

Engaging the media through Investigative news gathering and writing, and media relations: The NES Communication Workshop

A two-day Communications Workshop for NES-Philippines members was held on 8-9 November, 2016 at the PhilDHRRA Partnership Center in Quezon City, Philippines. Organized by the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC), the workshop aimed to train ILC Members and partner POs on effective news gathering and writing to share with the public and with the NES platform.

In particular, the following learning objectives were covered:

- A. Orient participants on investigative news gathering and writing;
- B. Highlight the importance of investigative news gathering and sharing;
- C. Train POs and Member CSOs in gathering and writing news using the investigative approach;
- D. Show the importance of social media in news sharing;
- E. Encourage the POs to share stories to the Members;
- F. Provide tips on how to reach the media; and
- G. A plan for action on news gathering and sharing (for

their organizations and for the NES) was formulated as a follow-up of this training.

The training was attended by 11 participants, 7 male and 4 female.

Malou Mangahas of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ), the workshop resource person, gave three presentations. Her first presentation, entitled: "Getting to know the media", gave an overview on print and broadcast media as well as how to use media for advocacy and how to reach and whom to contact in media.

Mangahas' second presentation was about "How to write investigative news". After the two presentations, it was off

to the actual Writeshop of participants. After the writeshop, the participants presented their outputs and Ms. Mangahas gave her inputs.

After which was another presentation and criticizing session of the participants' fine-tuned articles. Then it was off to the Action Planning, facilitated by ANGOC, for the NES media activities.

Workshop proper and outputs

A. Input: Getting to know the media

Before the actual input, Ms. Mangahas gave an exercise entitled: "What is your media diet?", wherein she asked the participants to rank where they get their news from. The results show that the participants get most of their news from television, radio and social media (facebook). Very few read newspapers.

The "Getting to know the media session" was in the form of a PCIJ presentation entitled: "Understanding the News

Media". Ms. Mangahas started by describing the "love-hate" relationship between the media, their sources and the public.

She then described the media's mandate and role: a private business with a public trust (to inform and help form public opinion), watchdog and fiscalizer of governing institutions, and its Constitutional mandate or basis.

She then gave an overview of the journalists' mindset and how they work, to wit:

- Often critical, analytical, even cynical; articulate, works in packs or independently
- Works to the beat of deadlines; the good ones follow the story and love scoops, controversy, conflict, consequence, big names in news, oddity (news values), while the bad ones follow the money
- Could distinguish between good and bad sources: The best ones give the best stories (scoops, well-written, consistent, forthright, earnest, expert)

Ms. Mangahas then explained the communication process by Wilbur Schramm: Source à Message à Channel à Receiver à Gov't/CSO à Story à Media à Public. After which, she then gave an overview of the media industry (See Box 1).

The PCIJ founder then went into the topic of the news process. She said that a typical news day

Box 1: Overview of the Philippine Media Industry

PRINT

- A dozen broadsheets and a dozen tabloids in NCR, a few regional leaders and hundreds of small newspapers in the provinces. Official and private data: 580 newspapers, 49 magazines, 16 other news publications.
- Composite print run: About 2 million copies, or less than 20 per cent of all 16 million households. Majority of readers largely male and of senior age (above 30).
- The Big Newspapers, in terms of both circulation and ad sales: Inquirer, Star, Bulletin. Apart from the tabloids, the rest of the broadsheets are second-liners.
- The NSO says newspaper readership declined by 3.2 percentage points, or from 33.0 per cent in 1989 to 29.8 per cent in 1994. Magazine readership decreased by 8 percentage points, from 22.4 per cent in 1989 to 14.4 per cent in 1994.

TELEVISION

- There are 352 TV stations, and 782 CATV stations in the country, including 12 based in Metro Manila (NTC, 2010).
- The largest and most profitable networks -- ABS-CBN (Channel 2, ANC) and GMA-7 (Channel 7, GMANewsTV) both operate their respective cable TV channels on 50-kw power while TV5 has Aksyon TV. All major TV networks also operate their own news websites.
- The government runs the national television network Channel 4 (National Broadcasting Network) and two TV networks sequestered from the Marcoses and their cronies in 1986 -- Radio Philippines Network (RPN Channel 9) and International Broadcasting Corp. (Channel 13).
- To advertisers and Filipinos living/working overseas, the popularity of television continues to rise from 48.0 per cent in 1989 to 56.7 per cent in 1994.

RADIO

- Metro Manila is home to 49 radio stations -- 25 AM band stations and 24 FM band stations. Across PHL, 392 AM radio stations, 782 FM radio stations (NTC, 2010).
- These include the "Big Four" national radio networks -- DZRH of the Manila Broadcasting Company; DZXL of RMN; DZMM of ABS-CBN; DZBB of GMA Network; and Aksyon Radyo of TV5.
- In 1994, government census data showed that over 8 in 10 or 80.8 per cent of 54 million Filipinos aged 10 and older, were exposed to radio.

ONLINE/SOCIAL MEDIA

- 304 registered Internet Service Providers (as of 2010, NTC)
- 4.32 million estimate number of landline phone subscribers
- 83.25 cellphone subscribers as of 2010
- 42 M Internet users (We Are Social, March 2015)
- 9.5M Twitter tweeps in PHL; 10th in world (2013)
- 38M on Facebook in PHL; or 1/3 of est pop of 105M in 2013

for media entities goes like this: (1) Reporters hunt for news; (2) Editors/news managers call story conference; (3) Deadlines are set in motion; (4) Newspaper runs, newscast airs; and, (5) Postmortem/planning for next day's coverage.

According to Mangahas, the newsroom gatekeepers are:

- **Print:** city editor, news editor, section editors, managing editor, editor-in-chief (day sequence)
- **TV/radio, online:** news directors, producers,

headwriters, hosts (real-time, loop-in process)

- **Management execs:** owners, advertising or marketing heads
- **Other talents:** columnists, block-timers

These people are the ones that decide on which stories to publish or air.

She added that the frontliners, who can be approached for story pitches, are: Reporters & correspondents ('brat pack', press corps, independents); Photographers, camera crew; and, Columnists, anchors, block-timers.

On to the definition of journalism, Mangahas defined it as: "Making the important interesting, and the interesting relevant". She added that news, according to the famous poet and journalist Rudyard Kipling, is a combination of the 5 Ws and 1 H (who, what, when, where, why and how). She mentioned that among Kipling's frustrations is too much of the 'where', 'when', 'who' and 'what' and too little of 'why', 'how', 'so what', and 'why should I care'?

Mangahas shared that every story has a narrative string, meaning that every story has backward and forward links, necessary connections, and context and consequence.

She then shared the pitfalls of sources and journalists, to wit:

Box 2: What Makes a Good Story

GOOD CONTENT	GOOD FORM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accuracy • Fairness • People Trail • Paper Trail • Online Trail • Legal Trail • WHY SHOULD READERS CARE? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure – words, sentences, paragraphs • Language: Mechanics, Style • Organization • Visuals, Platforms • Checking for Libel

- Not everyone gets it: Journalism is about information, communicating facts and opinion, telling a story.
- Some sources expect absolute, unqualified friendship with journalists, and think they could use/manipulate media. Some journalists expect absolute, unqualified friendship with sources, and for a scoop or other considerations, allow themselves to play along with sources.
- Some push it: Journalism is for scoring positive points, or mounting hype, spin, propaganda.
- Some make generalizations about the behavior of journalists.
- Some refuse to build stories on truth, not hype: they are aware that to "repeat & reinforce" a rumor, might also substitute for "the truth well told."
- Some sources build stories on hype, spins and feeds, agree to "repeat & reinforce" or are too lazy to offer "the truth well told."

Mangahas explained why 'bad news' hog the headlines. Conflict, drama and tragedy make for compelling stories, and big names make news. She explained that public accountability laws require government officials do good; thus, bad deeds must be exposed. She added that: "Bad news won't fly unless built on real problems. All that reporters do is present them in their most acute form in the media".

She ended the session by sharing what makes a good story, in both form and substance (See Box 2).

B. Input: Writing for readers

Taking off from some elements of the first session (What is news?; the 5 Ws and 1H; Kipling's frustration), Mangahas then gave a presentation on "Writing for readers."

She began her presentation with a discussion on the sources of news. She defined news sourcing or "sourcery" as the "arcane art of getting people to tell you the truth." She said that every effort, not just some effort, must be made to get all sides; and that in

general there could be four types of sources :

1. Affected parties
2. Official sources
3. Experts
4. Community – vox populi/MOS or man on the street

Mangahas shared the ground rules for treating information from sources:

- **For the record:** The journalist may quote verbatim the interviewee by name and title.
- **Off the record:** The interviewee provides information, which may not be used. It is provided only for a journalist's understanding of an issue.
- **For Background:** The journalist may use verbatim the material but may not identify the interviewee by name and/or title. The reporter and the interviewee come to an agreement regarding attribution. i.e. "A defense department source said..."
- **For Deep Background:** The journalist may use verbatim the material but may not identify the individual, his/her title, and place of work. There is no attribution. i.e. "Sources said..."
- **Not for attribution:** Not attributed to anyone or any agency.

She then mentioned the Writer's Goals, which are:

1. Tell the story using the best quotes & images, describing quotes as "brief, brilliant bursts of life", and
2. Uphold minimum standards of a good story:
 - a. Check for ACCURACY – "Get it right" on two levels
 - i. FACTS
 - ii. CONTEXT/IMPRESSION
 - b. Check for FAIRNESS -- "Get all sides" to the story
 - i. Pursue the truth with both vigor and compassion
 - ii. Report information without favoritism, self-interest, prejudice.

Mangahas then gave an extensive lecture on Investigative Reporting. She said that all reporting should be investigative, which she defines as:

- Systematic inquiry and critique
- In-depth, long-term research and reporting
- Tenacious and determined digging
- Documentary research, the use of public records, following the paper trail
- Excessive interviewing
- Crime-solving tools and techniques, like a police detective or public prosecutor
- Serving as a court of last resort, offering a voice to those unheard
- Doing stories uncovered by the rest of the news media
- Exposing information others want kept secret
- Groundbreaking, revelatory

reporting that adds significantly to the public record and public debate

- Watchdog power, focusing on the accountability of individuals and institutions that wield power

She added that investigative reporting is method, attitude and discipline. Discipline to her means embracing the right work ethic and building craft on top of talent.

The facilitator then went into detail on the style of Philippine news, to wit:

- A bounty of single-source stories
- Missing context, missing background: How?Why?
- Anonymous sources, mostly for negative stories
- The artificial dichotomy between politics and economics
- Leaked/fed documents, no comfortable distance with sources
- The inordinate focus on government sources
- Beats covered as territorial units, not policy fields
- Pack reporting, pack editing, the "daily slide to sameness"
- Short attention spans: write-for-the-day syndrome, the rush to print/broadcast
- Flawed news frames: Scandals sell?
- The bizarre flies? What bleeds leads?
- Stress on loud and acute issues, neglect of silent and benign issues
- Journalists never say sorry?

Box 3: Excellent vs. Weak Content

Writing with excellent content	Writing with weak content
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has a clear purpose • has correct and relevant information that supports the purpose; fits the needs of the reader; can be clearly understood. • is complete; needed evidence has not been omitted or distorted to fit private needs • is logical • has a consistent point of view and mood • uses effective, appropriate definitions, examples, and illustrations • is properly documented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has no purpose or central theme; reflects a rambling, “shoot-and-hope” effort • has incomplete, incorrect, or irrelevant material; material does not support needs of readers • supports only one view; has distorted or omitted material • is narrow, biased, and dogmatic • is vague, indirect, unclear, and hedging • is illogical; is guilty of logical fallacies • is not documented; contains plagiarized material

- Celebrity journalists, good and bad icons
- Racist, sexist, offensive language
- Unethical and misleading practices
- What’s private, what’s public a gray domain
- Wary of the worldwide web
- Reading a diminishing discipline

She then went into the investigative news process:

1. First Lead or Tip
Ideas for investigative reports can come from anywhere –
 - a breaking story
 - a hot lead
 - Incidents/events
 - news of historical significance and with grave policy impact
2. Initial Investigation
 - Is the story worth pursuing?
 - Can we prove it – before the court of public opinion and the court of law?

3. Investigative Hypothesis
 - Gives shape and direction to an investigation
 - What is the story about?

She shared that the investigative process involves the following trails:

- **The Paper Trail:** Documents, public & private
- **The People Trail:** Interviews, Observation, Surveys, community immersion
- **The Electronic Trail:** Use of computers and Internet databases
- **The Legal Trail:** What laws have been breached?

In addition to this, a thorough investigative study also **‘Does the Math’** and **‘Follow the Money’**.

An investigative reporter works from the outside-in: starting with secondary sources, then reviewing primary documents, then interviewing primary sources, before finally getting

the side of the subject of the interview.

Mangahas made a presentation on how to background sources and interviewing subjects.

After giving a brief history on how backgrounding and interviewing came about as an effective journalistic tool, Ms. Mangahas shared the steps in doing good interviews, to wit:

1. Ask for help.
2. Be prepared.
3. Listen.
4. Be honest.
5. Talk to everyone.
6. See people face to face.
7. Go back.
8. Be pleasant.
9. Remember the obvious questions.
10. Challenge your sources.
11. Never trust your sources.
12. Don’t socialize with reporters all the time.
13. Protect your sources.
14. You set the rules.
15. Give your enemy a fair shake.
16. Be cruel but polite.
17. Always say ‘thank you.’
18. Keep trying.
19. Keep a good record of your interviews.
20. Always ask: Who else knows about this story?

She also shared points of attention during interviews:

- On popping questions: Provoke subject, field open-ended questions

Box 4: Excellent vs. Weak Organization

Writing with excellent organization	Writing with weak organization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has an effective purpose statement. contains good, well-placed transitions. • has an effective overall strategy; has a good introduction, body, and closing. • has ideas combined in an appropriate order. • makes information accessible to reader; has been properly emphasized or deemphasized. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has a poor strategy; hides important material or causes negative reactions; presents ideas in a confusing order. • lacks sequence; is not tied together. • lacks topic sentences, headings, reader cues, etc. • fails to subordinate lesser ideas. • has poorly constructed paragraphs. • includes sentences with no variety in length, rhythm, etc.

- Prod subject to get into anecdotes
- Challenge subject to prove assertions: Ask, how do you know that? You have documents to prove that?
- Write down your most important questions - Do a minimum Interview schedule
- Prepare very well for a good opener and an artful close
- Discern when you must get tough – be persistent, not pesky or mean
- As a rule, record the interview (audio or audio-video), but also do back-up notes
- A note on taking notes: adopt a system for highlighting most important quotes, details; jot down personal observation on tone, color, texture of interview
- Off-record requests: Go back to the issue, throttle source into telling you more
- Dress appropriately
- Never let an interviewee wait

for you. Better to come early and 'case the joint'.

Mangahas gave some tips on backgrounding persons:

- People know people
- Friends, colleagues, relatives
- Enemies, rivals, victims
- Acquaintances
- Regulators, civil registrars
- Experts
- Every person is documented
- 5Ws & H apply to all interviewees

She then shared the difference between writing with excellent content and writing with weak content (See Box 3).

Mangahas ended the presentation by sharing the difference between excellent and weak writing organization (See Box 4).

C. Input: Putting the story together

Mangahas' last presentation was on finalizing the story. She

began by saying that **Writing the investigative report demands...** more time, more patience, more thought and more care.

She then went into the things that need to be done before even writing the story:

- List the main findings of your fieldwork
- Decide what facts and details go together
 - Outline
 - Memo or letter to yourself
 - Diagrams or flowcharts
- Write your **nut graph**

The **nut graph** is the story's roadmap/focus graph. It tells the readers what the story is all about, what you are out to prove or explain. It can contain the news peg and the story background. It comes in one or two paragraphs and must appear early on in the report (the first page, preferably the first half of the page). In journalistic lingo, the nut graph is the lead in the story that uses the 'hard' lead and comes later in the story that uses the delayed lead or 'soft' lead.

Mangahas then gave tips on telling the story effectively. She said that it is important to put a human face to the story because people like to read about people; and there is a need to get people into the story, either in the form of case studies or anecdotes and making it descriptive and narrative.

Box 5: Sample Output of the Writeshop

Participatory 3-D mapping empowers communities (PAFID)

Mapping one's own land, even for indigenous peoples, is now possible through the Participatory 3-Dimensional Map.

The Philippine Association for Intercultural Development (PAFID), a non-government organization which constructed 3-Dimensional Maps of more than a hundred areas all over the Philippines and some overseas, are assisting communities in mapping their own areas to reach out to tribe claims and their resources.



An area's extent can be computed and modeled through the 3-Dimensional Map, giving users the estimated distances of roads, rivers, trails, and landmarks, as well as the value of land uses in area in hectares. The Map becomes the best tool for planning, since it can be used to immediately interpret the site's topography, and easily assess the status of land use, its extents, and its vulnerability.

Involving people in the making of the model is what makes the mapping participatory, and awareness in constructing the Maps is promoted to everybody, making it a gender-sensitive work in the process. Residents in the area being mapped are especially encouraged to participate, since they are the ones who are usually aware of land uses, rivers, trails, landmarks, and roads, which are used as coding involved in the model construction. The coding uses colors, specifically, color-coded paint for land uses, rivers, and trails, color-coded strings for boundaries, and tenurials, and color-coded push pins for landmarks.

A community of the Kalanguya tribe, an Austronesian ethnic group most closely associated with the Cordillera Administrative Region, recently mapped one of the remote villages in the municipality of Kayapa, Nueva Vizcaya. This made the community realize that the Mt. Pulag National Park covers almost half of their area, hindering their rice and vegetable farming capacities to their full potential, and affecting the livelihood of most families.

Hopefully, more communities can be tapped to participate in the 3-Dimensional mapping.

She then shared some tips on how to write quickly:

- Write the highlights
- Code your notes
- Make an outline
- Write several leads
- Free write
- Fix later

• Tell it to a friend or editor

As well as packaging the story:

- Think graphics
- Think photos
- Think of sidebars
- Design attractive layout
- Promote the story

Then the most important: fact and libel checks:

- Edit line by line
- Check every fact
- Have several people look at the story
- Get a lawyer's opinion

Finally, the story is out; but the writer's work is not yet done without embarking on the following tasks:

- Do follow-ups
- Get reader feedback
- Get official reaction
- Track the progress of the problem or issue

D. Writeshop

After the inputs, it was off to the actual writing. As the participants were asked to prepare drafts of their stories or actual published stories, the first part of the workshop was the presentation of their stories (which for purposes of the workshop were called first drafts).

Mangahas then gave inputs on the first drafts and the participants were given time to re-write these. The second round of criticizing showed notable improvements on the stories and the PCIJ founder just gave a few pointers to tweak the stories further. ○