

PECOJON: Building A Peace Journalists' Network from the Ground – Challenges and Lessons Learned¹

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Articles, manuals, books and training courses on peace journalism now abound internationally, but after journalists are trained—then, what?

Since peace journalism as a discipline essentially challenges the main assumptions, paradigms and practices of traditional journalism, many of those who attempt to practice peace journalism in their field are met with opposition, not just from individuals and groups but from the entire media system itself.

For peace journalism to be sustainable, those who have been trained in the field need to band together for support in furthering their professional growth, engaging in mutually helpful exchanges and building solidarity as they jointly work towards implementing peace journalism in the mainstream.

This was the driving force that motivated a motley group of journalists and communications educators and professionals who were trained in basic peace journalism in Bacolod City, Philippines in late 2004, to form The Peace and Conflict Journalism Network (PECOJON). Today, the Network has grown into a number of national and international networks, with around 250 members in the Philippines, and 165 members from 15 countries worldwide.

This paper details the growth and development of this Network, with emphasis on the real-life challenges faced in the struggle to practice and mainstream peace journalism on the ground, and the subsequent lessons learned and improvements made. This paper also discusses reflections on the PECOJON experience and its implications to the bigger challenge of sustainability for peace journalism in the world, in the context of this Conference's theme.

Journalism in the Philippines

Perceived as one of the “freest and least fettered in all Asia” when it comes to the field of journalism (Florentino-Abad, 1998: 77), the Philippines also ranks as the second (to Iraq) most dangerous place for journalists to work and live in because of the number of journalists killed in the line of duty. Since the restoration of democracy after the ouster of dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1986 and as of 2006, eighty-one journalists have already been killed in the conduct of their work (International Federation of Journalists, 2005). In President Gloria

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Macapagal-Arroyo's administration alone, 33 have been killed in the line of duty (Chua, 2008).

As generally understood, the concept of press freedom in the Philippines emphasizes the creation and maintenance of an environment where media practitioners are able to function with relative freedom and with minimum frustrations. It has not yet coagulated in the public consciousness that it also includes the protection of the people's right to know (Rosario-Braid, 1993: 1).

This concept as it is publicly understood has become both a boon and a bane.

It has become a boon in the sense that it has encouraged a proliferation of media in the country and even the tacit recognition of media as a power to reckon with, especially after media played a key role in bringing about the People Power Revolution of 1986.

By the early 1990s, media infrastructure is well-developed, with 303 radio stations nationwide, 77 television stations, 353 publications and 1007 cinema houses in a country of around 80 million people. However, 66% of all publications are in Metro Manila and in the English language. Also, all five of the originating network television stations are based in Metro Manila. Seventy-two of the television stations serve as relay stations with 95% of their programs sourced from the Manila-based originating stations. There also exist community media and complementary media (blackboard newspapers, audio cassettes, theater and puppet shows), especially in the rural areas, but they are not able to become effective catalyzers of public opinion due to severe lack of financial, technical and adequately-trained human resources (Rosario-Braid, 1993: 2).

Radio still has the widest reach at 78 percent of households, with television at around 40 percent, and newspapers reaching only 22 percent of households (Rosario-Braid, 1993: 2). By the late 1990s, there were already 448 radio stations nationwide (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1999).

It has become a bane in the sense that despite laws, regulations and published codes of ethics for the responsible conduct of the media, in actual practice, almost anybody can just become a so-called "journalist" overnight, especially in the radio industry. There is a standing insider anecdote among radio practitioners, who refer to these overnight journalists as "vinegar journalists"—they were sent by their mothers to buy vinegar at the neighborhood store but go back home as journalists, reporting to everyone who cares to hear the tidbits of information they heard on the way and back.

Koop, currently PECOJON's international coordinator, in her unpublished graduate thesis, "Analysis of the Work Environment of Filipino Journalists as Basis for the Revision of the Peace Journalism Theory and Recommendations for its Implementation" (2006) points out that given the highly-developed media infrastructure in the Philippines, "the lack of access to high quality information might not be a result of a quantitative limitation but of the quality of information disseminated." Her thesis hypothesizes that there might be a need to update the original Peace Journalism Theory as developed by Galtung and Ruge (1965) and Lynch and

McGoldrick (2005), among others, with the different working conditions and challenges faced by Filipino journalists, since the original theory was geared more for international media and from a European perspective.

Citing an International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) special report, “A Dangerous Profession: Press Freedom Under Fire in the Philippines” (IFJ, 2005), she explains that in the Philippines, most journalists learn their skills on the job and have a disturbingly glaring lack of knowledge and background in media ethics:

Not fully understanding their roles and responsibilities, journalists unwittingly allow themselves to be used as propaganda instruments by some sectors, or aggressively try to address problems they identify without adequate preparation. This aggressive reporting not only endangers the journalists but also blocks positive developments in the country. (Koop, 2006)

This is substantiated by the groundbreaking study of journalists by journalists, *News for Sale: The Corruption of the Philippine Media* (Florentino-Hofileña, 1998), one of which findings show that when offered money by their sources, one out of three beat reporters openly admitted to taking them due to any of the following reasons: the money was not asked for but offered, because of their paltry pay, or because they feared that refusing the money would jeopardize their chances of securing future interviews.

Salaried print news reporters who have college degrees earn an average of P10,000 a month before taxes (Koop, 2006), a rate that is only a little above the official minimum poverty income of P6,195 for a family of five (National Statistics and Coordination Board, 2007). The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) has published a report on the state of employment conditions in Philippine media today corroborating this finding, and further detailing the prevalence of contractualization and measly correspondent rates and practices all over the country, among others (CMFR, 2008)

Repeated informal exchanges over the course of four years in my volunteer work as PECOJON national coordinator and trainer with a number of field journalists reveal that correspondents and stringers, who comprise a majority of news reporters in the country, earn even less, at an average of P50 to P150 per published story, depending on the newspaper and whether one’s story hits the front pages. (In terms of photographs, they are paid an average of P300 to P700 per photograph in the Visayas and P1000 to P1500 in Mindanao for stringers of AP, AFP and Reuters.)

The minimum daily wage in the Philippines is in the P200 to P342 range, depending on geographical base (National Wages and Productivity Commission 2008). To maintain one’s work as well as to feed body, soul and family then, a correspondent or stringer has to produce more and more stories on a daily basis, and this has implications on the depth of analytical treatment and the writing and reporting quality of stories, mainly in terms of favoring expediency over substance.

Dr. Florangel Rosario-Braid, President and Dean of the Asian Institute of Journalism, in her book, *Social Responsibility in Communication Media* (1993), explains that low salaries have forced many journalists to “moonlight”, resorting to self-censorship when news stories conflict with their vested interests. She further shares (parenthetical note in the original):

The economic state of the journalist has contributed to the gradual loss of professional ideals and distortion in reportage. A number have been co-opted into the system, making them dependent on it. The problems of ethics and morality as well as the lack of courage in reporting the truth (or the almost total absence of investigative reporting) are the consequences of the erosion of professionalism in the communication industry.

The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) explains that even if the Philippine press is considered one of the liveliest and freest in Asia, “deadline pressures, extreme competition and budgetary constraints make it difficult for many journalists to delve into the causes and broader meanings of news events.” (PCIJ, 2008)

In terms of academic preparation and training for the field, although there are around 200 journalism schools in the country, most graduates opt to go into the public relations and advertising fields because these pay better and are less dangerous for journalism graduates. Faculty are also hard put to find appropriate, relevant and updated training and education materials, which are usually sourced from the West and are very expensive (Hume, 2007).

Still, despite these constraints from all directions, journalists in the Philippines continue to do their work to the best of their knowledge and abilities, and they enjoy widespread public support for this, especially after the 1986 People Power Revolution. “Surveys of public opinion reflect positively on the continuing credibility of the press in the Philippines. Even those who are critical of the ways of the press, the sensationalism, the inaccuracies and lack of balance and fairness would not submit the press to government regulation” (Florentino-Abad, 1998).

Florentino-Abad further explains that this may be due to the public’s romanticization of the press.

The history of the Philippine press is closely aligned with developments in the country’s political and social history as the everyday Filipino’s co-journeyer in its seemingly endless struggle out of poverty and oppression in many forms. In addition to the view of the press’ key role as independent provider of information and shaper of public opinion, in the Philippines, the press is also seen as activist and even catalyst for political and social transformations, since the 1898 Philippine Revolution and secession from Spain, when the writings of key intellectuals and journalists shaped the course of subsequent Philippine history.

Thus, up to now, Philippine society seems to take it for granted that the press always does good. “Public trust has ... evolved a mindset of complacency, with disturbing lack of

awareness about the news process and ignorance of journalistic rules that discipline the practice. (However,) people seem to turn to the media (now) as a source of entertaining distraction, not for knowledge and information that will help them understand the problems of daily life” (Florentino-Abad, 1998; parenthetical notes supplied).

The PECOJON Story

It is in this context that PECOJON was born.

The first Peace Journalism training (PJ1) was conducted by Antonia Koop in October, 2004, as part of the then Peace Journalism Program that Koop ran for Pax Christi-Pilipinas (PCP) and the Niall O’Brien Center (NOBC) in Bacolod City, Philippines. Bacolod is in the Visayas, Central Philippines. The training was funded by Pax Christi-Pilipinas.

Koop is a German journalist and documentary film maker whose experience is in covering conflict, mainly in Palestine. She has worked since 2006 as a development contract worker with the German AGEH (Arbeitsgemeinschaft fuer Entwicklungshilfe) for PECOJON.

The first training was held in October 2004 in Bago City, Negros Occidental, with ten participants from the print and broadcast media, the academe and other communications fields.

Several months before this first training, however, a group of media and communications professionals based in Bacolod regularly discussed with Koop the concept and issues in the practice of Peace Journalism principles in the field. Among these volunteers and participants of the first training were Ledrolen Manriquez, who later on became the current International Secretariat (InterSec) chief of operations, and Jeanette Patindol, who later on became the current Project and national coordinator in the Philippines.

From these activities, the participants discussed how they could better work and grow together in solidarity in applying peace journalism principles. These discussions led to the request for and planning of the first formal weekend training.

It was also from these meetings that the idea of a Network “by journalists for journalists” was born. There were a series of discussions and even heated debates on what to call this Network. In the end, Koop suggested that until everyone agreed on a name, why not call it “The Peace and Conflict Journalism Network (PECOJON)” for the time being? Everyone liked the name and took up the suggestion.

The group then decided to form an e-group to have an online venue for all volunteers, advocates and future training participants connected. The PECOJON e-group was created on September 9, 2004.

The next trainings were held again in Bacolod in May, 2005, and then in Subic (Luzon, Northern Philippines) in June, 2005. It was from these trainings that the realization arose of the need for advanced training for those who have already finished the first Peace Journalism

training (PJ1), as well as the need to train more-- not just journalists, but other sectors involved-- as well.

Later trainings reflected efforts to address these needs, by coming up with advanced (PJ2) trainings for journalists, as well as “exchange deal” arrangements. These counterpart arrangements involved having the inviting institution-- usually a school or a civic organization-- provide the audience and logistics, while PECOJON comes in to provide the training for free. This strategy was conceived to overcome donor funding limitations, which specified only training for journalists.

At the end of each training, and as a result of the participants’ sharing and discussion, the concept of PECOJON is introduced and the invitation for membership is offered. Participants have the option to choose to apply for membership or not, but they almost always apply anyway, as experience has proved.

Even as these trainings were held, there also arose the realization of the need for concrete funding to grow PECOJON as a Network, and the need to create a distinct identity for PECOJON and Peace Journalism as separate from but parallel to the peace movement.

This was based on how training participants eventually questioned the confusion over the role of the journalist as an independent reporter and interpreter of events, and the journalist as a citizen and a peace activist.

It was consistently clarified and emphasized that the peace journalist chooses what and how to report in such a way that opens spaces for alternative solutions to conflict other than violence and war in the course of more truthful and responsible reporting, and is not a peace activist. However, it became apparent that more concrete steps had to be taken.

In late 2005, Koop and Patindol drafted a proposal for separate funding to develop the Network further.

On April 1, 2006, PECOJON officially started as The Peace and Conflict Journalism Network in the Philippines, under an approved three-year network development grant by Misereor. On October 30, 2006, PECOJON was officially registered with the Philippine Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) as a distinct non-profit, non-government corporate entity.

The first incorporators of the Charter for PECOJON were those members who had been actively involved since 2004, in both the informal monthly discussions and in the first series of PJ 1 trainings. The selection of the first incorporators and members of the Board were mutually agreed upon by the small group of core members and were chosen based on their depth of involvement and presence in the forming of the Network at that time, all on voluntary basis.

With PECOJON’s separate legal identity, trainings continued to be funded by InWent, but as a part of PECOJON now, and not as a program of the Pax Christi-Pilipinas and Niall O’Brien Center. Additionally, the International Institute of Journalism (IIJ) based in Germany,

provided training funds for PECOJON via InWent in 2007, when InWent's own budget for conflict management in the Philippines was channeled to other priority countries.

All in all, Misereor accounts for around 35 % of the total budget for PECOJON and covers mainly administrative and Network building programs and activities, while Pax Christi Pilipinas (in 2004 only, 1%), InWent (in 2005-06, 9%) and IJJ (in 2007-08, 53%) and private donations by the core team and voluntary contributions in kind by members account for the rest of the total budget for PECOJON so far.

The first Secretariat was formed with Antonia Koop as project consultant/manager and main trainer, Jeanette Patindol as national coordinator and trainer, and Ledrolen Manriquez as chief of operations. Currently, it holds office at Lot 4 Blk 17 Espinos Village Phase 2, Bacolod City, Philippines and has its online address at www.pecojon.org.

The first Magazine issue was published in late 2005, from voluntary contributions from the graduates of the first trainings, as well as international contacts in the field.

1. Trainings

Since April 2006, sixteen more trainings continued to be conducted in the Philippines. These trainings were jointly handled now by Antonia Koop and Jeanette Patindol, who finished her Peace Journalism Course from Transcend University in Romania in June, 2007, where Koop attended before in 2004.

Still, from these trainings, as well as with the increasing requests for exchange-deal trainings from various organizations and institutions, there also arose the realization of the need for more qualified PECOJON trainers.

So, in August 2007, the first PJ3 or Qualification Course for Peace Journalism Trainers, was held in Bacolod City. There were eight first graduates of this Course—two from Luzon based in Metro Manila, one from the Visayas and five from Mindanao.

The PJ3 is only the first in a series of training exposure phases the graduates undergo, and they are expected to continue to develop their skills and capacities as trainers as they assist in and even handle modules and workshops in further PJ trainings.

As these trainings in the Philippines were conducted, the first trainings in Southeast Asia were also held starting in late 2007.

2. The Secretariats

With the development of the trainings and audiences, as well as interest from people abroad, it became apparent that the original Secretariat had to evolve into an umbrella International Secretariat (InterSec) and per country National Secretariats (NatSec).

Today, the National Secretariat (NatSec) of PECOJON in the Philippines is currently focused on mainstreaming Conflict-Sensitive Journalism (CSJ) in the Philippine media. Thus, it is generally engaged in giving trainings on Conflict-Sensitive Journalism in key areas of the country. It also regularly identifies and invites journalists from tri-media and online networks, as well as university and college professors of journalism and mass communications, to participate in the trainings and become involved in the Network.

Administratively, the National Secretariat coordinates the concerns and communication and information needs of members in the Philippines and finalizing the membership manual, manages the processing of membership IDs, and the administration of the website, facilitating the discussion on press cards and other policies and concerns as well as other matters concerning the running of the Network. It also assists the coordinating body of the Magazine in its publication.

Although the Secretariat started out with only three people, another full-time staff, Jay Malaga, chief of operations (NatSec), was soon added, with Therence Koh (Mindanao) and Nowell Cuanang (Luzon) as consulting journalist-practitioners and deputies to the national coordinator.

In the course of managing the Network, it was realized that the Secretariat needed the assistance and feedback of fulltime practicing journalists, especially in pinpointing potential training participants, advice on module content, as well as in organizing trainings in Luzon and in Mindanao.

The International Network has today around 165 officially-registered members from more than fifteen (15) countries, while the National Networks in each country are in different stages of development.

Most countries' membership is still loosely organized and registered via the International Secretariat (InterSec) only, and currently shaping its structure according to their particular Network needs and strategies. The Philippines and Germany (Martin Zint, national coordinator) have already working secretariats, while the East Timor secretariat recently started operating via the support of its host, the Timor Leste Media Development Center, through its director and PECOJON-East Timor coordinator, Francisco da Silva. Just recently, on June 16, 2008, PECOJON-Indonesia was founded. It is jointly coordinated by Sri Wayuni of the *Jakarta Post* and Hendrawan Setiawan of Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia (RCTI).

The International Secretariat is currently hosted by the National Secretariat in the Philippines. It serves as a communication hub between the members of the Network, especially on an international level. Its main task is keeping the vision and unity among its members alive and thriving, along with the structural guidance of the Network.

Furthermore, the International Secretariat works on an operational level in developing projects and programs based on field assessment, with the goal of mainstreaming Conflict-Sensitive Journalism (CSJ), supporting journalists in their daily work through capacity-

building and the creation of support structures, improving journalism education and increasing the safety of journalists in the field, especially those in conflict and war coverage.

3. Chapters

Members in proximate geographical areas can band together and form Chapters. Although the trainings in Mindanao were held much later, it was in Mindanao where PECOJON quickly grew in membership, with four Chapters (Eastern Mindanao, Western Mindanao, Southern Mindanao and Northern Mindanao) formed in less than a year's time.

Chapter coordinators were identified in early 2006 and they were the ones invited for the first National Planning Workshop held in August of that year at Don Salvador Benedicto, Negros Occidental in the Visayas.

In that workshop, activities were focused on teambuilding as well as further defining the identity of PECOJON through a series of discussions and situation and stakeholder analyses, and participation in log-frame drafting. The following were identified as key needs of the members of the Network: membership development, promoting and protecting the welfare of journalists, quality monitoring, research, educational development and partnership with other sectors of society.

The second National Planning Workshop was held in July, 2007 in Malagos, Davao City in Eastern Mindanao. The Chapter coordinators, including the volunteers for Magazine coordinatorship, further defined PECOJON by intensively discussing membership and press card policies, as well as the publication of the second Magazine issue.

Chapter coordinatorship then was based mainly on the zeal and volunteerism of very active members in each area.

The Manila Chapter has been engaged in drafting a project proposal for monitoring and coverage of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) implementation in the Philippines, while the Northern Mindanao Chapter has been in the exploratory stage of drafting a proposal for multi-sector consultation on the roles of journalists and civil society in bringing about a culture of peace. The Southern Mindanao Chapter has been brainstorming on the idea of a national photo caravan showing "The Faces of War"-- a collection of unpublished photographs taken by our photojournalist-members in the area-- in major cities throughout the country.

However, the Chapters faced challenges in getting all of their members regularly and actively involved, even just in attending the monthly meetings planned, since all membership and coordinatorship is voluntary and not paid. For many members, there is always the constant struggle between attending to their profession and livelihood, and helping build PECOJON's vision, given the constraints on their time and other resources. Also, the very limited staffing resources in both the Secretariats and the number of very active volunteers in the Chapters have temporarily put the proposed projects on hold, even as energies are focused too on growing the international Network.

Recently, recognizing the need to more focusedly define the structure of the Network as it grows, Chapter Assemblies were held in Zamboanga and in Bacolod in March, 2008.

The processes first involved traditional-style elections and then consensus-style selection of Area Coordinators, in Zamboanga and Bacolod respectively.

It was found that the consensus-style process yielded more acceptance, involvement and personal investment of all members concerned, which is more clearly in line with the Network's vision of an empowered and highly-capable members-driven, Secretariat-guided Network.

The consensus-style process will be adopted in future Chapter Assemblies in other areas in the later part of this year, as well as in the review and reconstitution of the Zamboanga Chapter, to make the consensus-style selection process consistent in all Chapters.

4. Partnerships

To date, PECOJON in the Philippines has partnered with Miriam College, the Central Philippine University, the University of St. La Salle, the Ateneo de Zamboanga, the University of the Philippines-Diliman, the Provincial Youth Development Council of Negros Occidental and the Western Visayas Private Schools' Administrative Association of the Philippines (PRISAAP) in conducting introductory peace and conflict journalism presentations and/or exchange-deal trainings among campus paper staff and communications students.

It is also formally linked with the M.A. Conflict and Reconciliation Studies Program – Conflict Sensitive Journalism Specialization of the Pax Christi Institute (PCI) and the University of St. La Salle.

PECOJON has also met with Mindanao-based church-sponsored publication, *Paz*, to explore efforts to mutually work on the PECOJON Magazine as well as future projects they can both engage in partnership with.

PECOJON: Challenges and Lessons Learned

It has been four years since the idea of PECOJON was first conceived and two years since it officially started as a legally-registered non-stock, non-profit, non-government entity in the Philippines.

It started with a small group of men and women who were in the fields of processing and delivering information, images and messages to the rest of the world, and who were caught afire by the concept of peace journalism and what it can do if done right and completely.

Fueled by this passion and the facilitating and long, painstaking work of only three women at the start, PECOJON has grown in membership and connections over the years to have a stronger voice now in participating in the global discussion on peace journalism.

Reflecting on the journey PECOJON has traveled through so far, the following challenges and lessons learned stand out:

1. Peace is a Dangerous Word in a Dangerous World.

When PECOJON started, it was almost a non-entity, with a hard-to-pronounce name, both the long and short version of it (with the short name even drawing naughty snickers if pronounced in the Spanish way), three women who were not fulltime journalists (Koop put on hold her journalism career since she started with PECOJON) although they worked in film, local journalism and journalism and communications education, and a Philippine location that was neither in imperialist Manila nor conflict-ridden Mindanao.

Still, those who recognized Bacolod City as being the capital of Negros Occidental, though, understood that Negros is in itself a hotbed of social, economic and political conflict. It was even called a “social volcano” by *Time Magazine* in the height of the Marcos dictatorship, with its polarized income classes, feudal agricultural and economic system and constantly simmering and periodically-exploding armed rebellion since the 1960s.

When PECOJON first approached organizations and journalists and invited them to its trainings, there were not much takers, even if the travel and trainings were fully subsidized by grants. “Who is PECOJON?” was the common response.

In a country where the word “peace” has not only been overused but also misused, people are wary and skeptical. “Is it another leftist media organization fronting for the communists, or a right-wing propaganda arm of the government?” “If PECOJON is just another peace organization, what is it doing meddling with the independence of journalists then?” And then, the inevitable question, “What is peace, anyway?”

In trainings, journalists from competing networks would initially protest against “sleeping with the enemy” (a term actually used by one senior journalist in one of the trainings in Cebu) -- their fellow journalists from competing networks. (After the trainings, though, they end up seeking each other out like they were the best of friends.)

In discussing memberships, questions would invariably arise on why PECOJON was including in the trainings and even accepting the applications for membership of a few journalists already known in the profession to be corrupt and blatantly unethical.

These were all hard questions and serious concerns which could not easily be answered by pat explanations or even long lectures from theory. They were issues to be engaged with, fully, with all PECOJON had.

Although its over-arching vision was to contribute to a more peaceful world (1st PECOJON National Evaluation and Planning Workshop proceedings, 2006), PECOJON had to painfully wean itself from its close association with the peace organization that midwived it in the first place by establishing itself as a separate legal entity. This was to establish a distinctly independent identity for PECOJON in its continuing work with journalists who question this very nature.

When controversial issues arose, especially on the issue of the arrest of journalists covering the Manila Peninsula Hotel attempted mutiny in 2007, it had to restrain itself from adding fuel to the fire by issuing further incendiary statements in public and had to work hard to keep its cool and temper its tone when it finally issued a statement, after long and careful discussion with members who were at that time undergoing an advanced PJ training in Cagayan de Oro City in Northern Mindanao.

A year earlier, it had been almost burned by the issue of arming journalists amidst the increasing violence against journalists in the country, when a publicly-perceived left-leaning media organization who requested for its 30-plus members to undergo a basic PJ training issued a public statement calling for tougher measures and using the name of PECOJON (without PECOJON's knowledge and consent) to bolster its numbers and credibility. This led to the specific focus on drafting the membership guidelines emphasizing only individual membership with voting rights and that organizational membership may be considered only on specific project partnership arrangements and on a case-to-case affiliation bases.

The most sensitive part was the issue of memberships and allowing people in who were perceived to be “undesirables” in the profession. As in the case of all matters that require soul-searching, PECOJON looked to its vision as its guide, and affirmed that if it was to contribute to a more peaceful world in the end by the ethical, responsible, independent and professional exercise of journalism, the way to peace are the ways of peace, which means non-judgmental, non-discriminatory acceptance of members who indicate a desire to be part of PECOJON and its vision.

From PECOJON's perspective, as these “undesirable” journalists undergo trainings and interact closely with other members of their profession, this gives them the chance to, at least, become aware of other, more ethical ways of pursuing their profession. In becoming more conscious of their options, they have the space to choose the next steps they will pursue in their paths. So far, there has been feedback that if not for anything else, undergoing the trainings and interacting with fellow PECOJON members have made a number of members conscious of their “old ways” and this has become a moral dilemma they had to wrestle with. PECOJON sees this as a good thing, as it is a definite sign of birthing, of opening spaces for new awareness and new ways of being to come forth.

On a more operational level, this also led to further clarifying the specific provisions for membership in terms of continuing membership in good standing. Initial acceptance as member was one thing, continuation as member carrying the PECOJON name was another.

Birthing and growing PECOJON became the very arena itself for practicing and living out the principles of conflict transformation and living out Peace by peaceful means. What particularly helped PECOJON in keeping to the straight and narrow middle and peaceful path so far were the struggling to live out the values of authenticity, transparency, respect, compassion and friendship.

By and large, PECOJON grew very fast in a short time because mostly of members who were caught afire by the vision and concept of peace journalism, and who continue to work for the PECOJON ideals and invite colleagues on as well on a voluntary basis. There is a tacit agreement that overtly and covertly, everyone wants to help contribute to peace; the question is just how to do it within the demands and constraints of the journalism profession and not be perceived as a “peace propagandist”.

Unlike other professional organizations and even networks with a more corporate and even bureaucratic culture, PECOJON grew from a softer, more personally intimate culture of making and keeping friendships—a distinctly strong Filipino gift-- and it strives to continue keeping this spirit alive even as it faces the challenges of growing into organizational maturity and the demands for more structure in its operationalization.

It is not enough to just talk about Peace anymore. It has to be lived out, or not at all.

2. Conflict-Sensitive Journalism

The trainings started out as “Peace Journalism Trainings” but participants almost always got confused with: (1) Peace Journalism, the trainings, and PECOJON, the Network; and (2) the dilemma with the role and ethical mandate of the journalist as an independent and objective reporter and interpreter of events and issues they cover.

Although Peace Journalism Theory (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005) systematically deconstructs this myth of independence and objectivity with an analysis of the news production system and processes, the myth is so well-entrenched in people’s consciousness that even after repeated discussions and trainings on the same subject, it crops up again and again.

Common popular misconceptions with the use of the term, “Peace Journalism”, have been that—

- “Peace Journalism is reporting about peace / peace efforts / peace initiatives, etc. only” (no critical reporting on peace efforts);
- “Reporting for peace, or Peace Propaganda; and
- “Peaceful reporting / happy news” (avoiding ugly stories, violence, even conflict)

This necessitated a gradual shift in naming the discipline and the trainings themselves from “Peace Journalism” to “Peace and Conflict Journalism”, to emphasize that the concept applies exactly to the coverage of conflict, and not its exclusion.

Bilke’s work (2006a and 2006b, as cited by Koop, 2006) on anchoring peace journalism on the framework of quality in conflict reporting, particularly in the role of the journalist in upholding the democracy-human rights-peace framework, helped provide a model for refining peace journalism theory as it was subsequently taught.

Still, this generated further questions for clarification in almost every training.

Currently, the term “Conflict-Sensitive Journalism: (CSJ) is being used by PECOJON in its trainings. It has been found that the latter term has significantly clarified the concept among participants and further focuses on the fact that –

- It is more accurate and appropriate to the real work of a good journalist, literally speaking;
- The concept applies to the reporting of conflict, not to avoiding it; and
- The emphasis is on the challenge for journalists in reporting conflict.

The term was adopted from Ross Howard (2003), who emphasizes that “professional journalists do not set out to reduce conflict. They seek to present accurate and impartial news. But, it is often through good reporting that the conflict is reduced.”

Koop (2006) further distinguishes the variations in *focus* among traditional journalism, peace journalism and conflict-sensitive journalism and uses these in PECOJON’s training framework as outlined in the following table:

	Traditional Journalism	Peace Journalism	Conflict Sensitive Journalism
Source/Author	Media organizations (e.g.BBC, German Press Conference, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, IWPR)	Johan Galtung Jake Lynch Annabel McGoldrick (among others)	Nadine Bilke

Assumptions	Journalism is a key element of democracy	Journalists increase the capacities for peace or war Objective reporting is illusionary and innocent facts do not exist	The public is an intelligent, mature and active entity The role of journalism is to offer orientation on ongoing discourses in society
Preconditions	Self-Regulation of Media Press Freedom		
Concepts	Journalism ethics Best practices National or organizational codex, press laws etc (e.g. BBC Producers Guidelines, German Press Code)	Peace Journalism Ethical Reporting	Quality in War and Crisis Reporting Democracy, Peace and Human Rights as normative framework for journalism
Demands	Impartiality Accuracy Fairness Objectivity Balance (usually quantitative) News factors	Application of conflict analysis and transformation in conflict reporting Qualitative balance Paradigm shift	Truthfulness Accuracy Relevance Adequate presentation and explanation of information Orientation

3. Integrating Theory and Practice

The initial trainings (PJ1) involved the analysis of limitations and deficiencies of traditional journalism practice with regards to the task of providing reliable information, as well as an introduction to the concepts and principles of Conflict-Sensitive Journalism (CSJ).

However, the initial trainings could not provide a venue for the integration of the theories into practice. Feedback from the participants stressed that the learning from the trainings were not sustainable enough for long-term survival when journalists are confronted with the constraints of the media system. Thus, the training impact was evaluated, and the result of which is the design of the advanced (PJ2) trainings.

PJ2 trainings are more interactive and driven by members' focus group discussions and workshop outputs. They cover a review and deepening of the understanding of the concepts and principles introduced in the initial training as well as relate the theories to practice using the experiences and challenges encountered by the participants to further stabilize the training impact.

There are also the PECOJON Magazine and website as venues for application and exchange of training alumni and members.

Even so, the process is long and painstaking, not only because of the expected learning curves each has to go through to fully integrate and operationalize what one has learned, but also because conflict-sensitive content require more time, research and careful thought, luxurious resources in the context of the plight of the Philippine journalist faced with a system that demands for more and more output in less and less time.

Also, although the maiden issue of the Magazine was voluntary (Filipinos have a generous spirit), it was soon realized that for future issues to be produced regularly, contributing writers have at least to be paid some honoraria, given the economic realities and needs of the Philippine journalist.

4. A Resistant System and the Need for Long-term Support

Journalists committed to practicing Conflict Sensitive Journalism (CSJ) were confronted with a resistant system. They inevitably expressed the need for the support of peers who were similarly trained and committed and a supportive venue to practice the learning and support in overcoming the constraints created by the system (e.g. time pressure, editorial guidelines on what is newsworthy, market pressure). No matter how conflict-sensitively an article was written, if an editor does not like it, it gets cut, or worse, doesn't see print. The editor will point to publisher demands and advertiser constraints, too.

Currently, the Secretariats are working on providing training, further education and opportunities for cooperation based on solidarity, venues for practice (Magazine) and access and tools (e-group and website) to overcome the constraints of the profession. However, the Secretariat can only do so much in setting and promoting the appropriate environment in place. The members themselves must singly and collectively work at helping address these challenges for the long-term. The Chapters are encouraged to work on focusing on addressing these challenges in their own areas through the programs and activities that they initiate and conduct.

As every challenge carries with it the seeds of its own overcoming, what appears before PECOJON now in terms of the next steps forward in addressing this challenge is to face the resistance head on by engaging top-level consultations and discussions with editors, publishers and even advertisers—all the other actors and influences in the market supply chain—on Conflict-Sensitive Journalism.

5. The Reality of Market Forces

The strongest argument against the implementation of Conflict Sensitive Journalism (CSJ) is that it contradicts the requirements of the market.

Readers are perceived to require nothing but simple-, attention grabbing-, and entertaining news (Florentino-Abad, 1998) and the entire media production system is designed to cater to this perceived type of readership.

There is a need, then, to train and re-orient not only the journalists in the field, but also the other actors in the media system—the journalism and communications educators, the editors, publishers, advertisers and especially the media consumers—the entire demand-and-supply matrix of forces, so that, in effect, the entire market and its requirements are transformed.

So far, PECOJON has been developing media literacy trainings for the academe- and civil-society- based sectors to help address this need, in addition to working on curriculum integration with partner universities.

There is still the bigger challenge of reaching the editors, publishers, advertisers and the other sectors of the media system itself, on a consistent and long-term basis.

The Journey Ahead

Given this experience of and sharing by PECOJON and in the context of this Conference's theme and the launching of the Peace Journalism Commission-- what lies ahead for Peace Journalism? How does one make it sustainable?

Before proposing certain key recommendations, this paper suggests that first, recurring issues in the discourse must be clarified and anchored before we can all move ahead in one direction. Otherwise, we would be like pushing the metaphorical cart from all sides and preventing the cart from moving at all.

1. Recurring Issues

Lynch (2008) points out that accepting the myth of the independence and objectivity argument against Peace Journalism is actually accepting and operating within the paradigms of traditional, minority-world or War Journalism:

... Minority-world journalism, dominated by the representational conventions identified as war journalism, while presenting itself as agenda-free, can be identified as a contributory factor in the maintenance and promulgation of global structural inequities; whereas journalism which accepts its own conventionality, and chooses, on the basis of that, to create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value non-violent responses to conflict—including measures to address situational causes of observable behavior—can be seen, by journalists in developing countries, as a tool of liberation and global justice, fitting their own sense of purpose.

This paper agrees with Lynch and also contends that in the context of practical realities and constraints and for addressing Peace Journalism's sustainability on the ground, it is not so much a debate between War Journalism or Peace Journalism constructs and methods (in itself, war journalistic by the way, with the two-party presentation) as a *journeying* in awareness and growth in consciousness from the *continuum of paradigms* ranging from traditional journalism, to conflict-sensitive journalism, and eventually to outright Peace Journalism, which Lynch (2008) describes as a "critical proposition, critical in the sense of owning its agenda and choosing to harness journalism for peace."

In the same paper, Lynch has actually pointed it out as the difference between seeing the role of the journalist as a part of the “drama of intervention” (the journalist is just an observer of what is happening and temporarily intervenes by reporting what is happening) or the “drama of complicity” (the journalist, as well as the sources, readers, etc., are part of what is happening; that what is a happening is—in one way or another—of everyone’s making).

Until these elements are brought to the forefront in Peace Journalism discussion and education, the basic questions on the role of the journalist and its implications to the entire discourse will never rest.

This paper also asserts that there must be acute cognizance of the true value of Peace Journalism—the provision for reflexivity, or a critical self-awareness; and anchorage, or using the principles and tools of Conflict Analysis and Peace Research in the application of good journalism (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005: xvii).—and use these values to keep everyone on track on what the work is about here, no matter what the name used.

2. Models and Praxis Informing Each Other

The sharing of the PECOJON story is an attempt to contribute to building Peace Journalism Theory and Practice as learned from the ground, even as PECOJON’s own development is informed by Peace Journalism Theory.

Reflecting on the matter of long-term sustainability, this paper uses Hackett’s (2006) three frameworks for assessing structure and agency in news media as a way of answering the question, “Is Peace Journalism possible (and sustainable)?”

Hackett presents three models—Herman and Chomsky’s Propaganda Model, Shoemaker and Reese’s Hierarchy of Influences Model and Bourdieu’s Journalism as a Field Model.

The Propaganda Model is useful in highlighting the state and capital influences of journalism but risks being reductionist and functionist, leaving no room nor hope for journalism to improve and transform itself to serve the highest ends of society.

The Hierarchy of Influences Model is useful in highlighting the pressures for and against journalism in each of the five levels of key influences identified—the media workers themselves, their daily work routines, the broader organizational imperatives, extra-media influences and ideology. However, the Hierarchy of Influences Model, as well as the Propaganda Model, ignores “the specificity and coherence of journalism as a cultural practice and form of knowledge production in itself” (Hackett, 2006: 1).

Hackett then explains and expounds on the Field Model and how it conceives of journalism as an autonomous institutional sphere interacting with other fields, to a greater or lesser extent, “allowing conceptual space for both the structural influences of and on new media, as well as the potential agency and creativity of journalists.”

Three broad approaches as vectors for change are suggested: reform the journalism field from within, intervene in adjacent fields and build a new field parallel to the currently existing field (Hackett, 2006: 11).

PECOJON's work so far appear to fall within the first two approaches—it is facilitating reform within the field through the trainings it conducts and the dialogue and activities among its members; and it is intervening in adjacent fields with its work on the academe and civil society in media literacy trainings and curriculum integration in journalism education.

For PECOJON to work synergistically with the rest of those in the Peace Journalism field and vice versa, with the higher vision of moving Peace Journalism forward in the world, there is a need to work on, strengthen and coordinate all the three approaches.

On the matter of sustainability, Perlas (1998) posits the three-folding concept of sustainable development, as opposed to the single-fold (economy as driving force) and two-fold (economy and polity as driving forces) models. In the three-folding model, “civil society (understands) that it (holds) the power to bestow legitimacy on the government and business and it (wants) both to be transparent and accountable to the public interest, especially the poor and others who are marginalized.”

It is in this context of sustainability that PECOJON is after in its work with Conflict-Sensitive Journalism or Peace Journalism, and it is this framework of sustainability that this paper assumes in suggesting the following recommendations for the next steps ahead in the field.

3. Recommendations

So far, it appears that in the global arena, Peace Journalism initiatives and activities are focused on training and education of journalists from the field. The PECOJON experience highlights, though, the reality of the serious constraints acting on the journalist seriously intent on practicing Peace Journalism. The journalist cannot do it alone.

3.1. Networking and Solidarity (Continuing Reform from Within)

First, it is not enough to just train journalists from the field any more. There has to be more regular and consistent forms of follow-up and support, as well as venues for mutual exchange and building solidarity among journalists and Peace Journalism practitioners, within countries and across countries. The Peace and Conflict Journalism Network (PECOJON) – International provides a venue for this.

3.2. Reorienting the Market: Producer and Consumer Literacy (Intervene in Adjacent Fields)

Second, Peace Journalism must begin to act on and synergize with other fields, particularly in terms of media literacy or media consumer education and in curriculum integration in

journalism education, especially in countries where a significant portion of the population are young (like the Philippines is, with half of its population aged 35 and below).

Why the focus on countries with more of the young? Simply put, with less vested interests and still more flexible and open attitudes to emerging futures, the young are more malleable and receptive and it would be less taxing to introduce transforming concepts like Peace Journalism into the popular consciousness. More importantly, investing in the social capital of the youth is tantamount to investing in the future.

It must also act on the fields of business (the entire backward supply chain from the editors, to the publishers, to the advertisers) and even government and non-government organizations, first in terms of awareness and consciousness-raising and how Peace Journalism affects all, and later on in more strategic methods like including them in networking and solidarity and the establishment of a world media development bank as called for by Tehranian (2002, cited by Hackett, 2006), to reduce the inequalities of media production and access within and between nations.

3.3. Succeeding in the Transformed Market (Build A Parallel Field)

Finally, the best test of whether Peace Journalism works and is sustainable is to show that it works, in the very market system it exists in but has transformed.

Specifically, there needs to be a common media for journalists, both within their countries and across countries, to sink their teeth into in implementing conflict-sensitive reporting, and they have to be rewarded for this, not only materially-speaking but psychically-speaking. It can be a community-owned glocal (global and local) internationalist media whose content is widely sought by people and the opportunity to report for which is held in the highest regard by everyday journalists.

From a three-folding sustainable and futures perspective, though, the task is to first create and make vividly clear in our minds a parallel field to supplant the existing field—

Imagine a world where people demand from media not just sensual entertainment and gratification but also intellectual, psychological and even psychic fulfillment, and easily turn away from sensationalized, war-journalistic-type content as banal and outrightly distasteful. Imagine a world where people demand for news reports that truly help inform them about the choices they have to make in their individual and societal lives.

Imagine a world where journalists compete not for the “scoop” but for the most useful and informative report that the audiences demand for.

Imagine a world where editors and publishers express a strong preference and editorial bent for excellent conflict-sensitive reporting content in their publications and broadcasts.

Imagine a world where advertisers manifest a commitment to channel their huge advertising budgets to media content that serves their discerning audiences and target markets who know what they need in their own lives.

Imagine a world where business and government focus on serving the true needs of the people for authentic and full human blossoming, and not in pandering to their base, solely materially-driven wants and creating more unnecessary and even baser wants among them. Imagine a world where products and services produced are created for the satisfaction not just of bodily but also of higher needs, and there is no need to create artificial wants anymore.

It can still be a free-market world; the landscape and requirements will just look, sound, smell, taste and feel different and transformed.

This is the world that Peace Journalism can create, sustain and succeed in.*

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