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*Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 1987 64: 80

DOI: 10.1177/107769908706400110

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# Coverage of Development News In Developed and Developing Countries

*Developmental issues at an International Conference on Population were covered by the press in developing countries when the developed countries focused on political issues.*

► Some authors have attempted to conceptualize development news.<sup>1</sup> Others have tried to measure it.<sup>2</sup> Everyone who has researched the concept has tried to wrestle with the question, "What is development news?" Even researchers who have written what they feel to be definitive answers to that question have not been in agreement. And the inability to agree on a definition has made the measurement of development news difficult.

Part of the more basic problem in the research is that few scholars can agree on the definition of development. So studies of development news can include all the news in a mass media product, with the argument that if an event occurred in a developing country, news about it relates to that country's development. Other studies have excluded what the authors considered to be information that is either anti-development, such as war or political squabbling, or unrelated to development, such as sports and entertainment news.

About the only thing on which researchers have agreed is that there is lit-

tle development news included in the press of developing countries and that what does exist is not often critical of the shortcomings of development efforts.

This study attempts to alleviate some of the problems inherent in development news research by taking a different measurement approach. Instead of trying to isolate and describe the portions of a news media product devoted to development news, as has most frequently been done, this study focuses on an event related to

<sup>1</sup> See Narinder K. Aggarwala, "Media, News and People: A Third World View," *Media Asia*, 5:78-81 (1978); "Humanizing International Views," *Media Asia*, 5:136-39 (1978); "News with Third World Perspectives: A Practical Suggestion," in Philip C. Horton, ed., *The Third World and Press Freedom*, (New York: Praeger, 1978), pp. 197-209. Also see Frank Campbell, "The Practical Reality of 'Development Journalism,'" *InterMedia*, 12:24-29 (March 1984); Shelton Gunaratne, "Media Subservience and Developmental Journalism," *Communications and Development Review*, 2:3-7 (Summer 1978); John A. Lent, "A Third World News Deal? Part One: The Guiding Light," *Index on Censorship*, 6:17-26 (September/October 1977); Christine L. Ogan, "Development Journalism/Communication: The Status of the Concept," *Gazette*, 29:3-13 (1982); and Nora C. Quebral, "Development Communication: Where Does it Stand today," *Media Asia*, 2:197-202 (1975).

<sup>2</sup> See Hamima Dona Mustafa, "A Comparative Analysis of the Use of Development News in Three Malaysian Dailies During 1974," in John A. Lent and John V. Vilani, eds., *The Use of Development News*, (Singapore: AMIC, 1979), pp. 56-70; Christine L. Ogan and Clint Swift, "Is the News About Development All Good?" presented to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication at the annual convention in Athens, Ohio, August 1982; Christine L. Ogan, "Development News in CANA and Interlink" in Walter G. Soderland and Stuart H. Surlin, editors, *Media in Latin America and the Caribbean: Domestic and International Perspectives*, Windsor, Ontario: University of Windsor, 1985, pp. 95-119; Christine L. Ogan, Jo Ellen Fair and Hemant Shah, "A Little Good News: The Treatment of Development News in Selected Third World Newspapers," *Gazette*, 33:173-91 (1984); Emmanuel Osae-Asare, "The Ghana Press and National Development: A Comparative Content Analysis of Development News in the National Daily Newspapers and the Wire Service, April-September 1976," in Lent and Vilani, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-90; Ishadi Ks. Sutopo, "Development News in Indonesian Dailies," Occasional Paper 15, (Singapore: AMIC, 1983); and John V. Vilani, "Ownership versus Development News Content: An Analysis of Independent and Conglomerate Newspapers of India," in Lent and Vilani, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-54.

► The author is associate professor of journalism at Indiana University. She would like to thank the members of the graduate class in Communication and National Development for helping to conceptualize, code and provide significant background information for this paper. Special thanks goes to Jim Kelly for his assistance in data analysis.

the development process and analyzes the coverage of that event in a number of newspapers and news magazines in the United States, Western Europe, Africa and Latin America.

The event was the United Nations International Conference on Population in Mexico City from August 4 to 14, 1984. The conference came 10 years after the first United Nations sponsored population meeting in Bucharest, Romania. Unlike many other problems of developing countries, rapid population growth is not characteristic of the developed countries of the world. An estimated 90% of the world's population increase in the next 15 years will occur in the developing countries.<sup>3</sup> So analysis of the proceedings and outcome of this meeting should have much more significance to developing countries that are trying to understand and deal with the problem.

It was not expected, however, that this significance would necessarily be recognized by the press in developing countries, as will be later explained. It was hoped that by examining an issue that most people would agree was important to the process of development, one might focus on the specific nature of coverage without having to redefine development or development news.

### *Hypotheses*

The study had two general purposes. The coverage of the population conference by the press of developed and developing countries was compared. Based on the results of previous research, it was expected that there would be no difference in the way reporters from developed and developing countries covered the conference. It was also expected that the conference would be covered more as a political event than a development event. Research findings that led us to this null hypothesis are described below.

The second purpose was to determine if the press exercised the discretionary latitude in coverage attributed to it in the results of previous research. By examining the degree to which reporters covered the actual speeches listed on the conference agenda, it could be partially determined whether reporters were sticking to the agenda outlined by the conference organizers, or establishing their own agenda by consulting other available sources. The results of previous research, also described below, led us to expect that the actual speeches would be covered infrequently.

The following hypotheses were tested:

1. Newspaper coverage of the International Conference on Population (ICP) by developed and developing countries will be similar in approach, use of sources and topics addressed.
2. Coverage in the newspapers of both developed and developing countries will be concentrated on political, rather than population issues.

Although the population issue has been described as one that should concern developing more than developed countries, a major study of the world's press, conducted in 1979, found very few differences in the way countries cover the news, regardless of their stage of economic development. In that study, a team of researchers conducted a content analysis of the international news in the press of 29 different countries, to determine the pattern, source and nature of that coverage. One of the basic findings was that "politics dominated international news everywhere."<sup>4</sup> Of the international news hole in the 29 countries, an average of 46% of the space/air time was taken up by political news.

The researchers also concluded that countries devote most attention to news occurring within their national boundaries; that news in all countries is defined as oriented toward "exceptional events," such as coups and earthquakes; and the "soft" news gets little attention in the press of any nation.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Text of Declaration by International Population Conference in Mexico, *the New York Times*, August 16, 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, "The 'World of the News' Study," *Journal of Communication*, Winter 1984, pp. 121-142.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

Since the population conference occurred outside the borders of all nations whose newspapers or news magazines were included in the study (with the exception of Mexico), and since the population conference could not be classified as an "exceptional event," it was expected to be covered similarly by all news media in the study. In addition, since the population conference had a political agenda as well as a development orientation, it was expected that politics would be emphasized over the population issue.

Several content analyses of development news have found that such news is covered more as spot news (about events) than features (about processes), that it is usually given low priority and written in little detail. Development news is more often about economics than related to social services and is not often critical.<sup>6</sup> These findings also lead to a hypothesis of no difference. The population issue is considered a process, while the conference itself is an event. Coverage was expected to be limited to such things as voting results and highlights of major speeches, with little depth coverage of the population problem itself.

3. Official conference speakers and their speeches will get little coverage compared to other sources and topics.

This hypothesis is based on some previous and ongoing research in political agenda setting. In the conclusions to a study of media agenda setting in the 1980 presidential election, researchers Weaver, Graber, McCombs and Eyal report, "It also appears that reporters and editors exercise considerable discretion in choosing certain issues to emphasize over time. This means that not all of the issues stressed by the leading candidates or the major political parties will be heavily covered by newspapers and television."<sup>7</sup> Candidates stress what Colin Seymour calls the "diffuse" issues, or broad policy proposals, while the media cover "clear cut" issues, or ones "that neatly divide the candidates, provoke conflict and can be stated in simple terms."<sup>8</sup>

Although the population conference was not very much like an election, some people said the United States was more interested in political success of its policy, and its impact on American voters, than in the conference. Washington *Post* reporter William A. Orme Jr., noted that 700 journalists had been accredited for the conference, "raising the suggestion that the U.S. team might be aiming at a home audience."<sup>9</sup> And there were other political issues, unrelated to population control, brought to the conference by several Arab countries and by the Soviet Union.

There is no simple answer to the problem of overpopulation - and even disagreement over whether high population growth rate is an obstacle to economic development. So it would be easier for reporters to focus on the "clear cut" political issues brought to the conference than to try to tackle the complexities of the impact of world population growth - the "diffuse" issues more often raised in speeches.

Four main political issues were expected to be brought up at the conference in addition to the controversial U.S. policy statement.<sup>10</sup> The Soviets proposed a "peace" recommendation that linked the solution to population problems with disarmament. Another recommendation, backed by Arab states and made specifically with reference to settlements on the West Bank, would forbid the occupier of a territory from transferring parts of its own population into the territory it occupies. Several recommendations specified the rights of host countries and immigrants to those countries regarding both legal and illegal migration. Other recommendations dealt with different ideological perspectives on socio-economic development.

<sup>6</sup> See Ogan, *op. cit.*; Ogan and Swift, *op. cit.*, and Ogan *et al.*, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Doris Graber, Maxwell McCombs and Chaim Eyal, David Weaver, *Media Agenda-Setting in a Presidential Election*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), p. 199. See also Thomas Patterson, *The Mass Media Election: How Americans Choose their President*, (New York: Praeger Publications, 1980), pp. 31-42.

<sup>8</sup> See Weaver *et al.*, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> William A. Orme Jr., "U.S. Foresees Defeat on Population Policy," *The Washington Post*, Aug. 11, 1984, p. A15.

<sup>10</sup> "Issues to Watch at ICP," *Popline*, July 1984, p. 4.

These perspectives reflected the differences between East and West approaches.

Finally, the most talked about policy issue, was the U.S. policy to discontinue funding of agencies supporting abortion as a means of population control. This was not a specific recommendation, although Recommendation 13 urged governments to help women "avoid abortions and whenever possible to provide for the humane treatment and counseling of women who have had recourse to illegal abortions."<sup>11</sup>

### Method

This study was undertaken as a class project for a graduate seminar in Communication and National Development. Class members assisted in the development of the coding procedure, and each student content analyzed newspaper or news magazine coverage of the International Conference on Population. Newspapers and magazines were selected on the basis of availability in the university library and the foreign language proficiency of the students.

Publications in both developed and developing countries were examined from about mid-July to late August 1984. The following publications were included in the study: From the developed countries: *The Irish Times*, Dublin, Ireland; *The Times*, London, England; *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*, Paris, France; *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, Canada; *The London Free Press*, Canada; the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Christian Science Monitor*, all U.S. papers. In addition, the following magazines from developed countries: *L'Express*, *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Actuel Developpement*, all from France; *MacLeans* from Canada; and *Newsweek* and *Time* from the United States. Publications from the developing countries included: *Uno Mas Uno*, Mexico City; *El*

*Tiempo*, Bogota, Colombia; *La Prensa*, Buenos Aires, Argentina; *Granma*, Havana; *The Daily Nation*, Nairobi, Kenya; and *The Rand Daily Mail*, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Taken together, the foreign papers represent commercial interests (with the exception of *Granma*), as do the U.S. publications. This fact lends support to the argument that no difference will be found in coverage from the developed and developing countries' publications. The content analysis included all stories about the population conference or on a population issue appearing during the specified time period. A few issues of one paper, *El Tiempo*, were missing from the library's collection.

Coders answered 34 questions related to news sources, priority, size, tone and content of each item. After training sessions, coders achieved an inter-coder reliability coefficient of .96.<sup>12</sup> Reliability was based on coded items in English language publications from several countries, since all coders were not fluent in French or Spanish.

World Bank guidelines were used to classify the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Canada as developed nations, or industrial market economies (in the World Bank's terms) and Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, Kenya, Mexico and South Africa as developing nations. Of that group, the World Bank categorizes Kenya as a low-income country; Colombia and Cuba as lower-middle-income economies; and Mexico, Argentina and South Africa as Upper-middle-income economies.<sup>13</sup>

### Findings

A total of 221 stories and editorials were coded from the 23 publications, 83 from newspapers in developing countries and 138 from publications in developed countries. The coverage was competing with at least one major international event during the period - the summer Olympics, held in Los Angeles. This perhaps accounts for the small number of stories (6) in the *Los Angeles Times*. Later in August, the Republican National Convention was held

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Holsti's composite reliability coefficient was used for this study. See Ole Holsti, *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities*, (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969), p. 137.

<sup>13</sup> The World Bank, *World Development Report 1984*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

in Dallas, an event for which the U.S. media were gearing up; and in early September, the Pope paid a visit to Canada. Although all these events might have had an influence on the ICP coverage, it can be argued that news events always compete for attention.

Contrary to Hypothesis 1, there were differences between the coverage of the conference by news media of developed and developing countries. Newspapers and news magazines in developed countries were more likely to cover the political issues raised at the conference - both the one related directly to the subject of the conference (the Reagan administration's policy of withdrawal of funding for organizations that provide assistance for abortions) and the less related political issues of resettlement, immigration, and the ideological differences between East and West.

Coders coded one main topic and two subsidiary topics if found in the articles. The specific topics were collapsed into political issues, population issues and straight news coverage (for example, the result of a vote or the coverage of a speech only). Differences between developed and developing countries were found for the primary and secondary topics coded. (See Table 1).

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to indicate whether each of the four political issues was mentioned more or less often by the news media in developed or developing countries.<sup>14</sup> Of the four unrelated political issues predicted to be brought up at the conference, only the disarmament issue was not raised more often by the media of the developed countries than the media of the developing countries. Pearson's  $r$  ranged from .13 for the immigration issue to .20 for the East-West development philosophy differences, to .30 for the resettlement issue.

Developed country media also criticized the new U.S. funding policy more often than did developing country newspapers ( $r = .21$ ). And developing country newspapers were slightly more critical of the failure to find solutions for the population problem at local or international levels

TABLE 1

Issues Covered at the International Conference on Population by Developed and Developing Countries, in Percent

Primary Topic of Article:	Developed Country	Developing Country
Political Issue	49.6	31.3
Population Issue	38.5	56.6
Straight News	11.9	12.0
	N = 135	N = 83
Cramer's V = .20		
Secondary Topic of Article:	Developed Country	Developing Country
Political Issue	52.2	26.6
Population Issue	37.2	59.4
Straight News Event	10.5	14.1
	N = 86 <sup>a</sup>	N = 64
Cramer's V = .26		
Other Political Issues Discussed:	Developed Country	Developing Country
International Resettlement $r = .30$	23.9	1.2
International Immigration $r = .13$	14.5	6.2
East-West Development Ideological Differences $r = .20$	28.3 N = 138	11.1 N = 83

<sup>a</sup> N is smaller because many stories did not include a secondary topic.

than were the developed country publications (57.1% vs. 44.9%;  $r = .11$ ). But the tone of stories and editorials in both types of media was about equally critical overall. About 41.0% of developing country newspaper articles and 34.1% of developed country articles were negative. Only 6.0% of developing country stories and

<sup>14</sup> For nominal level data, Pearson's correlation coefficient is considered a suitable measure of association when a 2 x 2 table is computed. See H.T. Reynolds, *Analysis of Nominal Data*, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977), p. 28.

8.7% of developed country stories were positive in tone. The rest were judged to be either neutral or balanced.

Developing country media have been found to rely heavily on government sources in the reporting of development news.<sup>15</sup> In their coverage of the ICP, developing country newspapers relied solely on government sources more often than did developed countries. (Cramer's  $V=.37$ ) One primary and up to two subsidiary sources were coded. In all cases, the sources were more likely to be government sources than non-government or international government organization representatives. (See Table 2) Male sources were more often consulted than female by both types of media. A mean of 1.23 men in the developing media as against 1.97 in the developed media were consulted compared to .11 women.

Several questions related to the depth of the stories. Stories from developed country newspapers were longer (mean length of 16.8 paragraphs) than those from developing country newspapers (mean of 9.8 paragraphs). Magazines were eliminated from this comparison since no news magazines were included in the developing country sample and news magazine stories tend to be longer. But developed country media were no more likely to include population statistics than developing country newspapers, while stories about population issues not raised at the conference were slightly more often raised by developed country media. (See Table 2) Little information about population plans or progress made in controlling growth was included by either type of medium.

Specific mention of women's issues in the population question - such as birth

control, consequences of abortion, responsibility for family planning, etc. - was more often made in developed country media than in the press of developing countries (50.7% vs. 22.9%;  $r=.27$ )

Finally, there were differences related to the priority given the item. The developed country media tended to place "medium" priority on conference stories (below the fold on the front page or inside the paper up high), while developing country newspapers gave the conference coverage either "high" priority (front page above the fold) or low priority (inside the paper toward the end with a small headline) (See Table 2).

Developing countries apparently thought conference coverage was important, however, because 72.3% of the stories included in their newspapers were written by a native reporter or covered by their own wire services. Developed country media also sent their own correspondents to cover the conference. About 76.1% of their stories were written by their own correspondents or came from a Western wire service.

Hypothesis 2 was supported. With the exception of two or three principal conference speakers, most stories did not make reference to one of the speakers on the official conference program. In the stories or editorials from the two types of media, a total of 359 sources were consulted in the developed country publications and 111 sources in the developing country publications. In the developed country publications, 97 sources were cited who were on the official conference speaker agenda, or 27.0% of the total number of the sources consulted.<sup>16</sup> In the developing country newspapers, 26 sources on the agenda were cited, or 23.4% of the total. Although about 13 women were listed as speakers on the program, none was cited in any of the articles.<sup>17</sup>

If reference to the speech made by the source was included in the story, that information was coded also. Many of the conference agenda speakers cited in stories were interviewed or otherwise consulted rather than quoted from their official speeches. This further reduced the per-

<sup>15</sup> See Ogan and Swift, *op. cit.*, and Ogan, Fair and Shah, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> Multiple citations of the same person are reflected in the large number.

<sup>17</sup> Since the composition of the official delegations was not fixed right up until time of the conference, and since it could not be determined how long it would take to get through conference recommendations, all official speakers were not listed on a program. To the extent that it could be determined, a list of official speakers was made and provided to the coders. Since an official roster from the Strategic Planning Seminar for the conference was available, those speakers, many of whom also spoke at the ICP, were included on the coders' lists.

TABLE 2  
Some Characteristics of Coverage by  
Developed and Developing Country Publications

	Developed	Developing	Measure of Association
Type of Article			
News	46.7	74.7	No Statistical Difference
Opinion	13.9	15.7	
Analysis	39.4	9.6	
Tone of Article			
Positive	8.7	6.0	No Statistical Difference
Negative	34.1	41.0	
Neutral/Balanced	57.2	53.0	
Priority of Article <sup>a</sup>			
High	16.7	30.1	Cramer's V = .36
Medium	56.5	19.3	
Low	26.8	50.6	
Provider of Article			
Foreign	15.2	15.0	No Statistical Difference
Native	76.1	72.3	
None listed	8.7	12.0	
Sources Consulted			
No Source cited	34.7	23.3	Cramer's V = .37
Only Gov't Sources	20.2	56.2	
Both Gov't and Non-Gov't Source (The rest were unattributed sources)	45.2	20.5	
Critical of Failure to Solve Local Or World Problem	44.9	57.1	r = .11
Critical of New U.S. Funding Policy	31.9	13.3	r = .21
Used Statistics	42.8	33.3	no difference
Raised Women's Issue	50.7	22.9	r = .27
Included Solutions	44.9	49.4	r = .17
	N = 138	N = 83	

<sup>a</sup>Cramer's V = .36

<sup>b</sup>Cramer's V = .37

centage of citations of official conference speeches to 19.2% of the total number of sources consulted in developed country media. All references to speakers by developing country newspapers were from actual speeches.

As in previous studies, reporters appeared to have considerable latitude in covering this conference. Of the stories or editorials written about the conference, 38.4% of those from developed country publications, and 25.3% of those from developing countries included references to conference speakers.

When reference to conference speakers was broken down by topic - political issue, population issue or straight news event - about 2/3 of all stories including the speaker as a source were about political issues or straight news events in the developed country media. In developing country newspapers, about half the stories were about political issues or straight news events, and the other half were about population issues. As found in previous studies, the "clear-cut" issues were more frequently covered - speeches and political issues - than the "diffuse" issue of solving the world's population problem.



That finding is also supported when we observe the person who was cited most often - James L. Buckley, head of the U.S. delegation who delivered the U.S. position. For both types of media Buckley received the most citations.

Although great reporter latitude may account for the nature of the conference coverage, it may also be true that reporters had difficulty gaining entrance to the conference hall to hear the speeches and went elsewhere for their news. Student reporters in Mexico City said that there was no room for them to attend any of the official sessions. It is not known which reporters from which media were admitted to the conference sessions, however.

### *Conclusions*

This is the first study that has shown differences in coverage of development issues between media of developed and developing countries. The charges from the West and the findings of previous international news flow studies have indicated that Third World media are no different from media in the West in their preoccupation with political news. This study of coverage of one event by 22 newspapers and magazines in five developed and six developing countries shows the Western media concentrating more on the political issues and less on the population issue at the International Conference on Population.

It is probably not wise to generalize much from this study. Results should be taken for what they represent - some differences in approaching coverage of a single event by selected news media in a small number of countries.

Although more stories related to population issues in the developing country newspapers and fewer stories concentrated on extraneous political issues, little depth or analysis was found in the coverage, either at the international or the local level. Each member of the class who coded stories from developing countries expressed his/her disappointment at the

superficiality with which the population issue was covered. To some extent, that impression is substantiated in the length of the stories - a mean of 9.8 paragraphs (with a mode of 7).

On the other hand, it can be said that the media in the developing countries did a better job of covering the conference for what is was intended to be than as a political event.

In both types of media, reporters wrote minimally about the official speeches given at the conference, and cited the speakers in low proportion to the total number of sources cited. Though this can be said to support the findings of studies that grant reporters great freedom to set the agenda for a particular event, other explanations are also possible. Certainly the agenda for the American delegation to the conference was to carry the message that a free enterprise economy is the answer to economic development and that the world population problem will take care of itself when a strong economy is achieved. Members of the Population Institute and many of the United Nations delegates had the reduction of world population as their agenda for the conference. And selected delegates from Arab nations, the Soviet Union and some other countries were more concerned with the disarmament, resettlement and immigration issues.

So there were several source agendas for the meeting, and it was found that reporters picked up on all of those in their coverage. But only limited coverage was given to the conference agenda and purpose. Future studies are needed to determine whether this finding is an artifact of this particular event, or typical of the latitude reporters have in most of their work.

Though limited in focus, this study shows that developing countries are concerned about the population problem, and reporters did their part in covering the population issue at this conference.