

***Reading the Developing World: A content
analysis of Irish print media coverage***

DCU School of Communications

Final Report – March 3, 2009

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the results from an analysis of newspaper coverage over a six month period of the developing world, carried out by DCU School of Communications on behalf of Connect World.

The first part of the study – a quantitative analysis – gives us a picture of what is in the coverage overall. It shows that attention to the developing world follows some expected trends but also diverges from expectations with major differences emerging between the daily and Sunday newspapers and the regional press. Africa and Asia dominate the coverage as regions but attention is uneven. Coverage certainly follows international news trends or event ‘spikes’ particularly in relation to conflict, political and humanitarian struggles and not necessarily Irish interests. Indeed Irish overseas aid or development policy issues are not a feature of the coverage. Some of the Irish aid countries are among those getting least attention overall. In terms of individual countries, India dominates the coverage due to the variety of stories in which it appears consistently over time.

Developing countries get little or no attention from newspaper editorials, a major finding which suggests that a low value is attached to coverage of these countries by newspapers in general. Coverage most frequently appears in the *News* section of papers, but *Sport*, *Features* and *Business* present significant areas for more nuanced analysis, with some notable attention given in the areas of arts and culture.

In the daily and Sunday papers, most stories on developing countries are generated from external sources, indicating a low priority on resourcing such coverage. However, the regional newspapers cover developing countries in a very different way overall – most likely due to the necessity for a local angle – with particular focus on stories about Irish and preferably local NGO activities and personalities.

The second part of the study – the thematic analysis – describes the tone and thematic nature of coverage. Few articles of a positive tone emerge and the most dominant themes tend to depict countries or regions as a ‘*Basket Case*’ or as having a ‘*Conflict Culture*’ within – reflecting the prevalence of conflict in storylines overall, and following peaks in news coverage. However, a ‘*Helping Hand*’ theme is also strong, particularly in the regional papers, mostly associated with the NGO focus in storylines. The factors which may lie behind all these trends and items for further discussion are outlined in full in the following report.

2. INTRODUCTION

What kind of coverage do developing countries get in the print media in Ireland? Who is behind the coverage and what kinds of representations of the developing world are circulated by the nature of the articles written? These are some of the questions a research group from the School of Communications in DCU set out to study in a comprehensive analysis of the representation of developing countries in the Irish print media, conducted on behalf of Connect World.

This report examines six months' worth of print media coverage of 68 developing countries across a variety of national and regional newspapers, to measure the attention these countries receive and the nature of the coverage. It is the most comprehensive content analysis of its kind on this subject carried out in Ireland to date, and was designed to meet Connect World's objective of obtaining a clear picture of the actual coverage produced, which may support or refute supposed or suspected trends in such coverage to date. It not only adds considerably to our knowledge of media trends in Ireland but also provides the foundation for further detailed research into coverage of the developing world, and in broadcast and other media distribution outlets.

This report begins by outlining the research design for this project, particularly the stages of quantitative and qualitative stages of content analysis. The findings of this analysis are then presented, followed by a discussion of the key issues that emerged from the research, with suggestions regarding the directions that future research might take. The results indicate that, while there are variations in the volume and style of coverage across different genres of journalism for different countries over the sample period, some consistent trends do emerge. Some patterns may be of no surprise to those involved in the development sector. However, other trends suggest a more nuanced picture of Irish media coverage of the developing world.

Five appendices accompany this report:

- Appendix A lists the newspapers sampled during this research
- Appendix B details the dates that were selected for inclusion in this analysis
- Appendix C contains a list of the OECD countries included in this analysis
- Appendix D contains the codebook, which guided the content analysis
- Appendix E includes sample newspaper articles cited in the report to illustrate dimensions of the coverage under discussion

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research approach adopted by this project integrated two different stages of newspaper analysis. First, a descriptive and quantitative form of content analysis was selected as the best method of ascertaining the volume and nature of coverage of developing countries in Irish newspapers. This form of content analysis has been found to be highly useful for tracing key presentational and format features of newspaper coverage over time. Although it is predominantly a quantitative research tool, this approach also informed the second stage of content analysis undertaken by this research – a qualitative analysis of the thematic elements of Irish newspaper coverage of the developing world. These two separate though inter-related stages of newspaper analysis were employed in complementary and mutually reinforcing ways.

In consultation with Connect World, we devised a list of the newspapers that would be included in the total sample (see Appendix A) and chose a six-month time period within which to focus this research (see Appendix B). This was considered to be a sufficiently extensive time period to generate a wide-ranging and representative a sample of newspaper coverage that would, in turn, produce statistically significant findings.

3.1 *The sample:*

The sample for this study was selected from the six-month period of January 1st to June 30th 2008. A total of 32 newspapers were included in the analysis: 4 daily newspapers, 4 Sunday newspapers and 24 regional newspaper titles. Two criteria governed the newspaper selection process. Firstly, newspapers that had relatively high readership levels were included in this analysis. Secondly, only those newspapers that were available on the electronic database LexisNexis¹ were included, with the exception of *The Star* and *The Sunday World*, which have readership levels that merited inclusion and were searched manually. LexisNexis was chosen as the main research tool for this study in order to take advantage of its keyword search, which ensured that articles covering the developing world could be efficiently and reliably downloaded and collected.

On the advice of Connect World, we focused on searching for and analysing newspaper coverage that featured one or more of the total of sixty-eight countries that were included in the list of Overseas Development Aid recipients compiled by the OECD in 2007 (see Appendix C).

¹ LexisNexis is an online searchable database containing full text access to thousands of international newspapers and company, financial and market research data, to which DCU holds an academic subscription. Newspaper data is stored in text format with details on headlines, word count etc. and greatly facilitates large-scale content analysis.

The initial keyword search, for all articles which reference the 68 countries, returned a total of more than 6000 units for analysis. From this, we created a smaller ‘constructed random sample’ – an established method of randomly selecting a statistically significant and consistent cross-section of material for each day of the week – which represented one sixth of all the relevant articles from daily, Sunday and Regional newspapers. This presented a total of 977 valid articles for analysis.

<i>Total Sample:</i>	<i>No. of articles</i>
Dailies	657
Sundays	228
Regionals	92
<i>Total:</i>	<i>977</i>

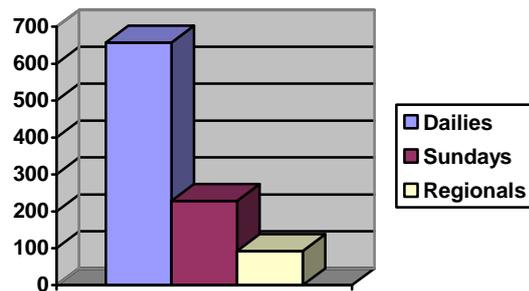


Table 1: Breakdown of units of analysis across newspaper types

3.2 The content analysis process:

The next stage of the research design involved the construction of a codebook, which guided both the quantitative and qualitative stages of content analysis. The codebook contains a list of all the variables analysed, as well as detailed explanations of how each of these variables are to be coded. In all, a total of 15 different variables were analysed (see Appendix D). We designed descriptive variables for the quantitative stage of content analysis to generate statistical data on the presentational features of newspaper coverage. Next, thematic variables were designed to guide the qualitative analysis of newspaper coverage; i.e. to focus explicitly on uncovering the overall tone and thematic content of newspaper coverage.

The quantitative variables that were analysed include:

- Newspaper title and date
- The word count of newspaper items
- The author or writer of newspaper items (if available), selected from a list of twenty pre-coded categories (staff journalist/correspondent, wire service, guest writer, etc.)
- Representational information including:
 - Country - the country (or countries) mentioned in the article, the strength of the reference (i.e. whether the reference is of major or minor relevance to the story).

- Genre – the format assumed by the article and/or the section of the newspaper where the item appeared (selected from a list of 9 pre-coded categories, e.g. News, Opinion, Sport, Letters, etc.)
- Topic – the issue(s) covered in the newspaper item. A list of twenty-two topic codes was generated by this analysis (e.g. conflict topics, tourism topics, immigration topics, etc. and articles were coded for up to four of these topic displays
- Angle - whether or not an ‘Irish’ angle was displayed in the article
- Sources quoted, paraphrased or mentioned – sources were coded as belonging to one or more of thirteen different categories of sources that were identified by this analysis (e.g. ‘Irish Government spokespersons’, ‘International NGO representatives’, ‘media’ etc.).

The qualitative variables that were analysed include:

- Tone: the mood or pitch of the story – the extent to which coverage could be said to display positive, negative or neutral tone(s).
- Themes: A close reading was undertaken of all the themes that emerged within the total sample of newspaper coverage analysed. Following on from this, 13 different categories of themes were constructed and each article was coded for the presence of up to four of these themes. The categories of themes included those of ‘*Helping Hand*’, ‘*Conflict Culture*’, ‘*Fair Deal*’ etc.

The results of both the quantitative and qualitative stages of data analysis were manually coded in spreadsheet format and in addition, the researcher’s observations and notes were recorded in a word document. SPSS was used to generate the statistical findings of this research. As outlined above, two sets of findings were generated by this research, requiring two different modes of data analysis. First, the quantitative findings were analysed in order to trace the descriptive and presentational coverage trends. This analysis focused on generating an overall picture of the level and nature of newspaper coverage. This was supplemented by a qualitative analysis designed to uncover the thematic elements of newspaper coverage. Whereas the quantitative analysis was focused more on questions relating to *what* kinds of topical trends emerge within Irish newspaper coverage of the developing world, the qualitative analysis is focused explicitly on questions relating to *how* the developing world is constructed and depicted thematically. Is the picture primarily negative, as is commonly perceived? Or do newspaper representations of the developing world also contain possibilities for more neutral, positive or more complex representations to emerge? The following discussion outlines the findings that emerged from this study regarding the presentational trends of Irish newspaper coverage of the developing world.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS – Quantitative analysis

The quantitative data gives us precise figures on the attention that the developing world received during the six-month sample period as follows:

4.1 Newspaper attention trends – Are some developing countries more newsworthy than others?

In total there were 1,307 references to 57 of the 68 countries on the list, which means 11 of the countries got no mention at all, while some countries received greater levels of newspaper attention than others. Table 2 illustrates the countries getting most coverage across different newspaper types:

Country	No of articles	Dominant Topics [see Appendix for complete list]
India (D/S/R)	218	Private Sector Business, Sport, Culture, Politics, NGO Activities
Kenya (D/S/R)	92	Conflict, Politics, NGO Activities
Afghanistan (D/S)	80	Military Activities, Conflict, Politics
Zimbabwe (D/S)	76	Politics, International Relations
Pakistan (D/S/R)	74	Politics, Human Interest, Conflict
Nigeria (D/S/R)	70	Immigration, Various
Vietnam (D/S)	67	US Politics, Culture
Chad (D/S)	66	Irish Military Activities, Conflict

Table 2: Countries getting most attention in the coverage (D = Daily, S = Sunday, R= Regional papers)

As can be seen from the above table, the daily and Sunday newspapers focused attention on the same top 11 countries (*Afghanistan, Burma, Chad, Kenya, India, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sudan, Vietnam, Zimbabwe*) although in a slightly different order of appearance. While the top three countries in the dailies were *India, Zimbabwe* and *Afghanistan*, the top three countries in the Sunday newspapers were *India, Afghanistan* and *Kenya*. In both sets of newspapers, the top three countries accounted for over a third of all articles.

However, the regional newspapers had some very different inclusions in their top ten – for instance, *Moldova, Uganda, Tanzania* featured frequently in the regional newspapers, but seldom in the daily and Sunday newspapers. The differences in attention patterns reflect the orientation of newspaper types towards different stories and topics e.g. a greater focus on stories about NGO activities (involving regional angles or actors) in the regional press, rather than conflict topics, which feature more often in Daily and Sunday press coverage. (See later discussion on findings regarding press topical trends).

As can be seen, India dominates the coverage across all newspaper types and is associated with a broad range of topics from politics and human interest to culture and lifestyle. Even

when the coverage is considered over the complete six-month period of the sample, the attention given to India is also consistent, possibly because of the broad nature of coverage under various topics. (See more under ‘Key news events’ below).

- Countries getting least attention:

The following table (3) shows the countries getting the least coverage across all newspapers:

Country	No of articles referencing...
Comoros, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kiribati, Sao Tome & Principe, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Republic of Congo, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan	0
Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, The Gambia, Maldives, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Uzbekistan	1 to 3
Benin, Cambodia, Guinea, Lao, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal	4 to 6

Table 3: Countries receiving the least attention in the coverage

- Regional Trends:

When countries are grouped by continent or geographical area, Africa dominates the coverage as a region, (although it also dominates the sample - 35 of the 68 countries are in Africa)

- Africa = 666 (over 50% of articles)
- Asia = 581 (44%)
- Europe = 11 (the only European country included in the OECD list is Moldova)
- Middle East = 7 (the only Middle Eastern country included in the OECD list is Yemen)
- Oceania = 30
- Central/South America & Caribbean = 12 (the only countries included on the OECD list from this region are Haiti – accounting for 11 of the 12 references – and Nicaragua just one)

- Possible factors behind attention trends

Although Asia and particularly Africa dominate the coverage in regional terms, attention is uneven as can be seen in Table 3 above e.g. West Africa receives very little attention compared to East, Southern Saharan and Southern Africa while the Indian subcontinent dominates the coverage of Asia. Several factors may explain this such as general global attention in the media, language spoken, media access or whether countries are particularly of Irish interest through Irish Aid, NGO or other links.

- Key news events

As noted, few countries apart from India receive consistent attention. Most countries tend to receive attention in ‘spikes’ relating to specific high profile news events and attention would

then tend to fall off substantially in the subsequent months. Some key news events or ‘spikes’, which triggered attention on some countries in the first six months of 2008 include:

- Pakistan – International attention focussed on the investigation into the assassination of Benazir Bhutto (Dec 07/Jan 08), pre-election crisis (Jan/Feb 08), post election analysis and government formation (Mar-Jun 08) and conflict on the border with Afghanistan (continuing).
- Kenya – Widespread coverage of post-election violence (Jan 08), talks and agreement (Feb/Mar 08), then attention fell away, apart from infrequent mentions to the then Democratic US Presidential nominee Barack Obama’s Kenyan family connections (Mar-Jun 08)
- Zimbabwe – Much coverage of pre- and post-election violence (Mar 08), the political stalemate following run-off (Jun 08) and humanitarian crisis (continuing)
- Burma – Cyclone Nargis (May 08)
- Chad – Deployment of Irish troops under EU mission (beginning Feb 08)
- Africa – Visit of Taoiseach Bertie Ahern (Jan 08)
- Nepal – Death of mountaineer Sir Edmund Hillary (Jan 08) & controversy over Cathal O’Searcaigh film² (Mar 08)

- Irish Aid countries - how do they fare?

The Irish Aid partner and bi-lateral aid recipient countries are actually among those least represented in the sample – in particular, Malawi, Lesotho and Sierra Leone are among the countries getting the least press attention. The exceptions are Zimbabwe and Vietnam, which do get significant attention, but it must be noted that none of the articles that mention these countries make reference to Irish Aid. Zimbabwe has dominated international news for some time, peaking during the six-month period of this research with world attention on the elections and the ongoing political and humanitarian crisis there and indeed on reaction from neighbouring countries. However, the articles referring to Vietnam mostly relate only to stories about the US Senator and 2008 Republican Presidential candidate John McCain (veteran of US-Vietnam war) and historical references to Vietnam in film culture in general. The rest of the countries getting least attention are probably simply off the international news agenda, due to lack of events of enough significance to trigger media interest.

² The feature documentary *Fairytale of Kathmandu* featured Nepal as location for the Irish poet’s frequent visits and charitable work, but the press coverage focussed almost exclusively on revelations on the nature of his relationships with young boys in the country.

- Does language matter?

Countries that receive most attention are generally Anglophone (India, Kenya, Pakistan, Zimbabwe), while those getting least coverage are mostly non-Anglophone (with the exception of Malawi and The Gambia). This reflects a common perception that these countries get more coverage perhaps because it is easier to source news there³. However, other factors such as Irish connections to these countries through charities and NGO organisations and their dominance on the world news agenda could also be responsible for this pattern. A detailed analysis of the production processes which bring each story from source right through to editorial and print would be required to establish whether this emphasis on Anglophone countries is due simply to expediency in the news production process, or whether it is due to other factors such as community links built up over time which are facilitated by ease of communication in English.

- Is the Irish angle important?

The vast majority of regional paper articles on developing countries have an Irish angle (96%) to their stories, which also tend to be focused on local issues. This trend possibly reflects the relationship regional newspapers have with their readers and editorial perceptions regarding readers’ interest in stories with particularly local links. A lower 46% of both daily and Sunday papers tend to have an Irish angle, which indicates a broader international news outlook in general but is still a significant trend. The kinds of links here range from the activities of Irish NGOs, Irish Defence forces, Irish business interests and individual citizens and their connections to developing countries. Irish political and aid related activities on the other hand represent a relatively low number of articles on developing countries with an Irish angle.

- Significant vs. incidental coverage:

The relevance of a country to the article – and the type of reference it gets – tells us about the depth of coverage - whether the reference is central to the article and detailed attention is paid to the country, or if it receives an incidental mention, perhaps along with a number of other countries in a region. The following table (4) illustrates the breakdown of articles across all newspapers according to the attention the country receives within the article:

Relevance to article overall	Dailies	Sundays	Regionals
Significant	47%	40%	43%
Minor	36%	38%	46%
Incidental	17%	22%	11%

Table 4: Relevance of reference to developing country to overall article

³ John Ryle, quoted in *Message Received* (Glasgow University Media Group), cites the ‘routine occurrence’ of journalists not speaking the language of a developing country being covered, something which would never happen in coverage of the ‘developed’ world.

[Note that from this point on in the report we use percentage figures in tables as a clearer illustration of trends, rather than the number of articles in the sample.]

The next table (5) indicates whether the reference was to the country ‘as location’ or only in relation to the nationality of citizens, whose activity is relevant to the story:

	Dailies	Sundays	Regionals
Location	83%	89%	86%
Nationality	17%	11%	14%

Table 5: Whether reference is to country as a location or as nationality of person

The results show that over half of all the articles were of only minor or incidental relevance to the country mentioned, although most articles did refer to a country ‘as location’ rather than simply as someone’s nationality.

- Why some developing countries might only get minor attention:

When more than one country is mentioned in an article, one country is often of major significance to the story while others are given minor or incidental reference as well. For example, in many articles several sub-Saharan African countries are given minor or incidental mention and often grouped together, reflecting a tendency to treat the region as a single zone in terms of explaining issues, in particular conflict.

An illustrative example is an article from January 2008⁴ where Kenya is of ‘major’ significance, but which also makes minor or incidental mention of Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Congo and Uganda, contrasting Kenya to its ‘failed’ and ‘ravaged’ neighbouring states (mostly in a paragraph beginning thus: “To compare...”). This kind of association reflects a tendency found in media coverage all over the world, described by Channel 4 News Foreign Editor Lindsey Hilsum as “a fundamental misconception about Africa – that it is all the same”⁵. Therefore, minor and incidental references to countries while perhaps amounting to a quantity of coverage, are important also in determining the quality of attention they receive, which in turn can produce a particular type of representation over time.

This does not necessarily suggest, however, that a country that receives more significant than incidental mentions gets more attention overall. For example, references to India are twice as likely to be ‘minor’ rather than ‘major’ or ‘incidental’. But in all the articles that mention East Timor, it was considered of ‘major’ significance. However, the sheer number of references to

⁴ “Cynicism and corruption at the root of Kenya's problems”, *The Sunday Business Post*, January 6, 2008.

⁵ From an interview cited in *Message Received*, ed. Greg Philo, Glasgow University Media Group, Longman 1999 (p.260 Chapter 14)

India over the time frame (218 articles) suggests greater attention overall than East Timor (with just 15 articles). The fact that so many references to India, though minor, are couched in similar terms, i.e. “the emerging market of India”⁶, but cover a wide range of topics, may serve to establish a more significant and persistent representation of that country which perhaps ‘normalises’ the country on the international news agenda over time. Coverage of East Timor on the other hand exclusively related to assassination attempts on the President and Prime Minister in February 2008.

Meanwhile, two thirds of the 41 articles on Nepal relate not to issues about the country itself, but to the controversial revelations about Irish poet Cathal O’Searcaigh in the feature documentary *Fairytale of Kathmandu*, released in March of 2008. A sizeable number of others relate to the death of explorer Sir Edmund Hillary in January 2008. This compares to just four articles across the sample that related to the abolition of monarchy and establishment of an elected parliament in Nepal, in April 2008. This illustrates how, although a country may get a large amount of attention, if the coverage is minor or incidental, a closer analysis of the topics may reveal it to be almost an accident of location rather than a specific locale of focus.

Finally, Bertie Ahern’s visit to Africa in January 2008 coincided with intense media interest in him relating to political and personal issues arising from the Mahon Tribunal. While spin off coverage may result from such official state visits, (because media outlets often put resources into sending reporters to cover the ‘Irish interest’ event), the focus here was on Ahern’s domestic political problems, not on coverage of the countries in question.

⁶ “Super wealthy likely to find that property doesn’t come cheap”, *The Irish Times*, April 24, 2008

4.2 Genre or format trends in coverage

The ‘genre’ results tell us what sections of the newspapers or in what format coverage of developing countries tends to appear, such as *News*, *Features*, *Opinion* etc. It can therefore give an indication of where newspapers are likely to give attention to the developing world – and indeed to specific countries – and how it is presented to readers e.g. in the thematic-rich genres that give more ‘colour’ to coverage such as editorial and commentary or the briefs and news reports which conform more to the more straight ‘factual’ styles of journalism. The following table (6) illustrates the genres in which articles appeared most frequently:

Dailies:	Sundays:	Regionals:
News = 47%	News = 25%	News = 62%
Sport = 14%	Features = 21%	Sport = 17%
Features = 10%	News feature = 17%	Opinion = 7%
Business = 9%	Opinion = 15%	News feature = 6%
Opinion = 7%	Sport = 14%	Letters = 4%
Letters = 5%	Business = 5%	Features = <1%
News feature = 4%	Letters = 2%	Editorial = <1%
Other = 2%	Other = <1%	Other = 0
Editorial = <0.5%	Editorial = <0.5%	Business = 0

Table 6: Frequency of format/genre of articles across newspaper types

Editorial was found to be the least common genre in dailies and Sundays and the second least common in regional papers. This is a significant finding, because a newspaper’s editorial is considered to reflect the operation of news values in the newspaper overall. Meanwhile *News* is the most common genre across all newspapers (43% of total) with *Sport* second in daily and regional papers and *Features* second in Sunday papers.

- Possible factors in the genre trends

The developing world appears to get little attention from editorial desks so is not considered an issue of policy importance. (However, it should be noted that editorials that discuss the developing world in a general sense, without mention of a specific country on our list, would not appear in the sample.) This, along with the prevalence of coverage within the *News* genre, points to a tendency for individual events or episodes to drive the amount and frequency of coverage of developing countries, rather than a longer-term view or ‘issue-driven’ approach. On the other hand, the attention given in *Sports* and *Features* indicate that these genres provide more potential for deeper coverage of developing countries, independent of the international news agenda.

The genre results for specific countries show some interesting trends. For example, while Chad gets most of its coverage in the ‘News’ section of the newspapers, a significant amount of coverage is also found in ‘Letters to the Editor’, which indicates a certain amount of engagement with the public, no doubt due to the involvement of the Irish military in

peacekeeping efforts. Meanwhile, the coverage of Haiti is split between ‘News’ and ‘Business’ sections of the newspapers, which indicates an economic slant to coverage, which if persistent over time, could set that country aside from other developing countries, which perhaps only get basic ‘News’ coverage. However, it is also related to a specific effort from the business community in Ireland to help develop sustainable industries in Haiti⁷.

- Article length

The ‘genre’ also dictates the average length of a relevant article to a certain extent (within the confines of the newspaper format and the kind of topics being covered), and it is notable to assess some trends here:

- The most common article size for the whole sample is between 201 and 500 words
- Sunday papers tend to have longer articles than daily and regional papers (e.g. 10 Sunday newspaper articles in the sample had over 2000 words), indicating that they are perhaps more likely to analyse issues and explore detailed background material
- Tabloid⁸ articles tend to be short in style (except in the genre of Sport, which accounts for the longest tabloid articles) and never go over 1500 words

4.3 The topics getting coverage:

Coding for topics gives us details on what kinds of stories are getting attention and what issues may receive more coverage than others. Articles were coded for up to four topics from a list of 22, based both on expected categories (e.g. conflict, immigration etc.) and others that emerged from the material (celebrity, climate change etc.) and included regional subcategories. For example, the topic of ‘Military activities’ has 6 variations – (Reference country), (Ireland), (US), (UN/NATO), (African Union) and (‘Other’). (See Appendix D for full list). The following table (7) illustrates the topics most frequently covered:

Most Frequent Topics	Dailies	Sundays	Regionals
Conflict	22%	21%	5%
Sport	16%	17%	12%
Politics (ref country)	15%	13%	8%
Private Sector/Business	9%	11%	-
Arts, Culture	9%	20%	15%
Politics (Ireland)	8%	8%	8%
Human Interest	8%	11%	10%
Irish NGO Activities	4%	3%	45%
Other – (table quiz results)	2%	4%	8%
Tourism/Travel	-	-	7%

Table 7: Most frequent topics across newspaper types

⁷ The Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year award 2008 was themed around Environmental Corporate Social Responsibility and included a CEO retreat to Haiti in June 2008 [See <http://www.ey.com> for more details]

⁸ ‘Tabloid’ here refers to *The Irish Star* and *The Sunday World* titles only – see discussion on tabloid vs. broadsheet coverage under 4.6 below

- Possible factors behind trends in topics covered:

The most common topic found in all daily and Sunday papers is ‘*Conflict*’, amounting to one fifth of the coverage, which probably reflects the major news value attached to conflict across the international media in general, as several research studies have found. In contrast, ‘*Conflict*’ is not at all common in regional papers (just 5%), which tend to focus more on ‘*Irish NGO activity*’, by far the most common topic in regional papers at 45%. This may be because a regional link can be generated more easily with NGO activity than with conflict issues in developing countries. This is illustrated by the following line opening a news article in a regional newspaper, which focuses on the results of conflict and how it connects to readers, rather than on the details of the conflict itself:

“The people of Kerry have been urged to dig deep in an effort to help alleviate the suffering of the people of Kenya.”⁹

The second most common topic for Sunday and regional papers is ‘*Arts/Culture*’ indicating more ‘soft news’ stories in the coverage than might have been anticipated. On a single day, coverage of India in the Sunday papers included a review of novels *The Elephanta Suite* by Paul Theroux¹⁰, *The Indian Clerk* by David Leavitt¹¹, a review of a radio documentary on ‘devidasi’ temple prostitutes¹² and an interview with actor Julie Christie¹³ who was born in India and whose renowned beauty caused the writer to recall:

“...a future Indian foreign minister being transported by the mere mention of her name...”

Meanwhile ‘*Sport*’ is second most common topic in dailies and third in the Sunday and regional papers. At first glance the country might appear to be less than relevant in sport articles, or stereotypical in representation. For example, of the 11 articles referencing Ethiopia, seven relate to long distance running, while six of 10 articles on Bangladesh are related to cricket. Meanwhile, all 11 articles on Togo are about Emmanuel Adebayor, a striker with Arsenal.

But there is some significant coverage within sport that covers other topics e.g. the murder of Olympic gold medallist Lucas Sang in the post election violence in Kenya in January 2008 which triggered further articles about the challenges facing international sports stars in some countries¹⁴. Meanwhile Ghana’s hosting of the Africa Cup of Nations in 2008 generated

⁹ “Kerry to extend hand of friendship to Kenya”, *The Kingdom*, January 17, 2008.

¹⁰ “India lumbers into new millennium in trio of tales” *Sunday Independent*, February 10, 2008

¹¹ “Nature of relationships explored”, *Sunday Business Post*, February 10, 2008

¹² “Radio review”, *Sunday Business Post*, February 10, 2008

¹³ “I wanted to be a hippie, not a film star”, *Sunday Independent*, February 10, 2008

¹⁴ “Bekele’s medals hide a past filled with tragedy”, *Sunday Tribune*, January 6, 2008

significant coverage not just of Ghana but of issues surrounding the attitudes of ‘Western’ football organisations to their African counterparts. This suggests that sports journalism can provide alternative avenues for coverage of developing countries, given the expectation from readers for detailed specialist information in this genre, usually generated outside the standard ‘news’ channels.

Meanwhile, ‘*Private Sector Business*’ accounts for about one tenth of all articles, a reflection perhaps of the economic focus evident within the Irish news media in general (at least in pre-recession times up until mid-2008), in relation both to globalisation and Irish economic interests e.g. several stories chart the progress of Tullow Oil’s Ngassa well in Uganda and Kenmare Resources’ Moma titanium mine in Mozambique.

A significant finding also is the lack of coverage of the ‘*Aid policy*’ topic in general, as distinct from humanitarian and charity aid activities. As noted earlier, coverage of Irish Aid related activities or aid policy discussion is notably absent, although again, articles which cover this topic but do not refer specifically to a country on our list would not be included in the sample.

4.4 The sources quoted in stories:

Details on who is being quoted and whose comments are reported are valuable as they tell us something about how stories might be generated or verified, or whose viewpoint or reaction is considered important or required from the newspaper's point of view. Indeed, it is worth noting whether any attributions are included in articles at all. Each article was coded for up to 11 sources, according to a list of 13 different categories of person or organisation, (again with regional options) developed for the analysis. Just over one third of all articles were found to include at least one quote, but quotes were more frequently found in the daily and Sunday newspapers (43% and 31% respectively) than the regional papers (just 18%). The following table (8) outlines the most frequently quoted sources from each of the newspaper types:

Top Quoted	Dailies (794 articles)	Sundays (240 arts.)	Regionals (21 arts.)
Total Gov Officials	17%	18%	5%
Gov Officials – Ref Country	10%	9%	-
Gov Officials – Ireland	4%	3%	5%
Gov Officials – UK	-	2%	-
Gov Officials – France	-	2%	-
Gov Officials – USA	3%	2%	-
Total Opposition Party	9%	9%	4%
Opposition party – Ref Country	9%	9%	-
Opposition Party – Ireland	-	-	4%
Total Private Citizens	15%	23%	34%
Private Citizens – Ref Country	9%	14%	10%
Private Citizens – Ireland	3%	6%	24%
Private Citizens - Other	3%	3%	-
Total NGO	10%	13%	34%
NGO – Ref Country	4%	5%	-
NGO – Ireland	-	3%	29%
NGO - International	6%	5%	-
NGO – EU	-	-	5%
Total Security/Military	4%	12%	5%
Security/Military – Ref country	4%	3%	-
Security/Military – Ireland	-	7%	5%
Security/Military – USA	-	2%	-
Other (by Nationality)			
Religious – Ireland	-	-	19%
Other - general			
Unspecified Groups	4%	6%	-
Diplomatic Corps	6%	3%	-
Public Sector	2%	1%	-
Research/Academic	2%	-	-
Rebel Group	2%	1%	-
Legal/Judiciary	4%	2%	-
Media	5%	4%	-
Other (Deposed King of Nepal)	<1%	-	-

Table 8: Most quoted sources – by category and nationality – across the newspaper types

- Possible factors behind trends in sources used:

These results show regional newspapers are less likely than daily or Sunday papers to include third party sources for stories. This possibly reflects differences in production and editorial styles, processes and budgets as much as patterns in the coverage of topics and countries. When the nationality of the source is the focus of analysis, the difference between newspaper types is even more pronounced – daily and Sunday papers are more likely to quote developing country nationals than regional newspapers, who tend to quote Irish nationals above all others, at a significant 86%. This reflects the ‘Irish/local’ angle so prevalent in regional newspaper articles.

Across all newspaper types, the categories of people most often quoted include *Government Officials*, *Private Citizens*, *NGO Representatives* and *Military sources* of all nationalities. On closer inspection, daily papers quote *Government Officials* more frequently than Sunday and regional papers, which incline more towards quotes from *Private Citizens*. Again news production factors most likely play a role – government, NGO and military sources can perhaps be relied upon to secure efficient, reliable and routine sources of news and viewpoints for the daily news desks and are regarded as authoritative and relatively objective. On the other hand, private citizens may be quoted to fulfil other more ‘feature’ criteria, for Sunday and regional papers, in fleshing out the story by including voices on the ground, for example:

*"They said that Kibaki stole the election and that they did not want to see any Kikuyus (Kibaki's ethnic group) in Kibera. They chased us away and took everything in the house."*¹⁵

[Anne Gathoni, 28 year old Kenyan single mother]

Meanwhile, the focus on NGOs (seen earlier in the topics) in the regional papers, is also strong in the sources used, where *NGO Representatives* (of any nationality) account for one third of all quotes, such as:

*" The funding we receive from this project will facilitate improved sanitation for children in Mutomo District in Kenya by building new latrines, replacing sub standard latrines and promote hygiene education for staff and students."*¹⁶

[Ronan Scully of GOAL]

¹⁵ "Kenya's poor pay for failure of politics", *Sunday Independent*, January 6, 2008

¹⁶ "Balla native takes to the boxing ring in fundraiser", *Western People*, February 6, 2008

The *Religious* also account for a significant 19% of quotes in the regional papers. This may reflect the fact that the *Religious* hold a similar position to *NGO* representatives with charity-related activities. Overall *NGO* sources, combined with the *Religious*, account for over half the quotes in the regional papers. These trends suggest it would be useful to carry out further analysis on the nature of the quotes and the topics most likely to include coverage of input and reaction from *NGOs* across all the newspaper types. This would give an even more detailed picture of where *NGOs* achieve success or otherwise in getting developing countries on the newspaper agenda.

Finally, the space given to quotes from *Media* in the daily and Sunday papers is notable. This comprises sources in both ‘state’ and independent media outlets in the developing countries as well as international media organisations. Further analysis of trends here might highlight where developing countries are gaining international attention through their own local media voice, or where ownership and control of media tell another story.

4.5 Authors – who is writing about the developing world?

Details on who wrote an article give a sense of where information and stories on developing countries are coming from, whether it is original copy generated in-house or paid for through wire or freelance services, or indeed whether articles are being attributed at all. The following table (9) illustrates some of the key figures from the findings:

Author Type	Dailies	Sundays	Regionals
Not attributed	50%	39%	91%
Wire services or Syndicated articles from US/UK	9%	7%	-
Staff desk/office sources (may include stringers/freelancers/columnists)	24%	43%	4%
Total ‘on location’ in reference country	8%	4%	-
Total from other non- in house sources	8%	7%	-
Total <i>NGO</i> authored	2%	1%	2%
Total letters (private citizens)	3%	<1%	2%

Table 9: Most frequently given by-lines

Over half of the articles from all papers were not attributed to any writer and regional newspapers were least likely to give by-lines at all, except for regular columnists and letter writers. Of those articles with a by-line (mostly dailies and Sundays), the majority were attributed to ‘desk’ journalists at 61% (staff or freelance), compared with 18% for wire or syndicated services and 15% for ‘on location’ writers. Guest writers and letter writers accounted for a further 16% of stories overall. Authors with *NGO* connections account for 2% of articles overall.

- Possible factors behind trends in by-lines

These results must be qualified by the kind of information available from LexisNexis – some newspapers are more consistent than others in giving by-lines and storing that information electronically. It is possible that those counted as ‘not attributed’ in this analysis may have had a by-line in the print version. But a large proportion of articles without by-lines are also short news items. Therefore, it is likely that they may not have had a by-line at all as these briefs often go unattributed. It is also relatively common for newspapers – conscious of appearing over reliant on bought-in copy – not to strictly adhere to agreements to attribute stories to wire services, which may account for some of those not given by-lines.

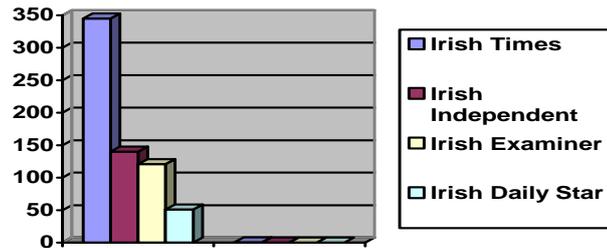
Newspapers do not always distinguish for the reader between staff journalists (who produce copy for their own title only), freelancers (who can produce for anyone) and ‘stringers’ (freelancers with an agreement to provide regular copy from a particular location to the newspaper in question) when giving by-lines. Again perhaps news editors wish to appear to be well resourced internally. Irish papers no longer maintain permanent correspondents in the field to the extent held previously apart from the *Irish Times* which does have ‘roving correspondents’ for stories from other countries. Therefore, the ‘on location’ by lines and a significant proportion of ‘staff desk’ sources could also be assumed to be almost totally freelance/stringer produced copy. Taken overall, this means that possibly only 15-20% of the coverage of developing countries in Irish newspapers is produced in-house.

4.6 Breakdown of coverage across newspaper types

In general, the daily and Sunday newspapers followed relatively similar patterns of coverage across countries, genres and topics while regional newspapers gave quite different results as seen earlier. In relation to individual newspaper titles, some differences also appear:

- *The Irish Times* accounted for over half of the daily newspaper coverage (53%) while *The Sunday Independent* led coverage in the Sunday newspapers (37%), indicating that these titles perhaps commit more attention to international news coverage
- The 22 regional newspapers had a varied spread of coverage – the two with most coverage were the *Western People* (Co. Mayo) and *The Kingdom* (Co. Kerry) and those with least coverage were *The Argus*, *The Corkman*, *The Drogheda Independent* and *The Kildare Nationalist*.

Dailies:	No.	%
Irish Times	345	53%
Irish Independent	140	21%
Irish Examiner	121	18%
Irish Daily Star	51	8%
Total Dailies	657	



Sundays:	No.	%
Sunday Independent	84	37%
Sunday Business Post	61	27%
Sunday Tribune	59	26%
Sunday World	24	10%
Total Sundays	228	

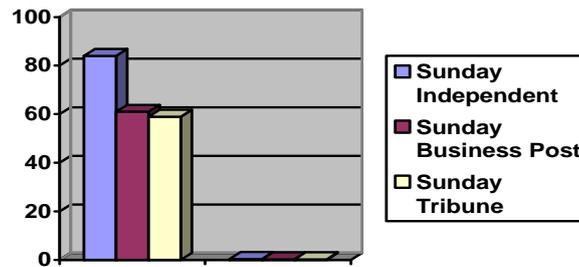


Table 10: No. of articles for analysis across news paper types (Daily & Sunday)

- Is there a ‘Tabloid’ vs. ‘Broadsheet’ dimension to the coverage?

This research grouped the daily, Sunday and regional newspapers together for coding and analysis as there are accepted and easily defined differences between these newspaper types. The term ‘tabloid’¹⁷ however is a more subjective label. However, two newspapers in the sample are widely perceived as ‘tabloid’ publications – *The Star* (Daily) and *The Sunday World* (Sunday) – and show some differences from the daily and Sunday broadsheets in terms of coverage in several respects.

These tabloid newspapers represent a higher readership than their broadsheet counterparts but register the lowest level of coverage of developing countries overall across both daily and Sunday papers (8% and 10% respectively). They do present a more even spread of countries in the coverage however, which could indicate more interest in the details of a story than in location or in necessarily following trends in international coverage. ‘Crime’ emerges as the most dominant topic in tabloid coverage, followed by ‘Human Interest’ and ‘Sport’, but this reflects general trends in all tabloid coverage, whether relating to Ireland, developing countries or elsewhere. Most references to developing countries are either major or minor with very few incidental mentions, possibly because of the more direct style of tabloid writing, which does not have the requirement for deep background that can lead broadsheet writers to augment articles with incidental references to other locations as a descriptive tool.

¹⁷ The term ‘tabloid’ actually refers to the physical description of the newspaper size – half the broadsheet size – however, in public discourse the meaning of ‘tabloid’ has connotations relating to type and quality of coverage.

In conclusion:

Overall, the quantitative analysis has shown that coverage follows some expected trends but also shows some surprising patterns, with major differences between regional and daily/Sunday newspapers.

As expected, Africa and, to a lesser extent, Asia dominate the coverage of the developing world as regions. But attention is uneven and definitely leans towards countries where English is spoken and where events pique world media interest, particularly because of conflict, political and humanitarian struggles and not necessarily due to Irish interests. However, India dominates the coverage as a country simply due to the variety of stories in which it appears, even with minor relevance, consistently over time.

Coverage most frequently appears in the *News* section of papers, but *Sport*, *Features* and *Business* present significant areas for more detailed and nuanced analysis. Developing countries get little or no attention from *Editorials* however, suggesting that regardless of the international news agenda, the value attached to coverage of these countries is considered of low priority by newspapers in general. Most of the coverage of developing countries in Ireland is generated from external sources – through wire and syndicated services or freelance/stringer journalists on location – with very little produced in-house, indicating again that providing resources for such coverage is a low priority.

The regional newspapers cover developing countries in a different way, mostly due to the necessity for a local angle, which appears to be served through emphasis on stories about Irish NGO activities and personalities connected to the local readership, rather than on conflict. And the regional papers tend not to quote sources in articles at all unless a local link is established. The Irish angle is less important to daily and Sunday newspapers, which are more likely to quote sources – both official and civilian – from the developing country itself. But the Irish angle is still served through stories involving both national military, organisational and individual interests. However, Irish overseas aid or development policy issues are not a feature of the coverage. Indeed some of the Irish aid countries are among those getting least attention from the coverage overall.

Continued

So far our analysis has detailed the attention given to developing countries in Irish newspapers in terms of volume, properties and characteristics of the coverage. But what is the nature of that coverage in terms of the representations of the developing world being portrayed? The next phase of analysis involves the qualitative aspects of the sample, which were appraised for the tone conveyed and the themes that emerge from the overall coverage when these aspects are considered.

5. RESEARCH FINDINGS – Thematic analysis

The qualitative data gathered in this analysis concerns the tone of coverage and the representations portrayed of developing countries through themes that emerge from the sample as a whole. Coding and analysing qualitative data is seen as a more subjective process than that required for quantitative data, which is more readily objectively verified. Therefore, the data in this research was subjected to further ‘reliability testing’, where a second researcher coded a proportion of the sample separately to ensure consistency, clarity and reliability particularly in the qualitative results achieved, to indicate that the average coder would read and code a sample article in the same way to give broadly the same results. The reliability testing indicated over 75% agreement, which is within the acceptable range for content analysis.

5.1 The tone of the coverage:

The **overall tone** of the discourses surrounding the countries in our sample was coded as positive, negative or neutral – an important feature as it tells us how much of the coverage could be regarded as ‘positive’, ‘neutral’ or ‘negative’ news. This is an important investigation, as it is a widely held perception that most media coverage of the developing world is “negative”. This analysis focused on discerning the extent to which newspaper items displayed overtly positive or negative tones. In cases, where such tones were not discerned, the newspaper item was coded as evidencing a “neutral” tone.

A negatively toned article could include descriptions like, “women forced out of homes... lost children... young girls used as sex slaves... boys forced to become child soldiers... etc.”¹⁸, and is relatively straightforward to code. At least a third of all articles across the newspaper types were coded as ‘negative’ in orientation. Overtly positive descriptions were, by contrast, very thin on the ground with very few articles of the ‘good news’ variety (dailies 3%, Sundays 2%, regionals just 1%). The majority of articles were considered “neutral” in tone towards the reference country (dailies 61%, Sundays 62%, regionals 69%). No positively orientated articles appeared in the two tabloid newspapers assessed, which were almost evenly divided between negative and neutral representations.

Tone is of course closely related to the topic being reported – the dominance of ‘Conflict’ in the coverage is certainly linked to the negatively oriented stories, while those that were coded

¹⁸ All found in the article “Seeds of hope” by Des Ekin in *The Sunday World*, April 13, 2008 – despite the headline, the article painted a predominantly negative picture of life in Uganda save for the efforts of some NGO organisations.

as positive tended to be linked to the topics of ‘Politics/Reference Country’ (many reporting successful initiatives such as Pakistan’s relatively peaceful election process) and ‘Tourism’ (support for Kenya’s major industry in the wake of political unrest), with some relating to ‘Culture’ and ‘Private Sector Business’ also. But whether the developing world gets more negatively orientated representation than elsewhere is a separate question. Recent research suggests that the maxim that ‘bad news sells’¹⁹ appears to be true across the board, regardless of the particular topic or location. Our research however, indicates that a ‘neutral’ standpoint appears to dominate coverage of developing countries. Either way, it is an issue that requires comparative analysis of coverage of all countries, regardless of their state of development.

The tone of an article is also closely related to an article’s thematic representations and the following discussion focuses on trends that emerged in these representations across all of the sampled newspapers.

5.2 Thematic analysis of coverage

All articles in the sample were subjected to a thematic analysis, which aimed to ascertain the kind of representations that emerge from the coverage. Therefore, this analysis looked beyond the basic descriptive content of an article, and instead focused explicitly on uncovering some of the more subjective and latent meanings embedded within the text, including representations, themes, depictions, stereotypes and symbolic or metaphoric elements.

A wide-ranging reading of literature on the developing world, including general media coverage, was undertaken in conjunction with this newspaper qualitative analysis. This helped to identify the range of possible themes that define media coverage of the developing world. A list of thirteen different categories of themes was then constructed, which are outlined as follows:

- 1) **“Helping Hand/White Man’s Burden”**: This theme places an emphasis on the requirement for aid, expressed as a moral or historical obligation, depicted in particular through the efforts of the “selflessly involved...in relieving suffering”
- 2) **“Basket Case/Inferior Other”**: This theme was identified in the coverage through the frequent use of terms like ‘corrupt’ nations, ‘failed states’, despotic leaders & their ‘cronies’. It also includes post-colonial discourses of ‘othering’.

¹⁹ Roy Greenslade citing a Pew Research Center study on news trends in *The Guardian*, September 4, 2007, available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/greenslade/2007/sep/04/thegoodnewsaboutbadnews>

- 3) **“Ireland’s ‘Special Position’”**: This theme places emphasis on Ireland’s reputed understanding of poverty, shared famine history, unique ability to help etc.
- 4) **“Behind the Veil”**: This theme was identified in the coverage in the focus on cultural issues in Islam, contrasted with or coming from a ‘Western’ or Christian perspective.
- 5) **“Conflict Culture”**: This theme places emphasis on conflict, implying its endemic nature with the use of ‘tribal’, ‘ethnic’ descriptors and a tendency to group nations together in regional ‘spill over’.
- 6) **“Emerging Markets”**: This theme was identified in the coverage as an economic or globalisation outlook, with comparative descriptions to ‘developed world’, a relatively positive theme frequently applied to India, China, Brazil etc.
- 7) **“Compassion Fatigue”**: This theme refers to a lack of interest by “western” publics in development issues as a result of saturated media coverage and was identified in the coverage as a tendency to present a ‘donor’ viewpoint, questioning aims of development or emphasising ‘bogus/scam’ or corruption stories from developing countries
- 8) **“Fair Deal?”**: This theme was identified from the coverage as a social justice angle, examining causes of underdevelopment, raising aid vs. trade issues, giving voice to a viewpoint which is not necessarily ‘victim’ or ‘recipient’ orientated
- 9) **“War on Terror”**: A theme identified from the coverage as centred on US foreign policy and military issues
- 10) **“Our Dumb World”**: This theme was identified from the coverage as a satirical outlook on media attitudes to the developing world [See *The Onion*²⁰]
- 11) **“Women & Children First”**: This theme places emphasis on victims and suffering, with a notable absence of men in the story presented.
- 12) **“Compare & Contrast”**: This theme describes the use of a developing country as metaphor for negative but unrelated local issue – e.g. Irish Health service called ‘Angola’ etc. – and was identified in the coverage
- 13) **“Us & Them”**: This theme emphasises cultural differences, contrasts and similarities, both light-hearted and the more serious.

Further detail on the identification of themes in articles is contained in the codebook (see Appendix D).

²⁰ The satirical online publication *The Onion* publishes a fake world atlas, which satirises typical media representations of the world and in particular, developing countries – available at <http://www.theonion.com/content/atlas/>

- What are the dominant themes in the coverage?

Over 40% of all articles were found to contain at least one of these themes. Of those, ‘*Basket Case*’ appeared to be the most common theme across all newspaper types, indicating and emphasis on comparative lack of development in these countries or ‘failure’ of policies, government, structures, states and so on, particularly when giving background details to a story. For example, “endemic political corruption and flawed governance by Kenya's political elites”, was behind the post-election violence, according to one commentator²¹. The use of such broad descriptive terms is similar to those repeated widely throughout the sample in relation to a variety of countries, particularly Burma and Zimbabwe (see ‘themes by country’ below). It may be a fair assessment of the situation, but this kind of discourse can also lead to a reduction of context and background detail. With repetition, this can contribute to oversimplification of what are in fact more diverse issues facing different developing countries. At its extreme, this theme presents a ‘hopeless case’ picture – attributing the causes of underdevelopment in a particular country to endemic problems potentially beyond repair.

‘*Conflict Culture*’ and ‘*Helping Hand*’ are the next most common themes. However, on closer analysis there are again marked differences between the patterns of daily and Sunday newspapers compared to regional papers. The ‘*Basket Case*’ and ‘*Conflict Culture*’ themes are found in 40% of articles in the daily and Sunday newspapers, but ‘*Conflict Culture*’ is significantly lower in the regional papers at just 2%. However, the ‘*Helping Hand*’ theme dominates regional papers at 40%, possibly reflecting the trend noted earlier in the low level of reporting of conflict but a high level of focus on NGO activities with an Irish/local angle. A local angle is more likely to be connected to fallout from conflict rather than directly to the conflict itself, so this becomes the story for regional papers and therefore dominates the themes that emerge.

Across the whole sample, the ‘*Women & Children First*’ theme appears most frequently as a secondary theme along with ‘*Helping Hand*’ and, while not so frequent in the dailies and Sundays, is the second most dominant theme in the regional papers. The focus on victims and descriptions of suffering serves to reinforce the ‘responsibility’ angle of ‘*Helping Hand*’ themed articles, and notably, tends to arise in articles about NGO activities or those written by or with quotes sourced from NGO representatives. This indicates that NGOs play a part in circulating this particular representation of the developing world, as requiring outside help sought through appeals to readers’ emotions – perhaps not surprising considering the role NGOs play, in both the ‘developing’ and ‘developed’ world.

²¹ “Cynicism and corruption at the root of Kenya's problems”, *Sunday Business Post*, January 6, 2008

- Themes and the attribution of responsibility for the causes of or solutions to problems

The dominance of ‘*Conflict Culture*’ and ‘*Basket Case*’ themes indicate a tendency to focus on the causes of a problem, usually assigning it to something internal or endemic in the culture, of the country or region in question, as noted in coverage of Kenya. The ‘endemic problem’ perspective tends to use shorthand to attribute causes of such problems to contemporary personalities and events, rather than looking at deeper structural and historical causes. This is perhaps why development policy issues and social justice approaches get less attention. Fundraising and humanitarian intervention issues are easier to cover – they suit journalistic orientations and news agendas and grab readers through a human-interest angle.

The dominant theme of ‘*Helping Hand*’ in the regional newspaper coverage however, tends to be associated with emphasis on possible ‘solutions’, with an Irish or local viewpoint on where the potential for help lies, rather than paying attention to causes. The emphasis in ‘*Emerging Markets*’ themed stories on the other hand, is overtly on the potential outward contribution of a developing country to the world economy but can include the threat or ‘negative’ impact this may have (e.g. on ‘western’ labour markets) rather than emphasising the inward benefits that might accrue to the country in question.

Depending on who writes an article and who or what is quoted in what order, issues and events can therefore be ‘framed’ in relation to possible cause and effect or responsibility for issues in question. This positions the developing world in a relationship dependent one way or another on the ‘developed’ world, not only to report on but also to assess solutions to the ‘problems’.

- Trends in themes and countries:

Some countries are more consistently represented in terms of themes while others receive more straightforward coverage. Of the top listed countries, those most likely to appear themed and the most common themes recurring with them are:

- Burma/Myanmar – ‘*Basket Case*’ and ‘*Helping Hand*’:
These themes were particularly prevalent in the wake of Cyclone Nargis in May 2008. Coverage of this disaster mainly focused on the refusal of Burmese/Myanmar authorities to allow ‘western’ aid agencies into the region, placing NGO activities and sources at the centre of the issue and closely relating them to themes which present a representation of a country requiring external help and ‘crazy’ not to accept it.

- Zimbabwe – *'Basket Case'*:
Statistics on inflation, references to its historical wealth and stability and detailed depictions of the actions, lifestyle and 'attitude' of Mugabe and his 'cronies' contributed to the theme that most frequently emerged in stories on the continuing political crisis in the former 'bread basket of Africa'.
- Afghanistan – *'War on Terror'*:
US, NATO and UN perspectives dominate the coverage of Afghanistan, which often received only minor or incidental mention behind Iraq and other US foreign policy issues, or as the subject of film and literature as mentioned earlier.
- Chad – *'Ireland's Special Position' & 'Conflict Culture'*:
Irish military involvement and leadership of the EUFor initiative provided topic, source and often author (in the form of present and former military personnel) in relation to coverage of Chad. The complexity of the conflict took a back seat to the importance of the Irish contribution in the daily papers, while the Sunday papers emphasised the regional 'spill over' effect on the character of the conflict.
- Pakistan – *'War on Terror'*:
Despite significant political events internal to the country's own governance, the dominant perspective in many stories on Pakistan related to it as an 'ally' on US foreign policy interests in the region, particularly with regard to 'spill over' from Afghanistan.
- Kenya – *'Conflict Culture'*:
Most of the coverage related to the post-election violence expressed it as 'ethnic', 'tribal' and endemic to the region, as noted above, contributing to this overall depiction.

India, although the top listed country throughout the whole sample, was not frequently the subject of articles with themes. However, the themes that are associated are more positively orientated, such as *'Emerging Markets'*, which appeared in over 50% of the articles on India. It should be noted that as of November 2008, India is no longer on the OECD list of low-income countries having moved to a middle-income category.

The countries most frequently themed in regional papers articles are Moldova, Ghana, Ethiopia and Zambia where the *'Helping Hand'* theme dominates – a reflection again of the emphasis on NGO and charity activities in these locations, through local connections.

- *Thematic trends in storylines*

The prevalence of conflict in news reporting probably lies behind the most common theme appearing in this area of *'Conflict Culture'*. And daily newspaper articles were much more likely to contain the *'Conflict Culture'* theme than Sunday papers. Meanwhile many stories

relating to political issues in developing countries involve the theme of '*Basket Case*'. Meanwhile, stories about NGO activities were most likely to contain themes in the regional papers, with '*Helping Hand*' the most frequent. Finally, and not surprisingly perhaps, stories on business and economics were dominated by the '*Emerging Markets*' theme. While portraying a more positive and autonomous image of developing world, this theme is still associated with a 'developed world' perspective, comparing notes as it were.

5.3 The possible factors behind thematic trends

Overall, the quality of coverage of developing countries is varied but follows definite patterns closely related to the characteristics of individual articles, the editorial styles of different newspaper types and to the 'agendas' that may be circulated through coverage via the sources, authors and topics of focus. This finding shows that while representations of the developing world may be the result of discourses expressed literally in the text itself, they can also emerge as a result of the structures of newspaper production in general. This is particularly manifested in the thematic trends that have emerged:

- The impact of newspaper formats on thematic trends

Themes that tend to simplify or stereotype developing countries seem more likely to emerge where there is pressure for time and space, such as in daily news articles. The frequency of updates in covering continuing stories (political, conflict or otherwise), the use of comparative techniques to explain complex issues and the shorter word count of the average daily news article can contribute to a conflation of context and background. Pithy descriptive turns of phrase, while an efficient use of scarce column inches, appear to allow themes like '*Conflict Culture*' and '*Basket Case*' to emerge more easily. Whereas the more breadth and background provided in the coverage, the more nuanced the representation of developing countries is likely to be, as is the case in longer feature articles common in Sunday newspapers, focussing on issues and subjects over time rather than episodes or events.

As can be seen, the most visible trend in the results is the difference between regional and daily/Sunday newspapers but the two tabloid newspapers also record important differences. While it was not possible to include the full range of tabloid titles available in Ireland in this study, the two analysed (*The Star* and *The Sunday World*) represent significant numbers of readers (far more than some of their broadsheet competitors) and can be considered relatively representative of the type.

Over 60% of tabloid articles contained themes compared to an average of just 40% in the broadsheets. This may again be attributed to editorial style as tabloid articles tend to be

shorter, the structure of articles more uncomplicated and the tone more direct. Opinions tend to be more strongly expressed in plain language, with liberal use of comparative description, resulting in further reduction of complexity. The most common themes again include ‘*Conflict Culture*’ and ‘*Basket Case*’, but ‘*Us & Them*’ also emerges strongly, particularly in short light humour stories. However, the ‘othering’ in operation here is overt and mostly of the “aren’t they funny?” kind, rather than a subconscious stigmatisation of the developing world. It may equally be found in similar kinds of stories in tabloid papers about people in Germany, Alaska or the UK.

- The role of ‘agendas’ in thematic trends

This research explicitly does not seek to analyse the agendas behind or the impact of coverage on readers - it is purely a record and analysis of what was printed during the cycle of the sample. However, it does suggest that ‘interests’ may be communicated through the coverage and in some cases appear to shape representations of the developing world. This is particularly evident in the dominance of NGO perspectives in the coverage from regional newspapers in relation to a number of different countries or US foreign policy perspectives in relation to Afghanistan and Pakistan. And even in the daily and Sunday papers, some of the more graphically negative descriptions of problems in developing countries leading to the themes of ‘*Conflict Culture*’, ‘*Basket Case*’ and ‘*Women & Children First*’ can be traced back to NGO sources or authors.

- The impact of changing news events on thematic shifts

The research shows that as events and stories evolve through different phases the representation of a country or region can shift over time. The impact of such developments on media thematic representations is particularly notable when tracing some political stories. For example, comparing the coverage of pre-election Pakistan to post-election Pakistan shows the following:

- Pre-election – The coverage of the investigation into the Bhutto assassination, subsequent political crisis, the threat of violence, civil unrest and so on, frequently included themes of ‘*Conflict culture*’, ‘*Basket Case*’, ‘*Behind the veil*’ etc.
- Post-election – A fair vote, relatively little violence and a sense of normality resuming saw few themes appearing in the coverage, which mostly focused on details about political horse-trading, portraying Pakistan as a run of the mill ‘democracy’ – perhaps regarded as a dull news outcome.

Similarly, comparing coverage of Kenya post-election to Kenya post-agreement talks shows the following:

- Post-election – The coverage of ‘tribal’ violence, the political stand off and threat to democracy and so on, included themes of ‘*Conflict culture*’, ‘*Basket Case*’, ‘*Helping Hand*’
- Post political agreement – Conciliation, shared power, again a sense of normality resuming resulted in few themes appearing in the coverage. Once more, details about political horse-trading dominated coverage along with a shift towards representing Kenya as fatherland of then US Presidential nominee Barack Obama.

This is also indicative of the trend for news reporting to be event-orientated or ‘episodic’ rather than focussing on long-range issues or processes, as has been noted in other studies. A more detailed thematic analysis focussing on some specific stories and countries could illustrate trends such as these more clearly.

6. FURTHER DISCUSSION

The results of this analysis are qualified by a number of conditions, not least of which are the relationships between the frequency of reference to certain countries, individual news events and general trends in coverage. Although the sample was large in terms of the time frame and the number of sources analysed, and is therefore statistically significant, a similar sample taken at a different six month time period would no doubt produce slightly different results for some variables. Analysis of this data therefore must acknowledge where such differences may appear.

When looking at attention trends during our six-month time frame, we noted how key news events create ‘spikes’ in the levels of coverage given to some countries. While the second half of 2008 perhaps continued with similar levels of coverage for some (e.g. Zimbabwe, Pakistan), others moved away from the headlines (e.g. Burma) in favour of countries who received little if any coverage in our sample from the first six months, for example:

- The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) received significant coverage from October 2008 onwards, relating to conflict and a humanitarian crisis that, according to several sources, had been escalating for months and continuing over years. However, the DRC received just 2 mentions in the sample for this study for the first half of 2008, neither of which were specific to conditions in the country itself, but rather were stories generic to the region
- India’s predominantly positive coverage in the results may have been diluted considerably if the terrorist attacks in Mumbai had taken place earlier in the year and would possibly have contained more of the ‘*Basket Case*’ and ‘*War on Terror*’ themes than just ‘*Emerging Markets*’

And also as noted earlier, countries such as India and Cape Verde no longer appear on the list of countries for analysis, having improved their status to move out of the lowest standards for ‘developing country’ definition, according to the OECD. Indeed further analysis of the coverage of those countries that do ‘improve’ their status - or those that deteriorate - could highlight other patterns of coverage worthy of attention.

6.1 Seasonality

There is a possible ‘seasonal’ trend in some genres of coverage e.g. Sport, which would account for peaks and troughs in coverage of certain countries and topics and associated themes. In fact, seasonality became the issue in some of the non-sport reporting of the Africa

Cup of Nations. Some European football club managers called for a change to the time of year the ACN is held – to European summer time – in order to keep African players available for European cup season, despite the fact that temperatures at this time in many African countries would make grass conditions a challenge and play highly uncomfortable.

Other topics such as NGO activities might also be seen to follow certain seasonal patterns, such as the run up to peak fundraising periods in Ireland such as Christmas and Easter as well as being triggered by crises. Meanwhile, there can even be a seasonal element to conflict as seen in Chad where the rainy season ‘suspended’ action on the ground and hindered military activity for a time, changing the nature of coverage as a result.

Finally, the Northern/Southern hemisphere climactic differences account for different governmental, administrative and academic seasons, which may have an impact on timing of events in developing countries and news flows into Ireland and elsewhere. This kind of seasonal analysis may be beneficial to our understanding of developing world coverage, but would require a focused investigation under this heading into specific topics over a longer period of time.

6.2 NGO attention vs. overseas development policy coverage

Several significant trends emerged in this study in relation to the coverage of NGO activities, particularly in the regional papers. This contrasts with the low level of attention given to general overseas development policy, in particular with issues or activities relating to Irish Aid. It would be useful to carry out further analysis on the nature of the coverage of input and reaction from NGOs across all newspaper types, through reports on the activities of, quotes from and even articles written by NGO representatives. This would give us an even more detailed picture of the impact of NGOs in comparison to governmental initiatives in getting developing countries onto newspaper agendas.

6.3 Future Research

The detailed data generated for this content analysis allows for further scrutiny of any of the countries, topics, genres, themes or other variables of interest, but could also serve as the basis for further qualitative studies on a number of issues as noted above.

A further addition to the overall research topic would be an overview of the online sources used in Ireland for international coverage, to give a complete picture of all the media sources available to Irish citizens on the developing world.

However, the next step following this study is to seek a picture of the nature of coverage of developing countries in the broadcast media in Ireland. Such detailed content analysis as outlined above for print media is not yet feasible due to the physical and logistical constraints of text searching in broadcast formats. However, we have conducted a survey of the ‘off air’ materials available to ascertain some of the more basic features of broadcast coverage of the developing world while illustrating how coverage may differ from the print media, and highlighting some of the features unique to radio and television delivery formats.

[See ‘Broadcast report’ March 2009]