

South Voices in Mainstream Danish Media

2023-2024 - Final Report

For the last year, I have tried to use my combined experiences as foreign editor and foreign correspondent to make an effort to introduce "South Voices in Danish Mainstream Media".

The purpose of the project, run by Danish Development research Network (DDRN) and funded by the OpEn Fund of the Danish Foreign Ministry, has been to introduce works with "South angles" of professional journalists and photographers from the Global South to a broader Danish audience.

Six reporters and photographers from the Global South (Uganda, India, Chile, Ecuador, Bolivia and Colombia) who were known for their professionalism by DDRN from earlier cooperation, were asked to contribute with pitches from the beginning, and through three rounds we have chosen three contributions from each of them. The communication with the South contributors was carried out by the DDRN secretariat. In the end, we were able to afford two more contributions, one from one of the original contributors in Colombia and another one from a new source in Bhutan, so the project resulted in altogether twenty articles/photo-series.

Seven Danish media has been associated with the project from the beginning, and I have been in charge of communication and cooperation with editors of these media. Articles and photos have been published in Ud&Se, Samvirke, Politiken, Information, Kristeligt Dagblad, Sjællandske Medier and POV International.

During the last round in December-January, we had to send proposals to other Danish media as well which were not involved in the project from the beginning. It has resulted in Jyllands-Postens travel section and (probably) the "Økologi Nu"-website also publishing one or two contributions from our South voices.

The original pitches from the six South contributors were based on written presentations of the seven involved Danish media that I sent them after having conducted interviews with each media editor. Through the year, we have further received several good ideas from the editors (Chinese in Ecuador, clothes' waste) which we after some discussion chose not to present for the relevant South writers. In the end, with one exception, we only ordered contributions based on the original round of pitches. Partly because we wanted the South voices to have the initiative, and partly because we had to realize that the DDRN secretariat didn't have time and resources to another round of pitches midway.

Around the time of the project's third and final round, we invited Danish media and development sector people and everybody else to a public evaluation meeting in Copenhagen. It took place January 3rd, 2024. Because of terrible weather and illness, only two of the involved editors participated, but the rest sent valuable input. The evening itself developed into a constructive and inspiring exchange with the participants who were mostly professionals and media people involved with the development field.

This report about my part of the project work was originally written in a preliminary version for this occasion. It has now been rewritten into this final version as the project is closed at the end of March 2024.

Learnings:

I can point at three major learnings:

- 1) First and foremost, we have run into the major challenge that the involved news media understandably have been forced to prioritize grave international news that have dominated the news during 2023, especially the Gaza War and the Ukraine War. The space for foreign news has already been diminished in recent years, and these events made potential non-breaking contributions from the Global South even more a niche priority than they would otherwise have been. Several of our articles

were accepted by foreign editors of news media, but they had to wait in queue for months before being published.

- 2) Then, the fact that three of our six "South Voices" were photographers collided with the reality that very few Danish media are able to give ambitious photo series a proper showing. Even though the contributions were excellent, some of these series ended up as text-dominated articles in the chosen media, even though the South voice actually was meant to be expressed primarily through the pictures. It should be noted, however, that there were some great exceptions from this pattern.
- 3) Trying to give my contribution to making the project a success, I gave most of the articles a rather tough editing, and some of the texts were considerably shortened. The South angles were of course kept, but otherwise I tried – based on my experience – to present the material in a way which looked like the way Danish editors – and Danish media consumers – normally meet interesting material from abroad. Only gradually through the three rounds, I found a good way of doing this. I got to know the South contributors better, and between the rounds, I sent written inputs to them in which I coached them how to approach the next story we had chosen among their original pitches. So, in the end, I honestly think we were able to present a number of strong and interesting stories that enriched a little bit the general picture in Denmark of conditions in the Global South.

Based on these three learnings, it would be extremely interesting to carry them into a new version of the South Voices project during the coming year. Originally, it wasn't meant to be more than a one-time event, but the way it has evolved would make a second version relevant, in which we build on what we learned – and maybe won't be overtaken to quite the same degree by breaking world news.

South contributions:

Below you will find a list of the 20 contributions from the South Voices – when and where they have been published or are going to be published.

William Odinga Balikuddembe, Uganda

- “The Older Brother of the Child Soldiers”, published by Information, November 7th, 2023.
- “LGTBQ+ People Gone Underground”, accepted and still queueing to be published by Kristeligt Dagblad, timing unknown.
- “How Farmers’ Response to Climate Change is Undermined by Poor Seed System”, Published by POV International, February 8th, 2024.

Namrata Acharya, India

- “Rich lithium discovery creates green hopes in India, but is it sustainable?”, Published by Information, February 7th, 2024.
- “Uncontrolled construction in the Himalayas leads to disasters and ghost towns”, published by POV International, October 25th, 2023.
- “Blue flags create debate about India’s beaches”, published by Jyllands-Postens travel section, March 21st, 2024.

Marta Apablaza Riquelme, Chile

- “Chile’s courageous grandmothers should be remembered”, published by POV International, September 7th, 2023.
- “The Movie Teller”, Lone Scherfig-interview, Published by Sjællandske Medier, October 21st, 2023.
- “Farmers of the Free Seed”, visit at agro-ecological school, published in April 2024 at the ØkoNu.dk-website and the printed paper of Økologi Nu.

Andres Yopez (photographer), Ecuador

- "Masculinity and macro-culture in Ecuador", published by Information, August 7th, 2023.
- "Migration in Ecuador, the old are left behind", published by Kristeligt Dagblad, January 9, 2024.
- "Ecuadorians giving up gold-rush for green forests", published by Information, March 6th, 2024.

Wara Vargas (photographer), Bolivia

- "Just a little fish", a fisher-woman at the Titicaca Lake, published by "Ud&Se", September 2023.
- "A new well has to be dugged every other month", the Chipaya people and climate change, Published by POV International, December 21st, 2023.
- "The farmer woman who became a politician", published by Sjællandske Medier, February 17th, 2024.

Charlie Cordero (photographer), Colombia

- "Cooks put coca on the menu", published by Samvirke, November 2023.
- "The beach is disappearing", about surf and climate, published by Politiken, December 10th, 2023.
- "The Land of Birds", published by Jyllands-Postens travel section, February 27th, 2024.
- "Colombia: The Climate Crisis is about to Flood the World's Closest Inhabited Island", published by POV International, February 29th, 2024.

Needrup Zangpo, Bhutan

- “A Peaceful Election in Bhutan”, published by POV International, February 15th, 2024

Southern Angles:

Then, as a sort of conclusion, I dare to point at a few good examples of published contributions which certainly have introduced significant Southern angles that would otherwise not have been visible in Danish media – just as examples:

- Marta’s Scherfig interview: No Danish reporter would have been able to make the same interview. It takes to a remarkable degree its starting point in the local area’s geography and history.
- Charlie’s coca photos: The whole reportage is focusing on honest people trying to make a living, showing solidarity with them. No criminals here. A very different angle on coca than the usual angle in Western media.
- Wara’s photo series about the female farmer, becoming a politician, as well as the chipaya people suffering from climate change: Wara is indigenous herself, and her pictures reveals the closeness of an insider to the issues.

Danish targets groups:

From the beginning, we have consciously been targeting far broader target groups among the Danish public, than the special interest media of the development and South issues sector are normally targeting.

As prescribed in the OpEn program, we have been targeting people who are neutral (not necessarily positive) towards development efforts in the South as well as people who know very little about conditions in the Global South. We have chosen the participating Danish media from this viewpoint, and all of them have published at least one South contribution. The 20 contributions have been or will be published in participating Danish media in these numbers:

POV International, 6 pieces

Information, 4 pieces

Sjællandske Medier, 2 pieces

Jyllands-Posten's travel section, 2 pieces

Kristeligt Dagblad, 2 pieces

Politiken, 1 piece

Samvirke 1 piece

Ud&Se, 1 piece

Økologi Nu, 1 piece

Of course we would have liked to have more of them being published in leading and influential daily newspapers, but as a whole we dare to think we have reached a significant number of readers within the chosen target groups, maybe especially through the immediate appeal of the strong photos in some of the 20 contributions.

On top of that, as a post-project effort, we are still preparing to produce a "POV Study package", consisting of four project articles published by POV International about "Climate change in the Global South", to be used as teaching material in Danish high schools. In this way we will indeed reach a new and much younger audience with parts of this project, many of whom would as a starting point be neutral as well as ignorant about the Global South. It should be underlined, that in doing so, we are not producing teaching material as such. The whole concept of POV Study is to take journalistic pieces like ours and use them in an educational context, adding spice to otherwise textbook-based lessons.

2024, March 27 (updated April 22)

Asger Røjle Christensen