

## TV ignores the real world

### Lead-in

Look at these different types of programmes. Can you think of an example of each type of programme from TV in your own country? Which ones do you enjoy watching? Why?

- a soap opera
- a docusoap
- a 'reality' TV programme
- a holiday 'challenge' programme
- an investigative documentary
- a travel programme
- a current affairs programme
- a documentary about the developing world

What do you think? Discuss these questions with a partner.

1 Do you think TV should entertain or inform?

2 Do you think it has a duty to inform us about events and issues in the poorer parts of the world?

3 How would you describe TV programming in your country? Use some of the words below.

shallow	trivial	cultural	obsessed with celebrity
serious	biased	informative	broad-minded
chewing gum for the eyes	mindless	educational	

### Reading 1

You are going to read a newspaper article about how TV ignores informative programmes about the developing world.

Read the two summaries. Then read the article. Which summary is more accurate?

1 Although there has been a recent rise in the number of factual programmes about the developing world on British TV, they are not serious investigations into the society and politics of these countries. They are merely entertainment. As a result, British people are less informed about the developing world than they should be.

2 British TV is only really interested in trivia and celebrities, which is why it only makes programmes like docusoaps and travel programmes. Although the situation has improved since the events of September 11th, British people are still very ignorant of events in the developing world.

## Britons grow dull on trivia as TV ignores developing world

by John Vidal

The British are becoming increasingly ignorant of how more than 80% of the world lives, thinks and acts because television has abandoned serious examination of developing countries, according to a comprehensive analysis of last year's programming. The research, which covers the year to September 2001, was conducted by the Third World and Environment Broadcasting Trust, 3WE, which is funded by Oxfam and other leading development charities. During that period it found there were only four programmes on the politics of developing countries. The report also found that the international documentary was now virtually dead and that "reality" TV, holiday "challenges" and docusoaps dominated television coverage of poor countries.

"Eighty-five per cent of us get our primary information about the world from television, but the space for programmes covering the lives, cultures and politics of the rest of the world is now almost completely closed," said Don Redding of Oxfam. More hours, says the report, were devoted to filming British celebrities and games players in exotic locations than to showing the reality of life for the 5 billion people in developing countries. Although factual programming about developing countries rose by 20% in the year, the number of programmes looking at the society, development and environment of developing countries fell

dramatically. There were just 10 programmes in the whole year about conflicts and disasters, and programmes on development, human rights and the environment fell to unprecedentedly low levels, representing just 6% of all factual international programmes. Even programmes made in developing countries failed largely to show the world from the point of view of people who lived there. Consumer-oriented travel programmes increased to one-third of all foreign factual programming in 2000 - 2001, and reality TV programmes such as Survivor grew to more than 10% of all factual international coverage on commercial channels.

Following September 11, beyond the period of the research in the report, the authors recorded "many searching examinations" of the state of the world and the division between cultures, but a snapshot survey of February this year found that British TV had reverted to shallow formula entertainment and "brochure" shows. One BBC programme was a desert adventure with the former footballer Ian Wright, challenged to survive in the Kalahari. It made no mention of the K'Wa, or bushmen, being evicted from their ancestral areas in what observers term a human rights disaster. The researchers fall just short of accusing the broadcasters of failing to carry out their responsibilities to cover the wider world, but charge them with being obsessed with trivia, culture and celebrities.

*The Guardian Weekly* 18-7-2002, page 27

To read 3WE's full report visit: [www.epolitix.com/forum/3WE.htm](http://www.epolitix.com/forum/3WE.htm)

### Reading 2

Find numbers in the text to match these statements.

- 1 The percentage of British people who rely on the TV to hear about world events.
- 2 The number of programmes about conflicts and disasters.
- 3 The percentage of people living in the developing world.
- 4 The number of people living in the developing world.
- 5 The percentage of factual programming made up by 'reality' TV programmes.
- 6 The percentage by which the amount of factual programming about the developing world on British TV went up in 2001.
- 7 The amount of factual programming filmed abroad which is made up by travel programmes.
- 8 The number of programmes about Third World politics.

### Vocabulary in context

Look at these paired words from the text. How are they different in meaning?

- 1 author/broadcaster
- 2 research/report
- 3 good/bad coverage
- 4 a commercial channel/the BBC
- 5 conducted/funded
- 6 a snapshot survey/comprehensive analysis/ a searching examination

### Follow-up

Here is your chance to change things. Imagine you are TV executives – work in groups of four.

Look at the TV schedule below. Make changes to the schedule to make it more informative about current issues in the developing world. Present your new schedule to the rest of the class, and say why you have chosen to commission the programmes in your schedule. Remember, the TV executives want popular programmes so that they can sell advertising.

#### TV Tonight

6.0	National News	
7.0	Westenders	soap opera set in Bristol
8.0	Kalahari	Footballer Ian Wright survives five days in the desert
9.0	Survivor	10 people try to survive on a south pacific island to win a million dollars
10.0	Travel the World	Judie Balmers visits the Maldives and stays in a luxurious hotel

## Teacher's notes – British TV ignores the developing world

Lead-in

Check that the students know all the programme types. You could start by eliciting types of programmes from the students.

Note the following:

a docusoap = a programme that follows the everyday lives of ordinary people.

'reality' TV = programmes like Big Brother, where the people who are performing are not actors

a holiday 'challenge' programme = a programme where people – often celebrities - are followed going on a holiday in which they have to survive difficult situations or do dangerous things

Ask students in the class to give you examples of the different types of programme, and have a brief class discussion on which programmes different students like to watch.

Check they know the words in question 3, then put the students in pairs to discuss the questions.

### Reading 1

Read the introduction as a class, then ask the students to read the two summaries before reading the article.

Answer

Summary 1 is more accurate?

### Reading 2

Ask the students to read the text again and find numbers to match the statements.

Answers

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 1 | 85        |
| 2 | 10        |
| 3 | 80        |
| 4 | 5 billion |
| 5 | 10        |
| 6 | 20        |
| 7 | 1/3       |
| 8 | 4         |

### Vocabulary in context

Ask the students to work in pairs to look at the paired words from the text, and discuss how they are different in meaning.

Answers

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | author = writer – writes novels, reports, etc.  | broadcaster = works on TV or radio          |
| 2 | research = trying to find information   | report = writing up what you have found out |
| 3 | good/bad coverage = coverage means how you 'cover' a news event or sports story, etc. So, good coverage means it was filmed well, and the news or sports story was reported well. |   |

- 4 a commercial channel = a TV channel that is paid for by advertising. The BBC, (British Broadcasting Corporation), is paid for by the British public by a compulsory TV licence scheme.
- 5 conducted = carried out                      funded = financially supported
- 6 a snapshot survey = a quick look  
comprehensive analysis = a detailed and thorough investigation  
a searching examination = a thorough, detailed look, which asks difficult questions

#### Follow-up

A good way to start this activity is to brainstorm the sort of international issues/stories that your students think should be covered properly on news and documentary programmes on TV.

Then put the students in groups of four to change the schedule. Ask one student from each group to present their new schedule to the rest of the class, and say why they have chosen to commission the programmes they have selected.