

United Nations Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women
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Improving Media Coverage through Journalist Training

Media Coverage on Trafficking in Persons

In many regions there is little media coverage on the issue of trafficking in human beings. If media tackles the issue, the coverage is mostly one-dimensional or biased, and victim protection (e.g. anonymity) is often neglected. In Southern and Eastern Europe, crime and social issues are not seen as important enough for the media to cover. There is a tendency to regard serious journalism and political reporting to be about covering politicians and political parties only. 'Lower' issues, like trafficking, get either merely a brief mentioning in serious local media or receive sensationalist treatment through the tabloids. Looking at criminal and social reporting as a barometer of how policies actually work and relating the way of reporting to progress in general is a new concept in the region.

Many of the best journalists and editors in the South Eastern European region regard trafficking simply as a crime story, usually involving prostitution. Other means of trafficking, like labour exploitation, organ trafficking or the exploitation of children are rarely covered. Without a more comprehensive approach on trafficking in persons by the media there is little accountability in the institutional structures that are supposed to deal with the problem. The one-dimensionality of the media becomes replicated in society's image of trafficking too. It is simply seen as something that happens to foreign women on their territory. Trafficking is always the problem of another group of people who has come to one's country and allowed trafficking to proliferate. In other words, the problem has nothing to do with oneself, so why bother? Considering the other issues of life that people have to deal with, trafficking becomes a low priority.

Media and Development International (MADI)

In April 2004, the non-governmental organisation Media and Development International was founded to provide media solutions to development issues. MADI works in a variety of media on social development issues including training journalists on coverage of social topics, creating public awareness-raising campaigns, advising on media relations for NGOs, INGOs and other organisations.

Human trafficking has become a large part of MADI's portfolio, partly because its work began with trainings on the topic. One of the first major projects was a Regional Journalists Training Programme on Trafficking for South Eastern Europe, which is still in the implementation phase. This programme began with a Regional Media Decision-makers' Conference on Trafficking in October 2004 in Belgrade and has continued with the Bulgarian Reporting Training Project in March 2005.

Through the trainings, MADI seeks to show how trafficking can be covered in all of its dimensions from the root causes to the responses of the government and how this reporting affects the larger society as a whole. Before, there was no comprehensive programme on a media level dealing with trafficking in persons regionally. Previous approaches that had been

incorporated were in many ways inadequate, judging by the quality of the press in the region and its coverage of trafficking in particular. Hence, MADI created a programme that addressed these issues on a regional basis.

Background of Journalist Training in Bulgaria

In 2004, MADI created a programme that trained journalists how to cover trafficking in persons. The first complete training seminar lasted 10 months and was funded by BMZ through the Sector Project of GTZ. Eight journalists from various Bulgarian cities took part in this programme. The participating reporters not only learned good reporting and editing standards, but also were able to pass on what they had learned to their colleagues. Journalism is learned by doing, therefore, MADI's training projects were set up to produce stories. Those stories were distributed to the public and created an immediate standard for journalism and an immediate response from the public. Often, if a story is good enough, other journalists and media in the region will pick up on it or even copy the techniques used to create this story. Imitation is the highest form of flattery, so MADI hoped for the articles to be copied around the region in order to redevelop standards.

For the journalist training programme, MADI worked with a team of journalists from a variety of media outlets across Bulgaria and in different media. The group was facilitated like a reporting unit: journalists were recruited for the programme in cooperation with the Media Development Centre (MDC) in Sofia, which was also the base for operations. The Bulgaria project focused on reporters from outside Sofia where the need for training was the greatest. Trafficking problems occur more often in rural areas and so far had not been covered to the same extent as in the capital.

Methodology of the Training

The reporters were given a three-day workshop covering various trafficking issues, reporting techniques as well as the creation of a standard process for the entire programme. As time or financial resources often restrict journalistic work in the region, the project was kept on a tight rein: the reporters were asked to keep up a very stringent level of work in their process of outlining the areas of research, writing and careful editing. Each step was examined and discussed among the group; various techniques like when to use tapes, how to approach subjects, which story angles to choose and how to check facts were demonstrated. Examples of previous stories were used as a basis for discussion and reporters were asked to reflect on them. The participating reporters planned their stories, working individually as well as in groups with the local and international editorial trainer in order to develop their articles. The reporters were enabled to think about their stories on a holistic and deeper level, considering all of the options that were available.

The trainer team consisted of a local prominent editor and journalist and an international trainer from MADI. They visited every participating reporter in their hometown and encouraged all reporters to share information and work together as much as possible. In the middle of the month, the group had an editorial meeting bringing the journalists together to discuss their improvement. Journalists contacted MADI at least once a week with a progress report on their story. During the individual and group sessions, the reporters were questioned on their story and

advance. The trainer team gave a diagnosis as to the problems they were facing, why and how to resolve the issues.

One of the issues the group consistently dealt with was the question of how well governments in this region actually protected and assisted potential victims of trafficking as well as those victims who were returned. To answer this, the group discussed questions of corruption within institutions as well as the rights of minorities, women and children. Often victim protection in the region is still inadequate and there is a lack of safety nets to protect trafficked persons. This is sometimes replicated in journalism as well. If the governments do not pay enough attention to victims' rights then that message is filtered down throughout society, including the media.

The editing process was the most difficult training module for the group. Their stories were not only fact-checked throughout the process, but also fully proofread for readability. As publications do not always reach international journalistic standards, editing became very labour-intensive.

Having the journalists work together and share information was more successful than originally imagined. The journalists called each other to talk about their meeting and to check on various facts for their story if they thought someone else was more knowledgeable (one journalist, for example, became the expert on legislation for the group). This exchange was strongly encouraged as it made the programme run much smoother.

The trainers also helped the team with contacts in the capital and abroad. The fact that none of the participating reporters had a good command of the English language cut down the depth of contacts they had abroad. Even using the Internet became a major problem. MADI therefore facilitated contacts to the embassies of the United States of America and Germany and to other State Agencies (National Security Service, Agency of Employment, Foreign Office) in Bulgaria as well as across the border in Macedonia and in the US, as two of our stories had links to those countries.

The Results of the Training Programme

In total, six stories and at least four follow-ups have come out of this programme. The trainer team spent roughly 50 hours on the support of each story. At the end of the programme, the reports will be placed on the Journalists Network on Trafficking site (www.jnet-trafficking.org), which is run by MADI and hosted by the Media Development Centre in Sofia. This regional site seeks not only to promote original reporting on trafficking but also to be a 'one-stop shop' of resources for journalists who cover trafficking as well as a place for reporters to network across borders.

The website is also used for monitoring progress as the MDC will continue to monitor the work of the journalists involved in the programme. Follow-ups or updates to the stories done will be published on the site. For the next six months, MDC will also look at the Bulgarian media as a whole and see if the stories produced have had an impact in terms of imitation, follow-ups and improvement in the overall tone of journalism regarding trafficking. In addition to this, journalists and others will be encouraged to directly respond on the website to the articles. The

stories will also be published and broadcast nationally throughout Bulgaria. Furthermore the stories on the website will be translated into English as well as Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, Macedonian, Bulgarian and Romanian. They will be released for republishing elsewhere free of charge in exchange for a credit to the website.

Lessons Learned

These types of programmes require a great deal of intensive labour for both the participants and the trainers. Looking at the time needed for such training programmes, they should last no less than a period of two weeks. The fact that most of the journalists were working their regular jobs in addition to writing the stories made it rather difficult to fully concentrate on the programme. Making an arrangement with their home paper or station to allow them to work full-time on the project would help very much with regard to time constraints. During the training process it became obvious that the individual work with the journalist is of high importance. In addition more emphasis should be put on support of the fieldwork and the editing process with the reporters. In order to raise the professional quality of journalists' writing to a national and international level, a long-term approach is required.