

TV ignores the real 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.

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1. Reading

Read the two summaries. 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.*

2. Numbers

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. _____

3. 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

4. Follow-up

What do you think?

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
serious	biased	informative	broad-minded
chewing gum for the eyes	mindless	educational	