address human needs, poverty being one of it. Prof Yeboah gave four general statements i.e. (i), poverty is a social problem and thus it needs a social response, (ii) response to indicate poverty – Poverty is endemic assessment (iii) the interest groups – media and newspapers (iv) understanding the major institutions – seeking to collaborate with these institutions. Though there might be difference in opinions and methodologies working together but there is a need to accept and adjust. He categorized poverty as eradicable (new poor) and non eradicable. He mainly stressed on the point that ‘it is possible to eradicate only if it is well defined’.

2nd Session

Ms. Kurbah began the second the session with a talk on Right To Information (RTI). She briefed the history of RTI, saying that RTI was enacted in the year 1776. The first country to implement the Act is Sweden. In 1948, the Act was declared as one of the Fundamental Human Rights. She then explained what RTI is about, how it can be filed, when it could be filed, who can file and the steps and procedures needed to file an RTI.

Every citizen can file RTI, only if they come through proper channel and procedure.

Next, Mr. Marbaniang and Ms. Kharkongor gave a report on the research conducted in all districts of Meghalaya on Media and Poverty. They presented on (i) the causes of poverty, (ii) effects of poverty, (iii) media coverage on poverty. The major findings of the research included lack of knowledge and skills on the issue reported, distortion of information, inability to conduct follow-ups on issues due to inadequate assistance. They concluded their presentation with some suggestions like media focusing more on poverty rather than on sensational news only, more coverage on rural areas, more financial assistance to media

persons, training for media personnel on the poverty issues, coordination between government and NGOs.

The last spokesperson was Mr. Toki Blah, who spoke on 'Media and Rural Development'. He spoke about rural development and its meaning. He added that 48.90% are living below poverty line (BPL) and they are mostly from rural areas of our country. He said that a need had arisen to identify community institutions for the people and also identify important issues that make people to think so that there can be development in the rural regions.

Every presentation was followed by a discussion, sharing of views and questions and answers between the audience and the speakers.

At the concluding sessions the Vice Chancellor of Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU) is of the opinion that there can be a networking between St. Anthony's Media Students with MLCU Social Work department to tap the various activities taken in field projects. This can be the starting point where media students can cover poverty issues, during the social work students' field work.

The seminar ended with a resolution that every participant would strive towards giving the poor a voice through the media, a channel through which their grievances and hardships could be expressed to the world, thereby giving them a chance to alleviate themselves from the perpetual poverty they are living in.

Action points

- There is a growing number of initiatives taken by the media, by people living in poverty and by other actors to address poverty reduction, including issues of voice, content and access to information and communication. These should be encouraged and actively supported. Best practices should be publicised and exchanged.
- Access for the disadvantaged to information and communication should be an integral part of any strategy to reduce poverty. Such a strategy should include participatory media.
- Community media should be specifically encouraged, including through access to licences and spectrum allocation. Frequencies should be allocated in a balanced way amongst community, commercial and public service media. Broadcast licensing should be administered by independent and transparent regulatory bodies.
- There is a need for increased resources, better coordination and targeting of training programmes; including training journalists in poverty related issues.

- Involvement of media in education, and the development of media literacy, should be promoted.
- Public service broadcasting mandates should include obligations to provide information and education to address issues of poverty; and to ensure that public
- National communication policies should be developed that address access to communication for people living in poverty. Such policies should be developed and implemented in a transparent and participatory manner.
- Professional standards and ethics of journalism, as defined by journalists themselves, should be supported and encouraged. The journalistic ethic should include sensitivity to issues of poverty.
- Journalists should be provided with living standards and working conditions which enable them to realise these professional standards.
- South-South and South-North exchanges between media and journalists should be encouraged, including personnel, training, equipment and content.
- Support should be provided for civil society organisations in working with the media.
- Mechanisms should be encouraged for making newspapers more affordable and more available to the disadvantaged, including measures to cut the price of newsprint and equipment.
- The use of ICTs to provide the media with more diversity of information sources should be promoted; together with combinations of traditional and new information technologies to facilitate better access to communication for people living in poverty, so that the Right to Information may facilitate the poor in getting the right information and have the right to information.
- Resources should be provided, including by public authorities, to address shortcomings in communication access for those living in poverty and to remove cost and other barriers, in ways that do not compromise freedom of expression.
- More research needs to be undertaken on the implications of current media trends for poverty reduction.
