



Wildlife Asia

**13th - 16th
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ASIA'S PREMIER WILDLIFE & ENVIRONMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL

Giving Asians a Voice...

Text of panel remarks by

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For a moment, I was wondering whether I'm at the wrong film festival -- because we don't cover any wildlife!

But what we do cover, with great interest and passion, is wild...life -- we chronicle life itself going 'wild' in different parts of Asia Pacific.

Disasters, conflicts, pandemics, migration and desertification -- these are a few among many topics, themes and subjects in the television and video films that TVE Asia Pacific produces and distributes.

We look at how our often wild ways of living affects:

- each other in our own species
- the rest of Nature and other species
- the future of life on Earth

Everywhere in the media we hear of Asia rising -- economies, cultures and people are all on the move. Indeed, things are happening at a mind-boggling pace. But not everyone is part of this frenzy. Many people -- and societies -- are being left behind. We are interested in both those who run ahead as well as those who get left behind....and we try to find out why.

That's the small challenge we have set for ourselves. 'We' are Television for Education Asia Pacific -- trading as TVE Asia Pacific -- a small media foundation trying to tell this big story of our times. We are driven by a strong belief that what is happening in the world's largest and most

populous region has far-reaching impacts not just on our region, but on the entire planet.

We were founded in 1996 by a group of Asian and European communications specialists who foresaw this big story emerging. We are mandated to cover the full spectrum of development issues, and to work across the Asia Pacific region.

From the beginning, we have been both a producer and distributor of editorially independent content for TV, video - and now, also for the web. We place much emphasis on distributing across many platforms and formats: from broadcast television to webcasting, from DVDs to the humble VHS tape.

Producing new content is one of our key areas of activity. We stand for Asians telling their own stories, to each other and to the rest of the world.

We produce content mainly through commissioning independent film-makers and small production companies in our region. While we do occasional broadcast co-productions - such as recent collaborations with Singapore's Channel News Asia and Thailand's Nation Broadcasting Corporation - these are still few and far between.

We engage the services of freelance TV/video professionals at three different levels:

- **At a basic level**, we often engage camera crews to shoot to a brief and return logged camera tapes to us for post-production. Most such shoots are set up in advance by our production managers.
- **At the intermediary level**, we seek camera crews to go on location filming with a one of our roving director-producers, in pursuit of a story that we have researched in advance, but whose full details are not known.
- **At a higher level**, we also commission full productions - from researching and location filming to post-producing - on agreed specifications and budgets.

Importantly, we pay international rates to our local film crews no matter where in the world we will engage their services. In turn, we expect a world class service.

Asia remains our main region of focus. To give you an idea, in 2005-2006, we filmed in: Bhutan, Cambodia, China (several stories), India (several), Indonesia (several), Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand (several). We have filmed in other countries in the past, and have at least one tried-and-tested local film-maker or production company in most Asian countries.

Last year saw us venturing beyond Asia to film in Africa, Latin America and Europe as well, for our first global series titled *Living Labs* (which, incidentally, is having its public release this month in connection with World Water Day on March 22).

In the past two years, we have post-produced in Bangkok, Colombo, Delhi and Melbourne -- we always try to edit as close to the stories as possible to ensure authentic translations and voices.

We produce both one-off documentaries as well as series on a broad range of topics and issues. Let me cite three recent examples to give you an idea.

- **Children of Tsunami: Rebuilding the Future** was our main response to the Asian Tsunami. Starting in January 2005, we had local camera crews tracking the personal recovery stories of 8 Tsunami affected families in 4 countries - India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Stories were led by surviving children aged between 8 and 16. This coverage resulted in 5-min month video reports on each child/family that were placed online, a 50-min documentary released on the first anniversary of the disaster, a dedicated website, and on-going public outreach and dissemination of this material which will continue until end of 2007.
www.childrenoftsunami.info
- **Digits4Change** is a new series we launched last year, documenting how information and communications technologies (ICTs) - including mobile phones, computers and Internet - are changing lives across developing Asia. Again, the TV/video output is complemented by a dedicated website at www.digits4change.net
- **The Greenbelt Reports** is an environmental education series that tries to capture and amplify the Tsunami's environmental lessons. In mid 2006, we returned to many coastal areas battered by the disaster and looked at how communities co-exist with coastal greenbelts, that is coral reefs, mangroves and sand dunes. The series was released for the second

anniversary of the Tsunami, and has been very well received. A dedicated website will soon be online at www.greenbelts.net

Our output is still small -- because we ourselves are a small and discerning content producer, what you might call a 'specialist publisher'. Highlights:

- We produced about 700 minutes of new, original content during 2005-2006.
- All made to international broadcast standards, filmed in DVCam.
- All made originally in English, with both mixed and international soundtracks
- These productions involved two to three dozen crews from different economies and cultures, all living and working in Asia

Our outreach is also comparatively small, but growing fast.

- We don't have our own channel, and rely on our broadcast partners across Asia Pacific to get our content out. We now work with over 50 TV channels - delivered via terrestrial, cable or satellite methods, at local, national or regional level. From Dubai to Fiji, and from China to Cambodia, we have earned the trust of broadcasters who take on our content and broadcast in original English, or version into their own languages.
- We are increasingly webcasting our content. Our first significant entry to this domain was in 2005 with www.childrenoftsunami.info, and we have since placed many of our shorter films online for free, public-access viewing.
- Recently, we launched our own channel on YouTube, branded as TVEAPFilms.
- We are also in partnership with the web TV channel Dev.tv, anchored in Geneva and covering both development and humanitarian issues.
- We also have significant outreach on DVD and video, which we consider equally important when it comes to conservation education and development education.

By the way, we distribute and promote not just our own content, but also films made by others. We have a regional distribution service that operates on a non-commercial and non-exclusive basis, extending the shelf-life of environment and development films beyond their initial broadcasts, and enhancing their outreach much further than countries of production. If anyone is interested in joining this free service, my colleague Manori Wijesekera and I will be happy to discuss details.

There's something else that might interest many of you. We are now developing a Database of Asian Film Professionals with track record and credentials in producing factual content. It will collate information on TV and video professionals - not just directors and producers, but also those offering other skills such as editing, sound, lighting and scripting - from across Asia. We will offer some kind of quality assurance so that anyone wishing to engage their services can do so with some confidence.

Our aim is to have this placed online as a free database service before the end of 2007. We will be interested only in those who are living and working in the region, especially developing countries of Asia Pacific. Origins don't matter if you are close to the region's ground reality and feel for the issues, people and stories of our region.

Yes, there is a political angle to this effort. Quite frankly, we are tired of Asia's stories being covered -- often not very well or very accurately -- by journalists and film-makers who don't live and work in Asia. We can remember how they covered the Asian Tsunami, SARS and other major stories in recent years. One way to improve the quality and authenticity of Asia's moving image stories is to match the abundance of Asian talent with those who need to engage their services.

This film festival's slogan is 'Giving Nature a Voice' which is certainly needed. But where we are coming from, there is another equally important need: *Giving Asians a voice.*

In our own small way, we are working towards that big ideal. Asians must tell their own stories -- to each other and to the world.

And there are enough and more stories waiting to be told.

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