

Name of Exercise: Television coverage of Georgian Environment Week, May 1-7 1998

Location: The City of Tbilisi

Participation Exercise under which Article? *Capacity Building*

Purpose of Participation Exercise:

To spread news of the different activities and events of the Environment Week to the widest possible public around the city, and encourage greater public participation.

Support for this project was provided under the TACIS project "Raising Environmental Awareness in the NIS and Mongolia", media component managed by BBC 'Marshall Plan for the Mind'.

Participation Techniques used:

A cameraman and an SVHS (Super VHS) camera were hired for six days of the week (Monday to Saturday). The two BBC journalists involved in Environment Week, Tim Grout-Smith and Lily Poberezhskaya, were accompanied by the cameraman and they visited all of the events and activities taking place each day. The costs of the camera hire, cameraman, editing suite, editor and twelve video tapes was around \$2,000 USD in total and were paid by a Media Grants project fund. The BBC journalists, car and driver were all paid for by the project.

At the end of each day (around 17.00), the team brought the video material to a small television studio. In one hour, a maximum of four minutes of news video footage was prepared together with a printed Georgian script for the newsreaders. This was then copied to six cassettes and sent to all the television stations in the city (national, regional and local).

Who participated?

Organisers of the Environment Week events, the news crew and Georgian television companies. The aim was to raise the general public's awareness of environmental issues and to demonstrate that people could make a practical difference to their environment.

Stages at which public participated in the process;

1. In the initial news gathering (the public were interviewed, took part in activities)
2. As viewers of the final broadcast news video footage

What information was made available?

Environment Week provided information about the practical efforts being made to improve the local environment in Georgia. The stories were carefully chosen to be of interest to the television station.

Television stories needs good 'visual' images, and the Environment Week events had been designed with that in mind so that the television station would be interested in them. The best images are outdoor, active images, not more of those dull committee meetings and speeches. When Mr Van den Broek, the European Union Foreign Affairs Commissioner, was in Tbilisi, we asked him to 'open' the new rubbish bins on the main street by dropping some rubbish into one outside the parliament building.

This is a small thing to do but it is important because it will make your images look better and more attractive to television stations. Some other ideas are:

- using children because they always make good visual images, especially if they are active (e.g. singing or performing in some way);
- never interview someone against a blank wall – try to get them to be interviewed in front of something interesting or better still, doing something.

For the stories, to interest the editors, you need to think how to make it relevant to the audience watching the television at home. It should be unusual and interesting. You might need to 'personalise' the story by finding someone to whom the news will have a real impact. You could interview them to make the story understandable and 'human'.

For instance, a dull story of an increase in the amount of pension paid can be made more interesting by beginning the report with a short section about a pensioner's life and then asking him or her how much the increase will mean to them personally. The key message is to think of how to supply the "human angle". Identify an appealing speaker from your organisation who can help make your message clear and find a good situation for them to appear in. It might be a class from the local school, a war veteran or a housewife. Once the spokesperson is next to the polluted stream, outside the factory gate, on a bridge overlooking the scene, then the images will help 'sell' the story to the news editor who is having to make choices between your story and a number of others. These points apply just as much for newspapers as well where a good picture is just as important.

Show that you are aware of the publicity possibilities in the press release by mentioning the 'photo opportunity'. Say what it will be. Examples include:

- that a well known war veteran will be appearing (with medals!) to support your cause;
- that several students from your organisation will be dressing up in costume to demand action;
- that children from the local school will be studying the frogs in the threatened pond (make sure somebody catches the frogs the night before to make sure!).

What was the outcome of the exercise?

The video tapes were used by all the television stations every day. The television companies did not edit the items and so the messages about Environment Week were broadcast as originally prepared. We achieved daily coverage at a national level of the Environment Week events (the week occurred during a crisis in the Abkhazian dispute, ensuring no other resources were left for local news coverage). A substantial proportion of the Georgian population learnt about Environment Week, its aims and purposes.

The exercise also increased awareness of how to work with the media among the organisers of Environment Week, giving them an insight into what makes their events newsworthy and how to present future events to make the most of any media interest.

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