

Quality in different world regions

TV experts from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe talk about quality

Children's TV professionals from all over the world were asked about their opinions on high-quality children's programmes in their regions.¹ One of the main questions was: What are the biggest challenges in achieving the highest quality in TV in your region (apart from financial aspects)? What would improve this situation? Another question was: What means "high quality" to you?

Africa

Antoinette Falohun, Nigerian Television Authority, Nigeria

"I believe the biggest challenges are time, training, and retraining to be able to blend local materials to meet up with global trends in broadcasting for children, and also research in order to celebrate African stories but also open vistas of seeing the world in different ways."

Firdoze Bulbulia, CBFA, South Africa

"Children's content is not a priority in Africa except for maybe South Africa where there are dedicated children's strands within the public broadcaster SABC. Most African countries either buy-in ready produced content or produce studio-based children's magazines and drama programmes. Most producers of children's content are not trained professionals, also broadcasters are not keen to provide the necessary resource to produce quality

children's content.

Among other things, political will could improve the situation – there needs to be Regulation and Policy formulation around locally produced children's content. Firstly, local content quotas should include a higher percentage for children – the Africa Charter on Children's Broadcasting spells out

some of the more important guidelines that both broadcasters and producers should consider, e.g. children must learn their own languages, cultures, life's experiences before they are expected to embrace 'foreign' cultures. The Scandinavian countries are good examples that we should follow in terms of ensuring African content is given a higher priority and political accountability. The good news is that the Nigerian Government has just increased their quotas for locally produced children's content as well as the time when this content should be aired.

There is also the very important concern with the Sesame Street Workshop concept where international companies/organisations are bringing in their format and enticing the local broadcasters to produce with them who incidentally never own the product, even though all the issues, storyline and content is local. In South



Discussing programmes with other children's TV experts at the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2008

Africa the funding that goes into producing *Takalani Sesame* could have been better used to make many more locally-produced programmes."

Antoinette Ntuli, Soul City, South Africa

"There is very little fictional material produced for children in Africa. In South Africa, *Soul Buddyz* is a notable exception, and has won awards. There are quite a few reasonably high-quality talk shows and other non-fictional formats designed for children that are shown in South Africa. There is a need for deepening awareness among broadcasters and policy makers of the significant role that drama can play in contributing to children's development.

There is also a need for more training of script writers, especially concerning children's drama to facilitate the writing of high quality scripts."

**Lolli Goodson, SABC,
South Africa**

“High-quality programmes are generally those for which there are good budgets and which have been made by good production companies – and also where sufficient time has been spent in development. In our region, children’s programming is only offered day-time slots and is under-budgeted. Dramas and fictional programming go beyond our reach.



Sharing enthusiasm about making children’s TV

Critically, we struggle with the “will” to invest in children’s programming. Also, there is the obstacle of little to no “return on investment” as different languages make local programming difficult to sell into other markets.”

Asia

Hyunsook Chung, EBS, Korea

“I am sorry to say that it is rather unlikely to have any local fictional programmes for children. For example, in Malaysia there are some magazine shows for children with some dramatised clips but no fiction except for ABU Children’s drama series. Mostly they broadcast animation programmes for children, which are very popular.

In general, in Asia “high-quality” programme means having a strong moral message with overall educational aspects.

Basically there is little understanding on how important it is to make quality

children’s programmes. The typical expectation, ‘Children should learn something’ without knowing how to make it more attractive becomes the biggest obstacle. On top of that there is not so much private investment in children’s programme as it doesn’t look so glorious in the money-making industry. We must rely on the personal passion on working for children. With continuous networking and workshops, we should keep up the certain level of discussion on the future of children’s programmes.”

**Hiroko Sakau, NHK,
Japan**

“I put the biggest value on these programmes that are filled with play. Play is the most important for raising children’s imagination and creative attitude. Through playing processes children learn to think for themselves and apply try & error unconsciously. Therefore,

The biggest challenge in achieving the highest quality in TV is that children’s programmes almost never have enough budget. So we gather and pick a lot of brain: We try to organise the production group with many efficient research person and talented artists who co-operate with us. And I think we should ask children. They always want to play and enjoy their lives, they are always hungry for new interesting things. So I connect adults’ talents with children’s feeling. I blend them and make programmes like fruitful cakes.”

**Mag Cruz Hatol, Anak TV,
Philippines**

“We find that the children of South-Eastern Asia, particularly Filipinos, seem to be happy with their diet of Western fare. It is likely because there seems to be very limited locally produced materials that they have access to. Hence, kids are accustomed to growing up being exposed to for-

eign children’s programmes. It is not surprising that many children in South-Eastern Asia seem to equate quality programming with imported materials. Not only do imports enjoy publicity and promotional advantage because of the worldwide marketing machinery that accompanies their launch and syndication, they also edge out local programmes in patronage and viewership because of the psychological advantage that since imports are promoted more heavily, they must be of higher quality.

Good children’s television can only survive in a highly mercantile environment such as the Philippines if it is backed up by solid and sincere advertising support and is propelled by the carrying TV station’s political will. No amount of improvement in children’s programming can ever do real good to the child audience if advertisers will not gamble their placements and TV stations will not risk choice airtime for children.“

Latin America

**Beth Carmona, MídiaTiva/Prix
Jeunesse Iberoamericano, Brazil**

“In Latin America, we do not have public TV as strong and established as in Europe or North America, being on the children’s side, offering shows all the time. Maybe the new media can open more ways for that. We also need to improve quality giving the professionals more opportunities to produce, watch and discuss quality children’s shows. Workshops, festivals, meetings are excellent opportunities to know more and to exchange experiences.”

**Aldana Duhalde, producer/
director, Argentina**

“In my opinion, the most important aspect to be developed is the basic first step: the consciousness regarding the necessity and the right of having a considerable portion of the programming truly dedicated to children. There are still almost no pro-

grammes for them in our main channels. Take Argentina as an example: Only recently the public station Canal 7 began airing a significant quantity of hours specifically designed for children, but it doesn't include fiction programmes yet.



Exchanging experience internationally is important (PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2008)

On the other hand, there are some huge commercial successes in Latin America, e.g. the Argentinean *Casi Angeles* or *Patito Feo*. Both are remarkable production systems but objectionable in some fundamental aspects. To mention only one aspect: although their "packaging" is targeted at children, the treatment of the principal conflicts in the plot is many times not suitable for kids (sexual scenes for example).

This situation could be reverted with a bigger offer and demand of local production to stimulate competition (channels' and government responsibility) and more audiovisual education. In this context, experiences like the PRIX JEUNESSE Suitcase trainings are so important in the region, to share concrete good quality examples of children's TV and to pass on the enthusiasm to create our own messages for our children and, why not, the children of the whole world."

Alejandro Escobar, Canal Once, Mexico

"Besides the more or less well known facts of lack of funding, limitations of the public TV systems in Latin

America, low resources and production times, and the uneven fight with multinational merchandising-driven products that flood the market, I would like to talk about a very big challenge that quality TV producers are facing in Latin America. It's the lack of demand for quality TV shows for children in the region. Audiences don't have readily developed criteria to prefer good-value, educational, inspiring television, from bad, violent and shock packed, "buy all our stuff" kind of shows. For some parents, solving the immediate problem of having their kids fuss about is done by putting them in front of the TV, maybe to watch a kids' cable channel, if having the means for it, or with whatever's on in the local channels. The challenge lies in making the public understand what better television for your child is like, and therefore creating a better culture for consuming children's television in the region."

Patricia Arriaga, Nao Kids, Mexico

"The biggest challenge is finding good writers who know children and can write for them. We have great production values in the region; the writing is our weakest link."

Liliana de la Quintana, Nicobis, Bolivia

"Well, in my opinion there are two main challenges. The first one is to achieve a higher quantity of productions because, although all the countries show the effort to produce programmes, we haven't been able to create a good amount of programmes to fill the free slots in the TV channels. So, the first challenge would be to create a certain amount of high-quality material, and this obviously is linked to the financial aspect.

The second challenge is, in my opinion, finding appropriate topics. It's a big challenge to find topics that can really give answers to a lot of questions the children don't ask directly. I think that all the things we see on

TV, for example the climate change, tornados, floods, earthquakes – all these things have also frightened the children, and we don't respond to that, so I think one challenge is to find these topics and to decide how to deal with them, how to give the children positive explanations, or topics with more potential for conflict such as confrontations. Latin America is in a very early stage of democracy and you see a lot of violence, discrimination and confrontations on TV and the question is how to present these topics for the children."

Milagros Roldán Berroa, Maribel Díaz Gato, Televisión Cubana, Cuba

"The situation of quality TV in the region would be improved by giving more priority to children's programmes in the channel's general programming and by getting more informed about international TV productions. This would help to produce according to the target group and their audiovisual needs."

Eastern Europe

Valentin Dimulescu, TVR, Romania

"We have Romanian productions of children's TV mainly on the public TV channel, whereas private channels broadcast cartoons. We want to make our programmes known to children all over the world. This is why we promote films in the EBU exchange programmes for children, and share TV productions with the active EBU States."

Oksana Klinchaeva, Kyrgyz National TV, Kyrgyz Republic

"On the whole territory of Central Asia as well as in Russian television not more than 2% of the broadcasting time fall on children's programmes, and instead of creating high-quality children's programmes in most cases this time is covered by showing cartoons.

In fact, there are a lot of problems in achieving high quality in the TV in our region, but the most urgent out of them is just a financial side. The lack of skilled personnel who knows the specific character of children's programmes takes the second place. With the example of two programmes (*Kontrolnaya dlya vzroslyh*, *Keremet koch*) we emphasise that one of main "secret recipes" in the creation of new projects was the consulting assistance of UNICEF in the development of the programme conception and its further implementation, holding of trainings, participation in different seminars, exchange of experience with foreign colleagues and international organisations."

"What means high quality to you in your everyday work?"

Filmmakers and TV producers in different world regions also shared their experience in making children's TV and named quality criteria when asked about their understanding of high-quality programmes for children.

Good content, technical excellence and quality in production practice are without doubt criteria in children's TV worldwide (cf. table 1).

But there is another important aspect that relates to choosing the right content which is not stated explicitly in table 1. International experts also put emphasis on telling stories of local or regional "feel" and importance.

This could be on the one hand picking up local traditions, regional cultural heritage or language, and on the other hand the need and wish to explain the global in a local context.

"I think the topics [of children's TV] are the same: It's about finding out who you are, wanting to do the right thing, ethical dilemmas, laughing. But we do it in a way the children recognise and feel more at home with. In Norway, it means mountains,

for instance. It means red wooden houses. It means in a language that is their own and in a dialect that a child speaks. The country is so large that we have to fly. We produce the programmes in different places in Norway, because living in Oslo is so different from living in a small village up in the north." (TV expert Norway)

"There is this Chilean series *Tikitiklip*, a little fiction piece, with an exquisite art direction and richness in rescuing traditional songs and old crafts techniques to communicate with children. Children love it, learn the short old stories, sing the songs and have the possibility to appreciate the sometimes forgotten traditions of their own place. This is considered high quality." (TV expert Argentina)

"Blend local materials to meet up with global trends, celebrate African stories, but also open vistas of seeing the world in different ways." (TV expert Nigeria)

Quality criteria²

Good content, the right subject matter, a great story

- Right for its target audience
- Being close to children's own perspectives
- Taking children seriously
- Producing programmes that are right for their age group
- Not being didactic
- Children must learn something/experience something new
- Telling stories humorously
- Entertaining children
- Communicating good values
- Taking account of children's viewing habits
- Fulfilling children's dreams and exciting their imagination
- Producing programmes that are suitable for families

Technical quality

- Good script and the right dramatic treatment
- Being gripping and exciting
- An appropriate aesthetic/"look"
- Not producing anything cheap or shoddy
- Having a unique style
- Being modern
- Being compatible with the market

Quality in production process

- Working with commitment/love
- A good team
- Creative ideas
- Thorough research
- Keeping an eye on the market

Table 1: "What do you understand by quality in your everyday work?" – The 25 most frequently named quality criteria by German producers

"I think that the most important challenge is to offer a product that impacts and captures the children and at the same time contributes content other than violence, consumption, stereotypes of foreigners, but content that allows us to know each other better." (TV expert Ecuador) ■

NOTES

¹ 30 experts in the field of children's television were contacted in 2009 through the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL network. Due to space restrictions we can only present excerpts from their feedback, ideas and opinions.

² The IZI questioned producers and those responsible for programming in Germany about this subject in 25 intensive face-to-face interviews. The opening question was: "What do you understand by quality in your everyday work?" The various quality criteria which were named spontaneously were then summarised according to similarity of content. Cf. Hackl, Christiane (2005). Qualitätsverständnis von ProduzentInnen im Kinderfernsehbereich. In: *TelevIZion*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 52-57.