

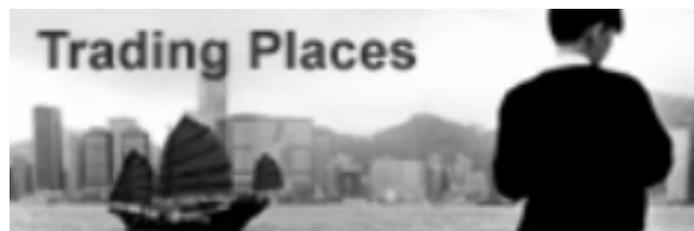
PANOS LONDON**WTO PUBLIC FORUM, SEPTEMBER 2006****Trade challenges, media challenges:
strengthening trade coverage beyond the headlines**

By Dipankar de Sarkar, Panos commissioning/training editor, Hong Kong trade summit, and Jon Barnes, head of globalisation programme, Panos London

Panos London is part of a worldwide network of independent NGOs working with the media to stimulate debate on global development issues (www.panos.org.uk).

This working paper draws on the experience of Panos in supporting journalists from Asia and Africa to cover trade and development issues accessibly for the public during the World Trade Organization's 2005 Hong Kong ministerial conference and the 2006 suspension of its Doha world trade talks (www.panos.org.uk/tradingplaces).

The paper, also based on a snapshot survey of mainly Southern media coverage of trade during this period, is intended to stimulate feedback on the challenges facing the media in raising public debate of trade policy. A preliminary version was presented to a Panos panel on this topic held at the WTO's public forum on 26 September 2006
www.wto.org/english/forums_e/public_forum_e/session_26_num22_e.htm.



Trade challenges, media challenges: strengthening trade coverage beyond the headlines

By Jon Barnes and Dipankar De Sarkar¹

Summary

As world attention focuses on negotiations aimed at setting the rules of international trade, one crucial aspect that remains largely ignored is the role of the media in both developed and developing countries in raising public awareness and debate of trade policy-making.

This working paper draws on the experience of Panos² in supporting journalists from Asia and Africa to cover trade and development issues accessibly for the public during the World Trade Organization's 2005 Hong Kong ministerial conference and the 2006 suspension of its Doha world trade talks (www.panos.org.uk/tradingplaces).

Informed journalism on all aspects of trade – most significantly its impact on poverty, given the concern of the international community with this issue – should be an indispensable concern of the media if it is to perform its traditional public service role. Yet, significant challenges need to be met if the media is to stimulate such debate on the links between trade and development.

This working paper, also based on a snapshot survey of major English-language newspapers on websites in seven countries of Africa and South Asia (Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), does not set out any formal position of Panos. Rather it is intended to stimulate debate as part of longer-term inquiry on the media and trade decision-making.

A preliminary version was presented by Panos London at the WTO's public forum on 26 September 2006 (for panel outline, speakers and audio, see www.wto.org/english/forums_e/public_forum_e/session_26_num22_e.htm). Panos London would welcome external comments and insights from interested parties and observers as part of developing its views. Please send these to Panos London's globalisation programme, globalisation@panos.org.uk.

JOURNALISTS from numerous developing countries are seriously under-represented at the WTO's international meetings. As the battle for minds becomes a growing feature of disputes about the development rights and wrongs of the Doha talks, it is time to recognise the important role the media can play in raising public understanding and debate of trade policy-making.

This must in particular involve boosting support for stronger coverage of trade policy decisions in the global South, given their acute relevance to people's daily lives and

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the prospects for poverty reduction. At the same time, observations received by Panos London indicate that the media in the rich industrial countries also face challenges in strengthening their coverage of trade and development. This issue figures occasionally in this paper, but has not been the main focus of Panos London's preliminary research on the media and trade policy-making.

This paper draws on the efforts of Panos London to address perceived gaps in media representation and media coverage through its work at the WTO's sixth ministerial conference in Hong Kong in December 2005.

The Panos network supported a group of 13 journalists from Africa, South Asia and China to cover the event, providing training, advice and resources³ to help them look behind and beyond the mainstream media headlines and produce stories showing how international trade rules affect the lives of ordinary people, particularly poor people.

Each day they filed stories for their own national newspapers, in addition to writing specially commissioned feature stories that were profiled on Panos London's website and disseminated internationally (a total of 34 features are available for reproduction on the Panos London microsite on Hong Kong and the crisis of the Doha talks, *Trading Places*, www.panos.org.uk/tradingplaces)

1. Panos London's approach to its Hong Kong trade stories

Panos London, based on its observations of gaps in mainstream media coverage of international trade issues (see discussion of these issues in the sections below), worked around Hong Kong to ensure that its stories included the following:

- **Coverage of national-international policy links** Explain and analyse the relationship between international trade rules and national trade policy challenges
- **Accessible analysis** Make complex policy processes and issues intelligible for target audiences, explaining technical language and jargon
- **Development perspective and poverty focus** Focus on the link between trade and development – opportunities and barriers – and the implications of trade policies for poverty reduction
- **Human impact** Highlight how trade and trade policies affect people in practice, for example access to essential goods and services or employment
- **Inclusion of poor people's voices** Gather and include the views of poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, and of organisations working with them
- **Gender** Consider gender – how trade policies reflect and affect the different roles and socio-economic position of men and women
- **Interest representation and decision-making** Explore the underlying social, economic and political interests involved in trade policy-making
- **Views of different interest groups** Interview interest groups and stakeholders (e.g. consumers, producers, workers, small businesses, the private sector, different ministries, parliamentarians) included or excluded in trade policy-making nationally and internationally.

2. Multilateral trade talks: gaps in media representation

Although the Hong Kong summit generated intense media interest around the world, many developing country media organisations could not afford to send their correspondents to cover it. Among the developing countries, large nations from South and Southeast Asia, for example, were well represented, but not so many from Africa.

³ This now includes two briefings for the media – one on international trade negotiations, the other on trade, growth and poverty reduction (see www.panos.org.uk/reports/globalisation).

Indeed, according to figures available to Panos, there was only one reporter from Kenya (sponsored by Panos), two from Zambia (one of them supported by Panos) and none from Mauritius.

Ironically, all three countries have assumed a growing role in arguing the case for the more vulnerable developing countries, including the least developed (LDCs). Each of these nations, as chair of a committee or as coordinator of a group of countries in the WTO, played a representation role in the trade negotiations that transcended mere promotion and defence of its own national position.

If one added up the countries represented at the media centre in Hong Kong, it would be fair to assume that a significant number of developing nations did not find a place. This absence would be scandalous if replicated in the official delegations to the world trade body, where inequalities in country representation are already well known and the subject of considerable concern. When such gaps occur in media representation, their impact is no less serious.

3. Reporting patterns and the global-local 'disconnect'

Coverage of WTO and related international trade issues in many developing country media is not only scant, but is often also marked by a 'disconnect' in its analysis of the links between global decision-making and national policy formulation and their implications for ordinary people.

Although there is frequent coverage of the views held by national traders' associations, businesses and other powerful domestic interests on international trade rules, the views and voices of the poor and marginalised – whether they be small farmers, workers or women – rarely find a mention.

Another frequent observation is that media reporting can tend to examine the fluctuating trends in top-level negotiations without sufficiently analysing the underlying interests involved or the substantive issues at stake. As with the lack of attention to the human impact of trade, some observers assert that this tendency is displayed by the Northern media too.

But it is Southern journalists, often under-supported and under-resourced, who face the most testing challenge of enlightening the public and bringing their views into a wider debate of trade policies.⁴ Time, money and research skills are required to travel to remote areas to interview disadvantaged communities, for example, or to investigate the somewhat closed and complex sphere of trade policy-making. But these resources can often be in short supply.

Reporting patterns in the South, some suggest, can be set by the big international media corporations, whose messages may have considerable influence on the outlook of developing country policy-makers and their national media.

Recent preliminary research by Panos London, based on a snapshot survey of major English-language newspapers on websites in seven countries of Africa and South Asia – Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – reveals that during the period around the Hong Kong ministerial and its outcomes, many of the dailies continued to rely heavily on the transnational wire services for their content on WTO issues.

⁴ Panos Southern Africa, for example, has looked at the difficulties and challenges facing journalists in its report, *A Case Study of Media Coverage of Trade and Aid Issues in Mozambique and Zambia* (see summary at www.panos.org.zm/summary.htm).

This apparent dependency deprives audiences of the crucial 'local angle' to a breaking international trade negotiation story. The difficulty in making such a connection is due in part to two problems. One, in the case of poorer developing countries, is certainly lack of resources: these newspapers invariably do not have a correspondent based in Geneva, where the WTO is based, nor are they usually able to send a correspondent to cover trade summits held in world capitals.

But there may of course be other factors that need to be taken into account. It is surprising that even India, whose newspapers are neither poor nor few, has a very limited media presence at Geneva – a handicap in trade reporting that is directly at odds with that country's now pivotal stature in the negotiations as a key member of the G20 group of developing countries and its involvement in the so-called G6 group of leading WTO members.

Second, the traditional reliance on Western wire services can have an 'incapacitating' effect, in that editors, having carried 'the news from Geneva' as it were, will often not think it worthwhile to dig deeper – to find out, for instance, what farmers, small entrepreneurs or consumers think about it. At best, there will be a national government reaction, which will be dutifully reproduced, accompanied by an opinion editorial piece.

As part of this reliance, there is also the important issue of the content of the wire service story itself – and the messages it may help to reinforce. There is not space or scope in this paper to delve into this question. It is, nevertheless, worth noting that some Southern newspapers appear unquestioningly to accept well publicised claims that trade deals and trade expansion, while a vital extension of economic growth strategies, can and will automatically reduce poverty.

As is known, the relationship between trade reform policies, economic growth and poverty reduction is the subject of controversial and fiercely-contested debate. However, assumptions about the development gains of trade also often characterise some media coverage in developed countries, some observers have claimed.

4. *The good news?*

Panos' snapshot study of the seven countries does, however, reveal the capacity and appetite of newspapers in the developing world to cover trade issues from a diverse range of angles. These include:

- The dynamics of regional trading arrangements (Ghana and ECOWAS; Kenya and the East African Customs Union; Pakistan and South Asian Free Trade Area);
- Patents/intellectual property rights (Uganda, HIV/AIDS drugs);
- Bilateral trade issues (between Kenya and Pakistan or India and Pakistan, for instance);
- Bilateral cooperation (Sri Lanka and India)
- South-south trade (Zambia)
- Corporate social responsibility (Ghana, Coke)
- Least Developed Country positions, in relation to those of other developing countries (for example, the relationship between Bangladesh and others at the Hong Kong negotiations);
- Governance, including corruption (Kenya)
- National negotiating positions (the Monitor, a Ugandan national newspaper, excelled in pre-Hong Kong summit coverage)

Not surprisingly, most reports tend to take a nationalistic position over controversial bilateral issues. On international issues that may have regional or even larger implications and inputs, the positions are more nuanced. The reporting of LDC positions at the Hong Kong negotiations is a case in point, with one Bangladeshi

newspaper, The Holiday, highlighting the issues at play – but in a constructive rather than confrontational manner.

As far as domestic sources of news on international trade are concerned, newspapers tend to show a heavy reliance on government officials and ministers, but this can be balanced by briefings and events organised by campaigning non-governmental organisations, both national and international.

While many newspapers turn to the Western wire services and other news sources for international news – often newspapers will simply ‘cut and paste’ articles from BBC and other websites, for example – the Chinese news agency Xinhua is also visible.

5. *Reporting on trade and poverty in a changing media environment*

Despite the emphasis on poverty reduction among policy-makers in the light of the Millennium Development Goals, a key challenge remains over how to encourage newspapers to report on trade and development issues at a time when the media environment itself is rapidly changing. The focus on poverty, once a strong feature of much Southern journalism, would appear to have been diluted on the pages of many Southern newspapers in recent years, in tandem with the growing commercialisation of the newspaper industry.

Levels of poverty and inequality, however, remain significant – and, some would claim, have become more acute in many countries under the reform policies of recent decades. This would suggest that greater coverage of trade reform, given its increased importance in economic development strategies, is required if the media is to perform its unique public service and public interest role.

Yet discharging such responsibilities is often accorded a subsidiary place in deciding the priorities of journalists.

Many developing country journalists have remarked to Panos that coverage of trade and development often does not figure uppermost in the minds of media owners, managers and editors having to operate in an increasingly competitive commercial environment. Ostensibly ‘dry’ stories on trade and poverty may be deemed to be of little interest beyond an elite group of readers. And in the competitive battle for editorial space, with the pressure or attraction of increasing advertising revenue making its presence felt, copy on this subject may lose out to other topics.

6. *Time to push boundaries?*

Yet in communications with Panos, several journalists and editors have both recognised and argued strongly that innovative ways could and should be found to make trade and development stories attractive, and that there should be a greater commitment to providing editorial space for them.

They claim that media houses can sometimes make narrow short-term assumptions about their key target audiences and the limits of the public’s information interests and needs. Underestimated is the public’s potential appetite for well crafted, accessible stories on trade rules and trade reform policies that explain the complexities of the topic and also humanise it.

While prevailing commercial pressures and the demands of media markets cannot be avoided, it could also be argued that boundaries should be pushed so that the media can strengthen its public service role in this new, complex environment and also pursue all necessary forms of support for this duty to be performed.

In this view, the media has a duty to inform and shape public opinion by stimulating debate, not just respond statically to target audiences and markets perceived to be core.

Pursuit of accessibility is the approach that Panos has taken in the feature stories it has commissioned from the journalists it has supported as fellows.⁵ We would welcome critical observations from any readers, particularly among the media, as to whether, how and to what extent we have been successful in this endeavour.

Engaging in wider and deeper debate with Southern editors about the constraints and opportunities they face in aspiring to strengthen journalists' coverage of trade, development and poverty reduction is clearly vital. Panos would particularly welcome feedback from editors on such challenges, as well as observations from all interested parties on how such a stronger media role can be supported.

7. Trade decision-making – from obscurity to transparency?

The difficulties facing the media in covering trade policy-making is of course in part due to the complexity of the subject and the technical jargon in which it is often wrapped. This is undoubtedly a barrier. But some would also argue that it suits actors of various stripes to keep the subject impenetrably obscure, and that the trade policy-making process itself is insufficiently transparent, open and inclusive.

Indeed, trade, traditionally a discrete policy area considered best left to technical experts, has been relatively closed to public involvement and scrutiny, despite its increased importance under globalisation.

Yet behind the technical detail, a highly political process is at play, given the increasingly sensitive nature of trade policy as markets are opened (or protected) in response to the pressures of domestic constituencies and foreign commercial interests, who stand to gain or lose. And the extent to which the concerns or the views of disadvantaged people are taken into account is for many open to question.

If, as part of its public interest responsibilities, the media is to report on trade from the perspective of development and poverty reduction, the first big challenge is for journalists to step up examination of trade-poverty debates at the national level, given the crucial importance of national government input in international trade decision-making. The next is to look at how national issues are dealt with by the machinery and dynamics of the policy process internationally, whether in the WTO or elsewhere.

Decisions at both these levels may affect public access to essential goods and services such as food, medicines, water and electricity in the South, as well as Northern countries' contribution to international development and poverty reduction.

One obstacle that prevents trade decision-making from becoming more focused on poverty reduction, according to some analysts, is the somewhat narrow range of policy-makers and interest groups involved in determining the process and content of trade policy in both the South and the global North (notwithstanding the upsurge of civil society and policy research activity on trade policy over the last decade).

⁵ Their stories can be read at: www.panos.org.uk/tradingplaces. Panos' work with the sponsored journalists was at the core of its project, *WTO Hong Kong and the Role of the Media in Trade Policy Debates*, which was kindly supported among others by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada, the Catholic development agencies Trocaire (Ireland) and Cordaid (Netherlands), Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and Norad (Norway)

Such gaps in public involvement are not, of course, a problem for the media itself to fix. But journalists do have a legitimate interest in investigating the question of whom governments are consulting or failing to consult in their policy formulation, what the issues at stake and consequences of policies are for all socio-economic groups, and whether the views of poor people and their organisations are taken into account.

By providing unbiased reports that inform rather than sensationalise, that reflect the many views that should count (farmers, consumers, workers, businesspeople, minority groups, women and men), journalists, in serving and extending their target audiences, can support better public understanding and help widen the debate.

Such debate may or may not lead to given policy changes, of course, but they are vital to ensuring that trade policy negotiations are more transparent, open and inclusive of society – a legitimate concern of media inquiry. Indeed, some policy-making processes may even be informal and lack public transparency. Media investigation and coverage could in principle shed vital public interest light on the implications of discussions held through such channels.

8. *The media – changing opinions, changing outcomes?*

If, at present, there is insufficient public demand for greater openness, transparency and participation in the wider public interest, this is because public awareness is relatively low, both of the trade policy processes and of the vital issues at stake in national discussions and international negotiations. There is a growing argument that greater public understanding and involvement is essential to the quality and legitimacy of trade policies.

Whether greater and stronger media coverage, particularly by the Southern media, can or will make any difference to the eventual trade and development outcomes of the Doha talks remains a subject of speculation. The media spotlight on international events has been known to turn the decision-making tide, even though such an intention is not necessarily a direct concern for the media. Equally, governments and entrenched vested interests can in any case ride roughshod over opinion-makers.

The outcome of the Hong Kong summit has sparked debate in the North on the role of the media and its impact on public opinion and WTO decision-making, some of which may be of significant interest to those in developing countries involved in trade policy debates or commenting on them.

Anecdotal feedback to Panos from some commentators observing developments in the United States, for example, has indicated that media coverage of US cotton subsidies has drawn attention to their damaging effects on African cotton-producers and had some degree of impact on political opinion, though clearly not enough to fundamentally alter official positions.

Media use of freedom of information has similarly shone light on claims that the bulk of European Union agricultural subsidies are spent on large producers and landowners and agricultural companies rather than smaller farmers so often invoked in public discourse and the public mind. Such revelations have begged questions as to whether further media coverage of this kind might in turn lead to a critical shift in public and political views of Northern agricultural reform, especially when agriculture is considered a stumbling block to any breakthrough in the again suspended WTO talks.

9. *The media, Hong Kong and WTO decision-making: talking points*

Whether such media coverage, legitimate in its own right, is positive for the WTO talks is a separate issue and depends on audiences' views of the issues under

discussion. Indeed, views can be divided on the pros and cons of the media's role in relation to WTO decision-making. Some comment has even pointed to the media, wittingly or unwittingly, being drawn into political battles as an additional force itself in the negotiations, reflecting in part the trend in recent decades for political actors to target the media as an increasingly important part of their arsenal.

Such comment on the alleged dangers of the media's role has come from different political perspectives. Before Hong Kong, for example, some international NGOs⁶ cautioned developing country governments against being swayed by 'media spin'. This was said to be part of political pressure orchestrated by major powers in the WTO to rush developing countries into acceptance of a world trade deal bad for development.

In contrast, presenting the case for rapid progress in the Doha talks, the UK Financial Times columnist Guy de Jonquieres argued in the wake of Hong Kong that the world's media, while serving demands for public transparency, had been a barrier to effective decision-making requiring confidentiality and insulation from the distraction of outside pressures.⁷ Seeing the media as an unhelpful addition to a publicity circus in which the WTO is said to be overloaded by contradictory expectations, he claimed that negotiators had been happier to grandstand in front of journalists rather than make tough decisions and compromises at the ministerial conference.

'Once upon a time, trade negotiations were conducted between a few consenting adults behind closed doors. Today they are everyone's business, plastered across television screens, newspapers and websites and fuelling activists' campaigns... Constant exposure to television cameras is unlikely to make politicians readier to overrule recalcitrant constituencies at home... It may seem odd for a journalist to question openness. Yet some decisions are best taken in seclusion,' he wrote.

Many observers would welcome the idea of governments curbing the influence of narrow vested interests on their trade policies, as noted in the case of rich industrial country support for their agricultural systems.

But many would also question the suggestion that the WTO and its member governments should be insulated from responsiveness to the stronger, wider, more representative stakeholder involvement many argue is needed for better, more informed and inclusive national and global decision-making on trade. As the world trade system faces a growing range of expectations – to help promote international development and poverty reduction, for example – greater democratic input in the WTO is required, they argue, not less. Stronger, well-informed and publicly accessible media coverage might, in this view, be an accompanying feature of democratisation within the WTO, matching other proposals such as the need for more effective parliamentary involvement and oversight.

The opinions of ActionAid and the Financial Times columnist are just two views, of course. And while they may be indicative of the fact that the role of the media is likely to become an increasing talking point in international trade policy decision-making, this would for the time being seem to be confined to the public relations battles of the main players as they play their chips at big international meetings.

10. Official information-sharing and media engagement with governments

⁶ See, for example, *The Doha Deception Round: How the US and EU cheated developing countries at the WTO Hong Kong ministerial* (ActionAid International, 2006), p3.

⁷ 'Being all at sea may be the solution for world trade talks', Financial Times, 10 January 2006.

Beyond this spotlight, the reality is that, at the routine – yet crucial – national level, governments, civil society organisations and other interested parties have yet to recognise fully the importance of involving the media as a means of generating wider public awareness and debate of trade policies. Particular challenges are faced in many developing countries.

Both in the WTO and other trade negotiations, formal official responsibility for informing and consulting their publics on trade policy lies with national governments, which are beginning to recognise that a coordinated national position, based on the input of different domestic groups, can help a country to negotiate with greater confidence and credibility internationally. Numerous developing countries, such as Mauritius, Uganda and Kenya, have set up structures to widen stakeholder consultation beyond a narrow group of government and state officials.

Yet such moves are still incipient and often episodic (revolving around supposedly key moments in trade talks rather than being part of a continuous process), and would appear not to have taken fully on board the importance of involving the media.

Indeed, one of the complaints made by African journalists to Panos is that in many countries official information-sharing and communication with the media on trade policy is often weak, with several reasons offered for this problem. One is that governments and state bodies usually lack the resources, personnel and skills to handle information provision to the media and other stakeholders. Another charge is that they can be overly-bureaucratic and politically sensitive or even secretive, with lower ranking officials requiring or feeling they require authorisation to deal with information requests, and unable to take the initiative to provide information to the media and the public.

Whatever the cause, such deficiencies would also appear to affect information-sharing and communication within governments and state bodies themselves. In some cases, key ministries such as agriculture complain that their views are not taken properly into account by the lead ministry responsible for international trade policies.

Such constraints reinforce the view that the role of the media is even more vital if information flows are to transcend the relatively limited range of official and non-state stakeholders involved in trade policy consultations and reach out to the public.

Yet it may be in developing country governments' own interests to strengthen their media relations capacity, not just nationally, in order to generate greater national ownership of trade policies, but also internationally. Their representatives are heavily outnumbered at the WTO's international meetings by the case of powerful governments, who can afford to send teams of officials and advisers, including media relations experts, to argue and promote their case.

It is understandable that media relations may seem a luxury consideration for the WTO's poorer member governments when set against the resource constraints affecting their main negotiation and country representation priorities. Yet, given the growing importance of the public relations battle over trade policy, finding simple ways to bolster engagement with the media and the public could be a wise government investment, especially when some countries, for example in the WTO, are in the thick of coordinating and representing the common stance of country and regional groupings. At a national level, some trade ministries are now making communication part of their externally funded trade policy capacity-building.

At the same time, government efforts to develop stronger media relations capacity, while offering positive opportunities for journalists, might also pose risks for media

independence, though dealing with these need not be greater than in other similar settings.

11. *Media interaction with other trade policy actors and journalists' practices*

Whatever the media relations and public communication challenges facing governments, one clear impression gained by Panos is that the media and non-state stakeholders (e.g. civil society organisations and policy research organisations) could do much more to strengthen their interaction. This in turn would strengthen overall public communication on trade and development issues.

Interaction between the media and the increasing number of interest groups active on trade policy does of course occur. But very often difficulties are encountered, or the full potential of such contact and collaboration is not realised. Sometimes this may be because of political differences and suspicions. Frequently it is more a problem of differences and misunderstandings in professional culture and approach, as the different parties fail to recognise each other's strengths, weaknesses and distinctive roles, and as each side fails to lay the basis for better working relations by addressing shortcomings in its own respective practices.

This paper does not have space to provide rigorous treatment of this topic, examining the media's relations with different stakeholders and interest groups on a case-by-case basis. Instead, initial comments focus on the problems and challenges facing media practice, based on feedback to Panos London on the particular difficulties facing journalists in Africa.

Many such Southern journalists find it difficult to tap the information and develop the knowledge needed to understand and convey the multilayered complexities of trade policy-making – admittedly a challenge for even the best of journalists. But this is despite the existence of an ever expanding range of information resources and organisations active on trade and trade and development policy issues.

Similarly, journalists, for a variety of reasons that merit further analysis, often find it hard to take the initiative to track down non-state information sources and contacts. Yet these sources, for example, national and international NGOs or policy think tanks, have often played an important role in informing the thinking of governments. They could help journalists to develop potential stories and gather analytical insights into the issues they raise.

In some cases, one reason for the problem may be the existence or legacy of state control of information. This may have an inhibiting effect on story research, with journalists adopting research and reporting patterns that privilege official sources of information, despite the bureaucratic hurdles standing in their way. In other cases, the problem may be due to the daily pressures of newsrooms, and to the reporting priorities of media owners and editors analysed earlier in this paper, which shape the practical and professional outlook of journalists.

In an environment in which they are often under-supported and under-resourced, and in which trade and development may not be seen as an attractive subject, it is perhaps not surprising that many journalists may be unaware of information resources, find it difficult to interpret them, or lack the time, skills and determination to research ideas and turn them into good stories that can win the backing of editors and engage the public. As well as the time and financial costs of any national and international travel needed, in some countries even accessing the internet can be erratic, slow and costly.

These problems and challenges facing journalists complicate their engagement with policy-makers and trade policy actors, who may consider the media to be

insufficiently informed on and connected with the underlying controversies and debates on trade policy-making. The media and journalists also have their own criticisms of the approach of other trade policy actors, of course – such as the tendency of some groups to provide unclear, inaccessible material ill-suited for topical stories and pressing deadlines, or to treat the media as a mechanistic conveyor belt for their messages with little understanding of, or respect for, the media’s supposed independence – but limitations of space prevent proper exploration of such issues.

12. Media challenges: an invitation to all interested parties to comment on this paper

Panos believes the media and communication have a vital role to play in stimulating the stronger public understanding and debate needed if the transparency and accountability of trade policy-making is to be strengthened as a public good in its own right, and if part of the media’s public service role is to include coverage of trade’s implications for development and poverty reduction.

As a result of this working paper, Panos London would welcome external comments and insights from interested parties and observers as part of developing its views on how to strengthen media coverage of trade and development, particularly in the developing countries but also in the rich industrial countries. We would especially value the following:

1. The views of media owners, editors and journalists on the constraints and opportunities they face in devoting greater attention to stories on trade and development
2. Views from all parties on whether and how media coverage of this apparently dry subject, as well as catering for the needs of existing audiences, can be widened and be made more accessible for new target audiences and the wider public. Of interest would be whether and how media and public interest organisations have carried out research on the information needs and interests of target audiences and the public
3. The views of editors and journalists on whether and how a wider range of stakeholder and public opinion could be included in their coverage, given trade’s growing importance and effects on people. Comments on the inclusion of the views of poor people would be particularly welcome, given that it would seem that they are often neglected in either policy processes, media coverage or communication strategies
4. Comments on how stories on trade and development can be made simultaneously newsworthy, topical, informative and engaging. Given journalists’ need for a peg, media reporting can often concentrate on the fluctuating trends in top level trade discussions, but observers claim that this approach can often neglect proper examination of the underlying issues and interests at stake and the practical implications for the public
5. Insights and observations from the media and interested parties on the interaction between journalists and trade policy actors and interest groups in seeking to share information and boost communication on trade policy issues. What have been the pros and cons and lessons of this interaction?
6. Observations from editors, journalists, policy-makers and interested trade policy actors on the pros and cons of the media’s role in decision-making on trade (eg within the WTO) and proposals for reforming trade decision-making. Thoughts from all parties on the limits and opportunities of the media’s role would be welcome in the light of the observations made in this working paper on reporting patterns and public interest considerations
7. The views of all interested parties would be welcome on how apparent gaps and inequalities in national media representation at international trade meetings can be overcome

8. Comments and observations on the issues raised in this paper would also be welcome from editors and journalists from the Northern industrial countries and the mainstream international media. Though the focus of this paper has been on the challenges facing journalists and media coverage in the global South, especially the poorer developing countries, research on reporting patterns and the challenge of strengthening trade and development reporting in the North would also be of interest. The views of all interested parties would be welcome
9. Given the international dimensions of trade and trade policy-making, one area of necessary future inquiry is what kind of international support and collaboration could be considered to strengthen reporting, particularly in view of the resource constraints of poorer developing countries in particular. It might be beneficial for the Southern and Northern media to share lessons and explore forms of possible collaboration and mutual support, leading to innovative new practices and approaches as well as to a more diverse range of journalistic outputs. There are numerous possibilities, but these might include, for example, study tours, sponsored internships and placements, carrying more developing country journalists' stories and Southern perspectives in Northern coverage, or looking in stories at the North-South dimensions and international links involved in the impact of trade rules
10. Panos London has sought to address some of the challenges, problems and gaps in media coverage of trade identified in this paper through its pilot initiative around the Hong Kong summit and the 2006 suspension of the Doha talks. In order to strengthen our future work, Panos London would welcome comments on whether and how we have been successful so far in this endeavour
11. Comments would be particularly welcome on the international feature stories Panos London has commissioned from the developing country journalists it has supported as fellows (see their published stories at www.panos.org.uk/tradingplaces). These stories have sought to combine pursuit of accessibility with a poverty and development focus in reporting on trade policy-making
12. Feedback would be equally welcome on the briefing materials that Panos London has produced to support the media, particularly in developing countries, in covering trade and development (see see www.panos.org.uk/reports/globalisation)

Panos would welcome external comments and insights from interested parties and observers as part of developing its views on the challenge of strengthening media coverage of trade policy-making. Please send these to Panos London's globalisation programme, globalisation@panos.org.uk.