

"A NOVEL ENVIROMENTAL EDUCATIONAL PACKAGE FOR A  
THIRD WORLD TELEVISION AUDIENCE"

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THIRD WORLD TELEVISION AUDIENCE**

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"Environmental education should be included in and should run throughout the other disciplines of the formal education curriculum at all levels - to foster a sense of responsibility for the state of the environment and to teach students how to monitor, protect and improve it....Adult education, on-the-job training, television, and other less formal methods must be used to reach out to as wide a group of individuals as possible, as environmental issues and knowledge systems now change radically in the space of a lifetime."

- Our Common Future: Final Report of the World  
Commission on Environment and Development, 1987

01. **INTRODUCTION:** The 1990s will undoubtedly be remembered as the decisive decade for the world's endangered environment and its finite natural resources. The individual and collective decisions and actions taken by governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others during this decade will determine the state of the world economically, politically, socially and environmentally.

A recent world-wide survey by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) has shown that concern for the environment is not confined to any particular part of the world or to any group or category of people. It is truly universal.

Sri Lanka has also witnessed a growth in the public awareness of environmental problems and issues. The environmentally-alert Sri Lankan today is acutely conscious of environmental crises that affect the future well-being of the entire community of 17 million people. Among them:-

- \* Deforestation and its adverse consequences (floods, landslides, and loss of genetic diversity)
- \* Harmful agricultural practices leading to soil erosion, loss of agricultural productivity; the indiscriminate use of agro-chemicals
- \* Ill-advised development projects which result in serious environmental consequences.

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There is also a wide-spread acceptance that socio-economic factors are crucial in the sound management of the island's delicate environment:-

1. Controlling the growth of human population and limiting it to a sustainable level;
2. Alleviating, if not eradicating, wide-spread poverty, which is the major factor in environmental degradation.

Governments and citizen groups can tackle environmental problems only to a limited extent. The situation requires everybody's commitment - because it affects the well-being of all!

The need of the hour, then, is to mobilize each and every human being to take whatever personal action within his/her capability for the sustainable management of the environment.

The people are, of course, very much concerned about all this. But concern alone cannot produce meaningful action; it should be used as an opportunity, a spring-board if you like, for launching programmes aimed at educating and informing them.

02. **ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION:** H G Wells (1866-1946) said "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe". This truism is perhaps more relevant to the current environmental crisis than anything else. It is only through education that we could avert unwarranted panic and channel the human energies for an effective and consolidated action. This is already happening among certain groups in the NGO sector and scientists. It now needs to be strengthened and supported by the media. The challenge is to blend human creativity and technologies to educate as many human beings as possible on this critical subject.

In this context, the environmental education plays a key role. This approach can be through one of the following avenues:-

1. Formal Education: this encompasses primary, secondary and tertiary education.
2. Specialized Education: education provided by various professional, public and private sector institutions for their staff and selected persons.
3. Non-formal education: the use of mass media and traditional media, etc for environmental education.

With the proliferation of easily accessible and affordable electronic media (radio, TV and video) the non-formal educational approach using mass media has come into wide use. The success of distance education institutions and open universities in many parts of the world is also largely due to this information "revolution".

03. OUR PROJECT: The Worldview International Foundation, an international non-profit NGO specializing in development communications for the past ten years, is dedicated to further facilitating this task. Worldview-Sri Lanka is planning to support and reinforce the on-going efforts in such public education through a multi-faceted television series to be broadcast on national TV. This will be a pilot project, the success of which will be watched closely by our Country offices (and other groups) elsewhere in the Third World.

We propose to produce a total of 64 educational programmes to be broadcast during prime-time on Sri Lanka's National TV.

Our aim is to supplement on-going non-formal programmes in this sector, and to co-operate and collaborate with both the state and NGO sector agencies in the field. Working closely with these organizations will be crucial to the success of the project. Participating in this project will enable local NGOs to have easy access to the medium of television. Thus, this also becomes an effort to give NGOs an effective "Voice" in the powerful but often expensive TV medium.

04. **OUR MEDIUM:** The rationale for emphasis on television is clear. Television was introduced in Sri Lanka only in 1979, but in ten years, it has established itself as the predominant media, and a very effective educational tool. Much emphasis is being given to the educational uses of TV, parallel to the essential entertainment element.

There were an estimated 625,000 TV sets in Sri Lanka by 1990. An average of 10 viewers per TV set is believed to be realistic for Sri Lanka; in rural areas dozens throng around available TV sets every night. About 60 per cent of the total viewers watch TV during local peak hours, which are between 7.30 p.m. and 9.00 p.m. Therefore, we can have a conservative estimate of 3 million TV viewers island-wide during peak hours on any given evening. Our proposed series will be telecast at this peak-hour, to achieve maximum impact.

05. **THE SERIES:** The series will have a number of varied features and components all based on the two central themes of environmental conservation and sustainable development.

These different components are:-

1. An inter-school Environmental Quiz Series
2. A series of Tele-dramas based on environmental themes.
3. Traditional Media: Songs, puppet shows, dances, muppets, etc., adapted for TV medium.
4. A monthly Magazine Programme providing a round-up of environmental news and views in Sri Lanka and the world.

05. 1 **THE QUIZ:** TV Quiz Contests on particular themes/subjects are one of the most effective means of promoting interest and study in that subject, because they blend education and entertainment. The effectiveness of the "theme quiz" has been demonstrated in Sri Lanka in the recent past through radio and TV quiz contests on Quality Control, Inland Fisheries promotion, Primary Health Care,

Nutrition, etc.

General and specialized Quiz programmes have proved to be extremely successful in generating interest and awareness. Both public and corporate sector institutions now use this medium for public awareness campaigns. We intend to multiply these effects by maximum audience participation, through audience questions and even requesting the public to send in potential questions.

05. 2 TELE-DRAMAS: Tele-dramas or soap operas, are also a very effective and subtle means of communicating public-interest messages. They have a definite edge over documentaries in reaching especially the young and less educated. They can artistically disseminate useful information, so that viewers who would not have the patience nor the interest to sit through a straight-forward documentary may be captured and motivated.

This is already being practised by some dramatists in Sri Lanka. Our series will also aim to achieve this with a set of characters against a rural backdrop, where 80 per cent of Sri Lanka's population still lives. Every effort will be made to highlight little-known traditional environmental practices in the stories.

05. 3 TRADITIONAL MEDIA: Sri Lanka has a rich heritage of traditional and contemporary performing arts, including folk dances; Ballad, puppet and muppets shows, and street theatre. We shall be adapting these forms for TV, and various environmental themes will be worked into them. For this, we have enlisted the services of a few experts who have already been experimenting with traditional art forms to communicate other messages such as health education and family planning. A great deal of creative experimenting will be encouraged and fostered;

05. 4 MAGAZINE: Finally, the magazine programme to be presented monthly by two hosts, will use updates on the local environmental scene and, as and when appropriate, present global updates as well.

06. FOLLOW-UP: There will also be a follow-up survey and a complete evaluation of the project once it is completed. We expect it to produce interesting findings, which should be available by the middle of 1992, in time for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Brazil.

## ANNEX 1

Worldview International Foundation (WIF) through its Colombo Media Centre will produce the proposed television series with financial assistance from donor agencies.

Worldview is an independent non-governmental organization aiming at the proper use of information and communication for development on a global scale. Together with a staff of 700 in Media Centres and Project Offices in 12 countries, and over 300 Honorary Members of the Foundation from 52 countries, Worldview strives for greater understanding of the problems of developing countries and for human development through systematic use of information and communication.

Worldview was established in 1979, with its headquarters in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Today, it operates national media centres with projects in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Kenya, Nepal, Thailand, the Maldives, Syria, Sudan, Botswana, Zambia, Peru, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and the Gambia. WIF has also implemented projects in several other countries. Projects and Media Centre activities are undertaken by WIF either on its own or in co-operation with and in support of the national NGOs, Governments, and United Nations agencies.

Over the past ten years, WIF has been involved in the field of "Development Education" and has produced more than 400 films, video and slide programmes and 250 radio programmes covering 36 countries to an estimated total audience of 500 million people.

International TV productions such as "Agenda for a Small Planet" have been produced and distributed in co-operation with 40 TV stations and independent producers. WIF television productions have won a large number of awards for excellence at many international television festivals and competitions.

## SOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

### 01. Sources:

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- \* Worldview International Foundation: Annual Report 1989
- \* The Audience Survey and Research Unit of the Sri Lanka Rupavahini (Television) Corporation.

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