

# Launch of new research report: Bringing the World to the UK

3WE's unique monitoring project has, since 1989-90, regularly monitored the quantity of international programming on the UK's mainstream TV channels (BBC1, BBC2, ITV1, C4 and C5). These are the channels which have public service obligations and which together still retain 80% of all TV audiences.

This report examines the output of factual international programmes by the public service broadcasters during 2005, the year of Make Poverty History and the BBC's Africa season. We have again commissioned Professor Steven Barnett of the University of Westminster to produce the research, with funding from DFID.

Previous research reports include [The World on the Box](#) (2000-01) and [Losing Reality](#) (2000-01).

## UK viewers' dependence on the BBC for public service TV is growing, new report shows

The BBC revived its factual programming about other countries in 2005, but coverage on the ad-funded channels continued to decline, finds a new report commissioned by 3WE, a coalition of leading international charities. Bringing the World to the UK, by the University of Westminster, measures international factual programming on UK TV from 1989 to 2005. It shows that there is a 'growing and worrying' dependence on the BBC to provide broadcasting which offers a deeper understanding of the world beyond Britain, especially developing countries.

Since 2003, when all five terrestrial channels reached an all-time low in broadcasting developing country factual programming, BBC1 and BBC2 have doubled their output. But Channel 4's has fallen by half again and ITV1 has 'almost evacuated this area' completely, the report says. 'Bringing the UK to the world and the World to the UK' is one of the BBC's six new public purposes that it must fulfil to meet its obligations to license fee payers.

Exclusive data on the impact of factual programming about other countries on audiences, also contained in the report, shows viewers respond more strongly to their quality, originality and learning value than is true for other types of TV programme.

Bringing the World to the UK is the eighth in a research series since 1989-90. As the most authoritative longitudinal study of any genre of public service TV content its findings have implications for the future of public service TV in general.

In 2005 there was a resurgence in general factual international programmes on the main five TV channels, with the third highest quantity since 1989-90. This was 'driven primarily by the BBC', say the authors, Emily Seymour and Professor Steven Barnett. Channel 4, for example, broadcast only the same volume as Five, despite a stronger public service remit.

Within the overall total, programming filmed in developing countries also rose, but less markedly, and is still much lower than in 1989-90.

Partly thanks to its 'Africa Lives' Season, BBC1 broadcast its highest recorded level of developing country factual programmes, and BBC2 came close to its highest. By contrast, Channel 4's developing country output fell by half again from its previous lowest figure, to just 36 hours - although the report recognises a 'consistent increase' in its current affairs coverage of developing countries.

On ITV1 'Celebrity Love Island' (filmed in Fiji) accounted for 75% of developing country factual programming, with just 13 hours of other programming. Five had increased its factual international programming since 2003, but was still lower than in 2000-01, and its developing country programming rose only slightly on 2003.

Don Redding, co-ordinator of 3WE said: 'It is vital that the BBC's remarkable revival of its international and developing country programming is sustained during the next Charter period, because it is clear that we are becoming over-dependent on one public service provider. Channel 4 has taken bold risks with international current affairs coverage in peak time; but this appears to be at the cost of a wider range and depth of factual programmes.'

Professor Steve Barnett, who managed the research, said: 'The gap between the BBC and the ad-funded public service channels seems to be growing alarmingly fast. Given that factual international programmes generate high appreciation and impact scores, they may have an added value for advertisers in a crowded television market and therefore start to become attractive again to commercial channels.'

Neil Thorns, Head of Communications at Sightsavers International, a member of 3WE, said: 'In 2005 the UK public felt connected to international events as never before, with their response to the Makepovertyhistory campaign and the G8, the Tsunami and Pakistan earthquake disasters demonstrating both compassion and commitment. This report shows that people respond strongly and positively to international programmes, whatever channel they are on, and so we urge the broadcasters to keep commissioning with imagination and bravery.'

Audience impact data, provided by the BBC from its new 'Pulse' monitoring system for exclusive first publication in the report, shows that up to 83% of respondents from a representative sample of the population found factual international programmes 'high quality, original and different'; and over 50% strongly agreed that they had 'learned something' from international programmes in the categories of politics, conflict, development, environment and human rights.

#### Key Findings

- In 2005 there were just under 1000 hours of factual international programming on terrestrial channels. A significant improvement on 2003 and the third highest since 1989-90.
- Factual programs featuring developing countries rose by 50% between 2003 & 2005. The total output on terrestrial channels is still considerably lower than it was in 1989.
- If you include the digital channels BBC3, BBC4 and More4, the volume of factual international programming was at it highest in 2005 since research began in 1989-90.
- Rise driven primarily by BBC which now accounts for just over half of all factual international programming on free-to-air TV (including both terrestrial and digital).
- BBC2 broadcast the largest volume of international programmes overall, the vast majority outside the BBC's Africa Lives season.
- Channel 4 and Five broadcast almost exactly the same volume of factual international programming in 2005.
- Channel 4 is the only channel to have consistently reduced its factual international programming over the past 16 years. It dropped by a third since 2001. Its level of developing country factual programming has halved since 2003. Despite this decline Channel 4's output remains second only to BBC2.
- ITV1 broadcast the lowest level of factual international programming of all the terrestrial channels. 75% of ITV1's programming featuring developing countries was accounted for by Celebrity Love Island which was filmed in Fiji.
- Travel programmes of the 'Brits abroad' variety continued to dominate factual international programming - comprising over a quarter of the total. But there was an increase in 'cultural' programming about other countries, again notably on the BBC.
- For further information on 3WE or to download a free copy of Bringing the World to the UK, go to: [www.ibt.org.uk/3WE](http://www.ibt.org.uk/3WE)