What is World Media in English
and Why Do We Need It?
Q&A with SFPIRG

Hello, my name is Gabby Doebeli, Director of Engagement for Simon Fraser University Public Interest Research Group in Burnaby, Canada. Today we are here with Ramtin Bashi of World Media in English to talk about this new initiative and its purpose.

Q: Hi Ramtin, what is World Media in English?

A: Hi, thank you Gabby. World Media in English is a website with the purpose to publish English translations and analyses of media reports that originally have been published or broadcast in the world's native languages. The goal is to bring important public interest issues that may have been underreported internationally, to the attention of international audiences better, and to do so with good and engaging journalism.

Q: Who is going to do the translations and analyses?

Any citizen of the world who is, fairly in touch with public affairs of their native community, and is able to translate from their native language into English, can create a written article or a video, and send it to us for publication on the website, and on the social media that we are managing for this purpose.

Contributors only need to follow a simple set of guidelines that are included on the website. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide practical and straight-forward instructions for using the internet, to research and create an article or a video. Otherwise, contributors are free to choose their subject matter; and if they like, they can add their personal understanding of the context as well. The guidelines do not give us editorial control, and we do not try to influence the contributors with regards to the content of their work in any way either.

Q: OK, so you're here in Canada, and you're organising a website and social media accounts for it, and anyone in the world who thinks that an issue is happening about public interest in their local community, which the world should know more about, can find some coverage or coverages about it in their native-language media, select and translate from those coverages into English, and then send their work to you for

publication on your website and social media, right?

A: Exactly, although it's better that contributors contact us before starting to work, because we will need to check that their language qualifications and intended subject matter meet the guidelines; and also we will need to check that their completed work is consistent with the guidelines, so they are welcome to keep in touch with us any time as they are working on their project as well, in case we may be able to help with some resources or using the guidelines.

This is not to say though, that people need a lot of specialized skills or training or certificates etc to participate. Basically, our contributors need to have good enough knowledge at a native level in two areas: language and public affairs of their community.

For language, any one with a first language – or equivalent of a mother-tongue - who has also learned a second language well enough to complete a university degree in that language, or well enough to do types of work that would need a university education in that second language, is considered able to translate between their first and second languages. So basically this means, people who have grown up with a native language, who have also learned and used English well enough to get a university degree in English, or well enough to do professional work that would require a university degree in English, can translate between their native language and English.

There are more than a billion people in the world who are literate in English as a second language. I haven't seen any data about how many of these people would be qualified to translate, but I would imagine, even if this is a small fraction, a small fraction of one billion people still makes a very large number.

Besides language, we should remember that our main purpose here, is to inform and educate international audiences, about how public interest issues are seen and felt domestically by the native communities involved. For this reason, our citizen journalists need to be knowledgeable about their native community's public affairs and current social and political conditions.

Public interest issues include any matters of human rights, economic or environmental justice, peace, security or democracy in general. At a minimum, our contributors should be able to search in their native-language media in order to prioritize subject matters, based on a number of factors: the main ones being urgency, numbers of people affected (either locally or internationally), potentials for prevention or solutions (again either locally or internationally), and how systemic the problems may be.

Optionally - and I emphasize optionally - with their translations, contributors can offer international audiences more insight, by giving some historical background and their analyses about why the actors in the events and stories have behaved the way they have, and how

they expect them to behave from here on.

Q: Is this last part what you mean when you say contributors can add their personal understanding of the context?

A: Yes, and this is essentially an explanation of the "hows" and the "whys" behind the events or conditions being reported. Some of the "hows" and "whys" may have been included in the source coverages, but then some may have been omitted, either because it's been assumed that the audiences knew them, or because of conscious or unconscious biases.

And this brings me to an important point regarding context: We've all heard the phrase "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter." The same is often true about media: Often one media outlet's terrorist may be another's freedom fighter. And, in parentheses, I should say that using these words, terrorists and freedom fighters, doesn't mean that we want to concentrate on these kinds of subjects here; in fact we understand that the majorities of people don't want anything to do with these kinds of situations and the violence that they bring. But the point is that generally in reporting, the media organization and the social and political conditions on the ground, are as much part of a story as the story itself.

If, in a story there are facts that are excluded, or somehow undermined or somehow overemphasized, or if there are opinions that are downplayed or overemphasized, these can usually be traced back to the media's affiliations, and the underlying social and political conditions. A native reader of the story can usually see through these nuances and understand why the story is being reported the way it is; but to someone outside, these insights may be, as the saying goes "lost in translation".

That's why it's important for translated reports to include an analysis of the coverages themselves, in other words an assessment of the social and political reasons behind what are emphasized or downplayed, what assumptions are made, or what conclusions are drawn. This assessment, and generally all context analyses, are essentially tasks of identifying a set of cause-and-effect relationships, that stem from a society's social history; and as such, should come out independent of the translator's possible preferences or biases. But on the other hand, we know that in reality no one can have complete knowledge or perfect objectivity in these domains, or perhaps we should admit that we are all biased; or for a host of other reasons people may not want to make public statements in this area. For all these reasons, we leave this part optional, and hope that in any case, our published reports will bring more comments and dialog from our audiences, so that we can all learn more together.

In short, creating a report for us can be as simple as translating a single article and adding a brief introduction and a conclusion, or it can be as broad as making a documentary and making critical analyses about the content. For more details please see the guidelines on our

website.

Q: OK, this sounds good. Still, it looks like it takes a good amount of time and effort to produce these kinds of reports, and we know translating is hard work too. You've done some yourself, and you're asking people to volunteer. Why is it so useful or important to do this?

A: Well, before answering your question let me say that yes, you're right, translation is hard work, especially when you're translating into a second language; but as I said, depending on the subject matter and the contributor's choice about context analysis, the translation part can be as small as a single article or as big as several articles. Also people can get together and do projects collaboratively using divisions of tasks. Otherwise, if our contributors have completed a draft of their writings, we can help with editing, or even using professional help if necessary.

Working collaboratively is especially helpful if people want to create videos instead of written text; and videos are usually more interesting to audiences, and we can put them on our social media right away too. Best of all, people can do all this entirely from their computer desk.

The first reward comes instantly and it's a personal one: Our contributors become worldwide published authors, with ownership of the work they have created. And later if we have time, I'd like to talk about how we've done so far with developing our reach on social media, and how it looks going forward.

But more importantly, people can be sure that their contribution is going towards a real need in our world today. And this brings me to my main answer to your question, why is this so useful or important to do. The answer starts with something that we've all heard often: Our lives have become so interconnected and interdependent on shared environments, shared economies and now shared public health; while level of awareness and communication needed among us citizens of the world, to shape our choices and shape our national public policies accordingly, have remained relatively too low.

If we lived in a world where outcomes of national policies or citizen choices stayed within borders of individual countries, then people outside of the individual countries would not be impacted or directly responsible for any consequences; but in fact now, national outcomes often do impact people outside of the individual countries, sometimes in very deep and massive ways.

The converse situations can happen too: Sometimes policies, choices or behavior from people spread around many different parts of the world can impact some particular communities disproportionately. And sometimes we can have combinations of both situations happening at the same time.

In all these situations what is missing is awareness and understanding about domestic issues of individual countries, on the part of international citizens outside. To put it more simply, we can say that nothing is just domestic or internal any more, but also international and global at the same time; the only question is how much international and global. Let me give you some examples:

My first example is about public health and economic and social life of almost all of us on the planet. Yes, you guessed it right, the Coronavirus pandemic that has deeply affected most of us for a year and half now, and will do so for much longer too. Here, it's obvious that domestic policies and citizen behavior in many individual countries have affected about everyone else in the world, but the important question is, which countries have made the spread disproportionately much worse than it needed to become, especially if they could have avoided their impact relatively easily?

The first country that comes to mind is naturally China, the origin of the pandemic; but what happened in China and how the situation was dealt with there, have been brought to public attention from the beginning, and there is really no shortage of coverage about it. But I doubt, if for every hundred international citizens who have heard about China's role, there is even one who has heard about another country's role, a country which remained a very contagious epicenter for two months, before other countries started to shut down their borders with it; and it turns out that this country could have easily avoided its spread too, and protected its own eighty million people, as well as many more millions outside of its borders.

This country was Iran. Recently its government has engaged in increased dealings with China in areas of trade and construction projects and exchange of students and visitors. By fall of 2019, there were daily flights between these two countries transporting thousands of people back and forth. On the 31st of December 2019 China announced appearance of a potentially fatal contagious virus on their territory, and that was enough reason for many other countries to take actions immediately. The government of Iran did absolutely nothing for a full month until end of January, despite the fact that as far back as in November hospitals had been reporting unusual increases in the numbers of deaths from some kind of a flu. The first reaction from the government came in the beginning of February, when they ordred flights to China stopped, and nothing else; and even so, an airline disobeyed the order and kept flying to China. On the 19th of February, the government finally announced, that the virus had arrived in the country, and that only two people had died of it, and about sixty others had it; but they still did nothing else to protect the people's health.

This also happens to be a nation with close to ten percent of its population living in diaspora, with thousands of them flying to major metropolitan centers of the world back and forth every day. Two weeks after the government's announcement of a mere sixty cases in the whole country, twenty eight other countries traced some of their positive cases back to Iran, and

closed their borders with it.

[Pause here for a photo]

Some months later, at least two independent studies showed that even back in January the number of infections in Iran must have easily been in the tens of thousands, a lot more than sixty. Before these studies came out, in January, Iranian doctors had also been sounding the alarm.

The reality of the situation should have been compelling enough for the government to admit, and act on. In fact, it would have been quite possible for them to control the spread then, because most of the infections were still happening in two particular areas, where there were travels to and from China, and the government just needed to quarantine those two areas.

Some people may say, well, this is in hindsight, in January no one knew for sure what was going to happen. But in matters of public safety we are always dealing with probabilities, and the first job of governments is to look after safety of their citizens. If you drive on a public road without your seatbelt on, a police officer can stop you and order you to put it on, and give you a fine too; because even though the probability of you getting into and accident may have been low, the loss would have been be so great as to make the precaution necessary by law. In Iran, all indications were that probability of spread of the virus was very high, and any child could see that, and lives of millions of people were at stake.

Now, how this all relates to our conversation here, the regime in control of this country has a documented history of disregard for human rights of people they don't need, and it's not me saying this. But it's also true that they do worry about public opinion outside of their borders. If in January of 2020 many people outside had known about what was going on there, it's quite possible that we would've had different outcomes, and World Media in English could have done that, because most of what I said here about their handling of the situation, was just quotes from the native-language media.

So this was one example of how international awareness and engagement about domestic affairs of a particular country can become so important. I can think of another example, deforestation and pollution of the Amazon in Brazil:

The Amazon is called 'lungs of the earth' because it absorbs large amounts of the atmosphere's carbon dioxide and turns it into oxygen. Most of the rainforest is within the national territory of Brazil. It has been deforesting since the 1970's, and this trend has increased recently, mainly because of cattle ranching industries that export their products internationally, and externalize their costs to the environments locally.

[Pause here for a photo]

The Amazon has also been polluted by international mining operations, with harmful effects on the health of the local people. There are still about half a million indeginous people who live there.

There is a scientific opinion that predicts continued deforestation will soon reach a tipping point, where any more deforestation will feed back onto itself and lead to large parts of the jungle turning into dry savannah.

Any changes for the better depend on changes in domestic policies of Brazil, but the situation there has gone on for many decades, without real improvements. It is clear that at least parts of any solutions, rest in the hands of international citizens, especially those who consume the products.

This is another example where international citizens need to learn about domestic politics and socio-economic conditions of a particular country, and connect with the local people, not only to help them, but also to protect themselves.

Another example is about manufacturing of electric vehicles. It's true that compared to internal combustion engine vehicles, electric vehicles are cleaner, and do not spread greenhouse gases, at least not close to where people live and breathe; but there are facts about the technology and its impact on local peoples and environments, which citizens of the world should know more about:

For example the process of production of an electric vehicle itself, leaves a much bigger footprint on the environments, than that of a combustion engine vehicle. The electric vehicle will do better than its combustion engine counterpart, only if it is consistently used for the length of its lifetime (That is to say, if it's not under-used or retired early); and even so, an electric vehicle can only improve on its combustion engine counterpart by a small difference. For example, an electric Volkswagen will do about 17% better, than a diesel engine one.

[Pause here for a photo]

Batteries of electric vehicles are made of a rare metal, called lithium. In 2017, there were about 3.1 million electric vehicles in the world. This number is expected to reach 125 million by 2030. Lithium has been, and will be heavily mined in the coming years. Natural deposits of this metal are mostly found in a particular group of countries: Bolivia, Chile, Argentina,

Australia and China. Current methods of extraction do entail harm to the environments, including pollution of air and water resources, and they can consume large amounts of water. Mining activities have already strained local farmers, and caused clashes and killed wildlife.

Also lithium batteries have a useful lifetime, after which they cannot be recharged. If dumped untreated, they can be harmful to the environments. There are still no known commercially viable methods for re-use or recycling them. For example in Australia, only 2% of the country's 3000 tons of lithium waste has been recycled. Based on what we know now, there will be a huge problem of lithium waste in the world very soon.

This is another example of an issue, which international citizens need to learn about, and learn how it can be managed in coordination with domestic economic and environmental situations, in a group of individual countries.

And of course, we all know about global warming in general, and its consequences, which now have reached even first world countries like Germany and Canada; countries which are right now dealing with destructive floods and fires, with the loss of lives and livelihoods they have brought.

The three last examples I talked about, were about environmental justice. There are many more about human rights and economic justice, where luckily for the victims, in many instances, governments would find it hard to ignore the problems, if international light is shed on them. For example, did you know that in Pakistan and Iran and Venezuela, there are thousands of people who smuggle merchandise across the borders, as their only option to make a living? In doing so, they risk their lives, and many do get shot and killed. The governments of these countries have, or should have the resources to provide better alternatives for these people.

In all these examples, there is much more that international citizens can see and learn, from native-language media, compared to international media.

Q: You said you wanted to talk about what you've done on social media so far, and how it looks going forward.

Yes thank you. Before talking about our social media, I should mention about our website. This is where, our articles and videos are published in the first place, and it is also our home base on the internet. There is a Home page, and there is a page we have called Contribute, that contains the guidelines. As we say on this page, creating reports is not the only way people can participate and help. Joining our audiences, and joining us on social media and sharing, and making recommendations are all other very important ways.

We also have a Campaigns page on the website, where we can provide a home on the

internet, and share our resources with people who want to create outreach campaigns, based on the same kind of citizen journalism. There is already one campaign we are hosting on this page. It has a Facebook page with more than 18,000 likes as of now.

Facebook is the social media platform, with the most interactive functionality, like events and abilities to post and share content, by both the account owners and the audiences; and for this reason we thought it's the best platform to use for our campaigns. But for articles and videos we get for World Media in English only, and not as part of a campaign, mainly we want to show them in audio-visual form, and receive comments from our audiences; and this makes YouTube the best choice. Of course we can link and cross-post content between these two platforms as well. In addition, we have an Instagram, which we can use for live streaming, and to post links to content on the other platforms. Being on the three biggest social media, that are connected in this way, also increases our reach; so if people like, or subscribe or follow one of our accounts, they will have access to content on the others as well.

We have just started our YouTube and Instagram, and we are debuting them with this video, and that's why you won't see many subscribers on them yet. But we've had a five-year experience with our campaign Facebook page, and given the fact that the content and the audiences will be similar, we can assume that going forward, our YouTube and Instagram will perform similarly, and get similar responses from people.

With our campaign Facebook page, audience response rates to our advertisements, that is the numbers of people who have responded to our ads out of the total numbers of people who have seen them, have been more than ten times Facebook's average. We've also got thousands of organic likes of the page, and shares of pages the website. If we look at the numbers we've got from our Facebook page during the past five years, we can make a general prediction about what is possible, going forward with our YouTube and Instagram as well:

So far, with a small budget of about 600 US dollars we have reached about 600,000 people around the world, and as a result, we have got about 60,000 different types of responses in total, consisting of likes of the page, shares of pages of the website, video views and likes of the posts. If we divide 600,000 by 60,000, we get 10. This means that for every 10 people we have reached, we have got a like or a video view or a share. There are about three billion Facebook users in the world; so the 600,000 people who we have reached so far, make only 0.02%, or one in 5000 of all the people who we could potentially reach on this platform. It may be hard for us to reach all of these people in the foreseeable future, and it may be too optimistic to assume that we will always get the same response rates; but it is clear, that it is possible for us to easily reach at least many more millions of people, and get participation from at least many more thousands of them in a short period of time.

This is to tell people that if you create content with us, whether reports or analyses or

discussions, they will certainly be seen by at least many thousands of people around the world, in not too long a period; and that any help you give, goes towards building a global community, around some of the most important social and moral goals there are.

Now can I ask you a question Gabby?

Please:

Please tell us about your organisation, what you do, why do you consider our activities good for your support, and what are the kinds of help we can get from you.

[your reply and finally:]

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Well, to close, for a second I just want to put myself in the shoes of people who have been watching us, in case some people may have asked themselves, who are these people? Is this real?

The answer is yes, this is definitely real. We the volunteers may not have the public profiles that people would usually see associated with a project like this; but Gabby here, is director of engagement for a foundation that has been here since 1981, and they have an office on the campus of a public university in Canada; and in this country a civil society organisation like theirs, do their work only on the basis of their stated principles and policies, and they don't take orders from any one, and they don't fake anything.

In addition, what we do is completely transparent: Our guidelines are based only on principles of serving public interest and good journalism. We publish qualifying submissions, exactly as we receive them, and require inclusion of original sources of all translated content. And our published content is open to free and democratic public discussion. We are also open to, and welcome criticism and suggestions for improvement.

Imagine if, when you got up this morning, there was no water in your taps, or no electricity in your plugs, or no food on your table, or no roof over your head, or no money in your bank account, or no certainty that you wouldn't be hit by a bullet or a bomb any minute; what kind of a shape you and your family would be in now? These are not privileges; these are rights. And with some of your time and brain power, you can help in a very real way, to bring these rights to many of your fellow human beings who need them.

Please subscribe to our channel here, and visit our website and stay with us.

Thank you Gabby and thank you to all who have watched.