



UNI EROPA

South Sumatra Forest Fire Management Project

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Final Report
International Campaign Expert (Documentary Film)
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Preface

The South Sumatra Forest Fire management Project (SSFFMP) is a technical cooperation project jointly funded, in terms of the financing memorandum IDN/RELEX/1999/0103, by the European Commission and by Government of Republic of Indonesia through the Ministry of Forestry (MoF)

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in part fulfillment of activity 1.8, Contribute to increase of awareness, knowledge and concern regarding SNRM, environmental management, and fire management.

1.8.6 Develop a documentary film on "Fire on forest and land, causes and impact on human live".

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The report has been prepared by:

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The report is acknowledged and approved for circulation by the project Co-Directors when duly signed below.

Palembang, November 2005

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Executive summary

The report gives an overview of the production of SSFFMP's first awareness film and provides guidelines for future campaign activities. The documentary addresses the dangers of uncontrolled fires and is part of the current awareness strategy, which has the objective to decrease the immediate risk or likelihood of fire. The long-term objective is to promote sustainable land use management so that fire will no longer be an issue.

Due to the urgency of the matter, the film concentrates on the first objective. It raises awareness of fire as a problematic issue. Since this is the first film SSFFMP has produced, it will also test how well visual communication is received and whether it has the potential to become an integral part of future awareness campaigns of the project.

The introduction of the report briefly describes the problem of uncontrolled fires in South Sumatra and outlines SSFFMP's objectives. It then goes on to explain why the decision was taken to make a film on the dangers of uncontrolled fires.

The main part of the report is the description of the production procedure from the development of the concept to the final product. The report ends with recommendations for future awareness activities. It suggests the campaign team of the project evaluate how effective the medium film is in comparison to other channels of information and based on the results decides which measures should be enhanced in the future.

Ringkasan Eksekutif

Laporan ini memberikan gambaran mengenai pembuatan film dokumenter pertama SSFFMP dan memberikan arahan untuk kegiatan kampanye dimasa mendatang. Film dokumenter ini tentang bahaya kebakaran yang tak terkendali, merupakan bagian dari strategi penyadartahuan saat ini, dengan tujuan untuk menurunkan resiko atau kemungkinan kebakaran. Tujuan jangka panjang adalah untuk mempromosikan pengelolaan dan pemanfaatan lahan yang berkelanjutan sehingga kebakaran tidak menjadi masalah utama.

Materi film dikonsentrasikan pada tujuan untuk meningkatkan kepedulian mengenai kebakaran sebagai permasalahan utama. Film ini sebaiknya diuji bagaimana komunikasi visual dapat diterima dan apakah berpotensi untuk menjadi bagian yang tidak terpisahkan dari masa depan penyadartahuan dan kampanye proyek.

Dalam bagian pendahuluan laporan ini dijelaskan bahwa masalah kebakaran yang tidak terkontrol di Sumatera Selatan dan garis besar tujuan SSFFMP. Serta alasan mengapa film bahaya kebakaran yang tidak terkendali ini dibuat.

Bagian utama laporan ini menjelaskan langkah-langkah pembuatan, mulai dari pengembangan konsep hingga menjadi produk akhir. Pada bagian akhir laporan ini diberikan beberapa rekomendasi kegiatan penyadartahuan dimasa yang akan datang. Laporan ini juga memberikan saran kepada tim pelaksana kampanye untuk mengevaluasi keefektifan media film dibandingkan dengan media informasi lain secara terukur, untuk peningkatan dimasa yang akan datang.

Introduction

In South Sumatra, small and medium land-holders as well as large plantations use fire to prepare land for new cultivation. Sometimes those land-clearing activities are not controlled and turn into large-scale vegetation fires. The unwanted fires have destroyed vast forest and land areas in South Sumatra accelerating depletion of natural resources and biodiversity and producing thick smoke that affected not only Indonesia but also neighboring Malaysia and Singapore. The haze threatens people's health, disrupts traffic, damages tourism, hurts the economy and strains relations between Indonesia and its neighbors.

The objective of the South Sumatra Forest Fire Management Project is to prevent and fight uncontrolled fires by establishing effective and efficient fire management structures on provincial, district and village level. The project also promotes sustainable land use management to reach its long-term objective of zero burning. One of the project's main tasks is raising the awareness of the population that uncontrolled fires are a problematic issue that needs to be addressed. This will help reach the overall goal of decreasing the immediate risk or likelihood of fire.

In 2004, SSFFMP decided that existing awareness material should be supplemented by a documentary that addresses the causes and impact of forest and land fires in order to use an additional channel of information and thereby increase the dissemination of information on this issue as well as the project and its objective.

Television has gained an enormous importance in Indonesia in the past years. Even in remote villages, one or two households usually have a television set and the entire village population often gathers there to watch different programs. Therefore a documentary on the dangers of fire shown on television will reach a large audience and pick up on the growing popularity of visual communication.

Arrangements were made with TVRI (Television Republic of Indonesia), the government sponsored channel, to broadcast the documentary on its local program. The film will also be shown in different villages as part of screenings organized by SSFFMP. In addition, copies of the film will be distributed to NGO's and various government departments so they can use it for trainings and workshops.

Main Task

According to the Terms of Reference (Contract No 44 / 2005) it was my task to plan and develop a film scenario and prepare a script for the documentary. Initially it was intended to make a separate film on SSFFMP and EU effort to support the development of a fire management system in South Sumatra. We decided to include this issue in the awareness film. It remains to be seen whether a separate film that addresses these efforts in more detail will be made in the future.

The terms of reference further laid down that I should assist and direct "a contracted production house" in developing and shooting the documentary and work closely with the SSFFMP training and campaign specialist and other TA to improve media coverage of the project's activities.

Following is my final report which outlines the film's production process and its concept and structure. It describes the most important decisions taken during my consultancy and gives recommendations for SSFFMP's future awareness strategy.

Production process

The Palembang office of TVRI was our partner in the production process of the film. TVRI provided us with a cameraman, equipment and editing facilities. This cooperation helped to build local capacity and strengthen ties with the broadcaster. One positive side effect of this cooperation was that a news item on the fire fighting training by SSFFMP including an interview with the EU project manager Karl-Heinz Steinmann as well as a live television discussion of SSFFMP and its activities were aired during the time, further increasing awareness of the project.

Unfortunately TVRI in several cases didn't comply with our arrangements. They didn't stick to the timetable and were unreliable in organizing the necessary technical equipment as well as the archival footage, which was essential in demonstrating that uncontrolled fire has already caused major damage. The difficulties we had with TVRI also influenced the decision to include the information on SSFFMP and EU effort to support the development of a fire management system in the awareness film. Under those circumstances, a second film that addresses this issue in more detail would not have been possible within the given timeframe.

The film

In developing a concept for the documentary, I determined three main points: the message, the target group and the method of conveying this message to the target group.

The message

Small and medium land-holders and large plantations in South Sumatra use fire to prepare land for cultivation. For them it is the cheapest and fastest way to clear land. But fire is dangerous and can have fatal consequences. Therefore fires should be reduced or very carefully controlled.

The message of the documentary is simple and direct. It communicates that fire is threatening, not just to the environment but also to human beings. Put into a slogan it translates into: "Fire destroys -- plants, animals, your health, the economy as well as political ties!"

The target group

The general public, with a focus on the rural population.

The method

Our concept for the film was influenced to a large extent by Indonesian culture and people's visual habits. We watched local and national television programs and talked to local people about the content and structure of those programs. It turned out that people enjoy drama and suspense and prefer soap operas over pure news or educational programs. Therefore, we decided that the documentary needs to include some dramatic elements. Drama helps to attract people's attention and to keep them interested throughout the film. A more dramatic film also serves the purpose of educating people better since it leaves a stronger impression on the audience and will be remembered more vividly. While the film will ask people to change their behavior, it should do so without fingerpointing or moralizing, which usually fail to fulfill their purpose. Towards the end, the film will show how fires can be prevented and fought and it will leave off with a positive ending where nature is intact and people live in harmony with their environment. We decided to choose a "happy ending" to give positive affirmation rather than ending with warning images of destruction which might fail to fulfill the educational purpose. In Indonesian society criticism is something that is communicated in a very subtle way if at all. If the criticism is too strong, it will easily be ignored and we would risk people not taking the film seriously.

The biggest challenge in communicating the message of the film to the target group is that the rural population is foremost concerned with survival, environmental as well as health issues are only secondary to them. Since burning is still the most economical way to prepare land for new cultivation, it will stay an attractive land-clearing tool.

An article in the New York Times from August 2005 that addresses the effects fires in Indonesia have on neighboring Malaysia underlines this dilemma. It cited an Indonesian farmer as saying:

"I don't see what choice I have. This field will have to be cleared and planted with oil palm and rubber trees by next month so that my family will have a source of income."

When asked whether he knows that the smoke has affected neighboring Malaysia or surrounding areas, he said: "We never heard about that."

The question is how to effectively convey the dangers of uncontrolled fires to people like this farmer, who as he says "has no other choice". And how to make him sensitive towards more global threats of uncontrolled fires. While this farmer didn't care about the effects simply because he didn't know about them, in some cases it is a lack of concern or feeling of responsibility.

Only if fire becomes a threat to the farmer himself, his family, his possessions and therefore his existence, will it be considered dangerous and taken seriously, which will consequently lead to a change in attitude and behavior. Once general awareness of the dangers of fire has been raised, people will also be more sensitive towards threats that don't affect them directly but neighboring regions and countries.

For this reason, we decided that the dangers of fire would be best communicated through a personal, rather emotional story of loss and despair. A story that shows that fire can easily become a threat, even to the farmer himself.

After extensive research, we found a village that was greatly affected by an uncontrolled fire which had been raging in the area for weeks. It was initially set by the nearby oil palm plantation for land-clearing purposes but got out of hand and spread to the adjacent village. Since the area is covered with peat soil, the fire spread so quickly and widely that it could hardly be stopped. It kept burning underneath the surface and heated up the entire area, destroying everything that crossed its path. The wooden houses quickly caught fire and fell together like card houses.

The people who are still living in the village told us about the traumatic events that turned their lives up side down. Some people only lost their gardens, others their houses and entire possessions. Many people have moved on to look for more promising land. Some left in such a hurry that

they didn't even take their belongings. When we visited the village, cooking pots were still standing on the oven and clothes were still hanging on the line. Wooden windows were creaking in the wind and garbage was piling up on the doorsteps. Burned trunks stuck out like totems against the sky. What used to be a vibrant little town, had turned into a ghost town.

The story of this village is a good example of the dramatic impact uncontrolled fire can have on individual lives and served us well in communicating that while burning might be the cheapest way to clear land for new cultivation it also poses a serious threat and should therefore be reconsidered. This personal story with its emotional power makes up the main part of the film. The other sequences are mainly informative and with the help of an explanatory comment show the broader context.

The structure

The documentary starts with a dynamic collage of news items and anchor announcements of fire disrupting traffic, destroying houses and threatening people's health combined with dramatic music and news jingles. The collage demonstrates the seriousness of the situation by showing the destruction uncontrolled fire has already caused as well as the media coverage the issue has received.

The film then goes on to explain the process of land clearing during the dry season from cutting trees to burning fields. It explains that it has become a widely used land-clearing method that is not always controlled and can easily get out of hand. Here we introduce an important dramatic element of the film. The image of aggressive red flames threatening people and their possessions. We felt that it was important to underline how easily fire can get out of control because fire has become such an integral part of everyday life in South Sumatra that it lost some of its threatening effect. People use fire on a regular basis whether for cooking, burning garbage or clearing land. The image of the threatening flames reoccurs throughout the film. From the uncontrolled fire we move on to the example of the destroyed village. One of the women living in the village explains how the fire changed her life and that of her neighbors.

Now that we have established that fire can also be a threat to the farmer himself, we place the story in the broader context and pick up on the collage in the beginning. This part demonstrates which magnitude his small fire has in combination with thousands of other fires and points to the responsibility the individual land-owner has not only for himself and his family but other human beings and nature.

The film then goes on to explain how fires can be prevented and fought. Here we also introduce SSFFMP, its objective and achievements. We show SSFMP training village people in preparing their fields for burning so the fire won't spread across the area designated for burning. We also show them training people in using tools and in rescue techniques.

After the images and stories about the harmful effects of uncontrolled fire, the last part of the film takes up on the basic human needs of having a secure job and living in harmony and peace with one's surroundings. It shows a quiet little village where people go about their work on the field and, at the end of the day, sit outside their houses and indulge in the village life. It conveys in a subtle way that such a life is possible if certain rules are followed and people take responsibility for their actions. These last images give the overall message of the film a positive spin.

Recommendations

The documentary on the dangers of uncontrolled fire is the first awareness film SSFFMP has produced. It should be shown to as many people as possible, especially the village population, to see whether the form and content will be accepted by the target group, and whether the film fulfills its purpose of making people aware of the dangers of uncontrolled fire and the fact that they can be prevented and fought.

Once it has been assessed whether the film successfully raises awareness and helps reach a larger audience than existing awareness material does, SSFFMP should consider making a film that fulfills the second objective of its awareness strategy: promoting alternatives to burning, such as sustainable land use management so that fire will in the long-term not be an issue anymore.

SSFFMP should consider the pros and cons of working with TVRI or another television channel/production house. As mentioned before, the TV station didn't comply with our arrangements in several cases, which greatly prolonged our production process. They also lacked some of the necessary technical equipment and expertise, which meant that SSFFMP itself had to fulfill those tasks. Furthermore, while a broadcast on TVRI helps disseminate the information, it also needs to be pointed out that TVRI as the government owned channel has lost a considerable amount of viewers to commercial television broadcasters. A broadcast on a commercial channel might indeed reach a larger audience.

In the course of the production of our documentary, SSFFMP has also started to build its own editing capacity. Since we couldn't always rely on TVRI, we created a workspace with the necessary equipment and software to do our own video editing. I strongly recommend that SSFFMP staff receive further training in the use of the equipment so they can create their own small spots and films for training and workshops without having to rely on outside production facilities.

Generally it should be evaluated which channels of information are most effective and should therefore be reinforced. Those that will be promoted in the future should have a consistent form and slogan and be in line with the objective the project has at the time. The existing material is rather unobtrusive and tends to be drowned in the mass of colorful posters, flashy headlines and explicit slogans that have become popular in the Indonesia of today. The awareness material should be able to compete or rather stick out among this mass of information. The slogan on existing awareness material reads: "Help prevent forest fires and land fires." This slogan doesn't address the question why fires should be prevented nor does it communicate a sense of urgency or danger. Both should be included in a new slogan.

In the final analysis, pointing the farmer to the dangers involved in burning, including the threat to his own existence, might well trigger a change in attitude. But his day-to-day existence will always remain the farmer's top priority meaning that any inconsistencies in his life might effect his behavior. So, while conveying the dangers of uncontrolled fires to the farmer, it is essential to introduce alternative land use planning or even other sources of income to show him that, unlike the farmer in the New York Times article said, he does have options. Any future awareness material should include these alternatives to help promote SSFFMP's long-term goal of zero burning.