
Media Lacking Aggression to Report Environment-Related Issues

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ABSTRACT:

Over the one last decade or so, the natural disasters and extreme weather events have claimed human lives and damaged properties across the globe like never before. The news reports of natural catastrophes in one part of the world or other reached us through print, electronic or web media as frequently as if they were common reports on routine sports, crime, business or political developments. If we take a look of such calamities and extreme weather events occurring from 2012 to 2013, we will find a long list including – monsoon flooding in North Korea uprooting more than 2 lakh people in July, 2012, more than 5,30,000 being displaced in Nigeria due to unprecedented flooding of the Niger River, superstorm Sandy displacing 7,76,000 people in USA in October 2012 and many others. India too witnessed one of the biggest catastrophes in the country in the form of Uttarakhand flash flood in July this year which claimed thousands of lives and more than 15000 were reported to be stranded.

Many studies have been revealing recently about the increasing frequencies of such natural calamities and extreme weather incidents due to human activities but media seems to be lacking the spirit and aggression to raise this issue among the governance for immediate redressal and among the citizens for their awakening.

This paper aims at studying the increased frequency of the natural disasters and weather events in the world as a result of human activities like - deforestation, over grazing, river channelization, hardscaping and others. The paper would also try to analyse whether media is not giving the kind of attention required to tackle the environment related issues which is posing threat not only to India but to the entire world.

Media is said to be the driving force for bringing changes in the society and world and therefore, it must, once again, realize its responsibility and adopt a proactive approach and launch a similar campaign collectively to aggressively raise the environment related issues before the governance.

Keywords: *Environment, extreme weather events, media, reporting, natural disasters, climate change etc.*

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

With a view to reach a meaningful conclusion on the basis of facts and figures from different articles, books, magazines, research papers, newspapers reports, books etc., the **Content Analysis** method has been chosen for this research paper. Besides, an **Interview** of the senior editor of Down to Earth Magazine was also conducted so that the point of view of those actively working in the science and environment reporting could also be gauged. This way there are two research methodology used in this research paper:

- ⇒ **Content Analysis**
- ⇒ **Interview**

OBJECTIVES:

This research paper aims at studying the role of media in reporting environment related issues.

- ⇒ It also attempts to study the increasing frequencies of the natural disasters and extreme weather events during last 30 years.
- ⇒ To some extent we also try to figure out the factors causing the increased frequencies of these incidents.
- ⇒ The paper also tries to know how the media affect the way environment issues are taken up today.
- ⇒ It also aims at finding out the challenges media organizations face while reporting environment issues.

HYPOTHESIS:

- Media does not report the environment-related issues to as much extent as needed.
- The numbers of weather events and natural disasters have increased in frequency due to the human activities like deforestation, transportation, river channelization, hardscaping etc.
- In last 30 years or so, the number of such incidents has increased many folds.
- Mainstream media lack the will power to report these issues.
- There's a dearth of awareness campaigns by mainstream media among the people to bring awareness for environment conservation.

INTRODUCTION:

Global warming, today, is a matter of grave concern for the entire world. It has become a threat to the planet earth as a result of which the hot days are turning hotter, cold days are getting colder and the floods and the rainfall are also becoming heavier. The droughts too are more severe today.

The global warming today is not only causing these extreme weather events but is also causing changes to the landscape of the earth which is disastrous. The human activities like deforestation, river channelization, overgrazing are also adding stress to the wildlife species and their habitat. The way, we are experiencing the changing (extreme) weather conditions in every season in different parts of the country and the world is also attributed, by the experts, to these human activities which eventually lead to global warming.

Media plays a crucial role in bringing the needed change in the world by bringing awareness among the masses that shapes a public opinion on an issue which results in public pressure ultimately leading to legislature. Considering the kind of attention that the environment-related issues needed, media has been lacking aggression. While these issues continue to haunt the entire globe and demand immediate redressal, the media seems to be lacking the will power that it needs to report these issues in a way that could compel the government of different countries to draft some effective policies for checking the environment-related issues.

AN ANALYSIS:

Over the one last decade or so, the natural disasters and extreme weather events have claimed human lives and damaged properties across the globe like never before. The news reports of natural catastrophes in one part of the world or other reached us through print, electronic or web media as frequently as if they were common reports on routine sports, crime, business or political developments. If we take a look of such calamities and extreme weather events occurring from 2012 to 2013, we will find a long list including – monsoon flooding in North Korea uprooting more than 2 lakh people in July, 2012, more than 5,30,000 being displaced in Nigeria due to unprecedented flooding of the Niger River, superstorm Sandy displacing 7,76,000 people in USA in October 2012, a series of storms in China including Typhoon Haikui forcing 3.5 million people to leave their homes, heavy rains and large-scale flooding affecting around 2 million people in Pakistan in August, 2012 and the list is unending with

the recent Typhoon Haiyan reportedly claiming over 10,000 human lives and dislodging over a million in Philippines.

India too is witnessing natural calamities from past few years as frequent as never before. Some of such disasters that took several lives and wrecked millions people in last one year were - Uttarakashi flash flood in Uttarakhand in August 2012, heavy floods in Assam and other North-Eastern states in July, 2012, Cyclon storm 'Nilam' Tamil Nadu in October-2013, landslides and flooding in Sikkim in September, 2012 and there were such many flooding and landslide incidents in West Bengal, Mumbai, Andhra Pradesh, Jaipur, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and others that eliminated hundreds of lives and forced thousands to leave their shelters. The incidents of flash floods, landslides, flooding, lightening, thunderstorm, cyclone etc. were regularly reported from some part of the country or other during the monsoon of 2012. And while the onset of 2013 saw many avalanches in states like Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand killing many, hailstorms wrecked havoc in states like Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh where many died and crops of more than 80 villages were damaged. After frequent incidents of flooding, landslides, hailstorm, thunderstorm, heat waves, cyclones, forest fire during the first half of the year came the flash flood of Uttarakhand that not only shook the state but the entire country wherein thousands of people lost their lives while more than 15000 pilgrims and tourists were left stranded.

Around 40,000 people were evacuated and moved to safe places following heavy flooding in Gujarat in September 2013.

In October 2013, Odisha was hit by Cyclone Phailin that affected more than one crore people living in 16,000 villages of the state. Besides, over 3 lakh houses (according to ndtv.com report) and 26 lakh trees were damaged due to the heavy rains and strong winds, mentioned national English daily, Indian Express in a report.

While a report of WHO reveals that the world has warmed approximately by 0.75 degree Celsius in last 100 years, the rate of global warming has accelerated at over 0.18 degree Celsius per decade over the last 25 years owing to the human activities. Another study by *goodintents.org* shows that deforestation, over grazing, river channelization, hardscaping and many other activities impact the frequency and severity of natural disasters. The study further says that although tsunamis are caused by earthquakes, the destruction caused by them is greater in the areas where the mangrove swamps had been destroyed as it act as a sponge absorbing much of the force of the waves.

Many studies have suggested that climate change across the globe is raising the sea-levels and changing weather patterns in many parts of the world. As sea levels are continuously rising due to global warming caused by the pollution, low-lying coastal areas are becoming more prone to damage by sea-waves, tropical storms, cyclones and others. Areas witnessing increased rainfall owing to the changing weather patterns remain under the threats of flooding and landslides whereas the regions with decreased rainfall have to face crop failure, desertification, forest fires and other issues.

According to a report of British charity firm Oxfam, the number of natural disasters around the world has increased by more than four times in the last 20 years. After analyzing the data gathered by United Nations and researchers at Louvain University in Belgium, it found that the earth is currently experiencing around 500 natural disasters per year compared to 120 per year in the 1980s. The British firm has attributed the increasing disaster rate to global warming.

Although many national and international organizations are working in the field of environment conservation, however, most of the countries of the world seem to be lacking a political will power to address such a serious issue as their focus remain on fast-paced development. The environment and pollution related issues are even more serious in developing countries like India which needs serious and immediate attention both from its government and the citizens.

MEDIA & ENVIRONMENT-RELATED ISSUES:

So far, media too seems to be lacking aggression in raising the environmental issues which could compel the government to formulate some effective policies and check human activities posing serious threat to the environment and eventually to the human existence. As of now, media is only seen reporting the events organized by different organizations and countries for working out some plans to deal with the problems related to the conservation of environment and check pollution. The proactive initiatives are clearly seen missing by media organizations not only in India but the entire world.

Media is said to be a driving force for bringing changes in the society and the world. And this has been testified time and again. Recently in Indian scenario, we saw media playing a decisive role following the Delhi-gang rape incident wherein it build public opinion in a way that people went on a movement that forced the government to introduce a new law for speedy trials of the cases involving crime against women. Media also played a significant

role as the five states of the country – Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Mizoram (elections in Delhi are scheduled on December 4) – went to polls in November, 2013. Many newspapers launched voters' awareness drives that resulted in a heavy turnout of the voters in states like Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Mizoram. It was the courage and sense of responsibility towards electing a better leader and government instilled in people collectively by Election Commission and media organizations that drove them to the polling booths in such a large number defying the threats by the Naxalites in states like Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

Media must, once again, realize its responsibility and adopt a proactive approach and launch a similar campaign collectively to aggressively raise the environment related issues before the governance. It should not stop until an effective policy is worked out by the government to resolve the environment-related issues which poses severe threat to the entire human existence. Media also needs to work to bring awareness at a mass-level about how every individual could make contribution in conserving the environment and checking pollution so that we can lead a better and healthy life and offer a bright future to the generations to follow.

Interview with Mr. Richard Mahapatra, Senior Editor of *Down to Earth* – a fortnightly magazine published by Centre for Science and Environment:

Q.1. In the past few years, the frequency of natural calamities and extreme weather events have increased manifold across the globe which is attributed to the human activities like deforestation, over grazing, river channelization, hardscaping and others. With all these happening around, mainstream media seems to be lacking aggression in reporting environment-related issues. What's your take?

Answer: The media is reporting disasters as stand-alone events. That is the crisis, and it has been the case since generations. But the plot has changed, we have massive environmental degradation, we have climate change and also we have changes in fundamental of our socio-economic structures.

The media is not informed how these changes are inter-linked and how one change could be linked to another change. For example, the Uttarakhand floods. Many media coverage to begin with couldn't understand the links between rising urbanization and the disaster, the increasing deforestation and the link to severity of the flood. So, the media is yet to understand this links.

Q.2. Do you think media should change its approach in reporting issues related to environment protection so that it can force the government to formulate effective policies?

Answer: In an ideal situation, yes. As pointed out, media reportage is not a problem but the way it approaches. So, who will change this? First, the media itself needs to be more researching and understanding of a situation. Second, the other wings like scientists and NGO and research organization also need to orient the media on the linkages.

Q.3. Recently, during assembly elections, mainstream media was seen carrying out awareness campaign to encourage voters to exercise their franchise. Why is there lack of such awareness campaign among the masses to develop a healthy environment?

Answer: Again, media responds to its readers' interests. Voting is a general interest subject. So is, environment. But a media hardly in understanding of it and its many manifestations, will never take up such campaigns. But yes a few TV channels have taken up campaigns. Like NDTV's tiger campaign. But if you look at the campaign it is a pure conservation campaign, forgetting the intimate linkage of tiger conservation with the well beings of the forest's tribal residents.

Q.4. How do you think media influence the way environmental issues are taken up in our lives?

Answer: Many ways, but not in the degree that we expect. Yes the NDTV campaign on tiger informed young viewers and government of the crisis of depleting tiger population. But, what about the reasons why it is happening? What about the Indian reality of forests being inhabited equally by human and animals? Why is the conflict between human and animals not being reported?

You have very few examples of media influencing in such degree policies. You can count Down To Earth as one of them,

Q.5. What are the challenges that you think media faces while reporting environment issues?

Answer: As pointed out, the understanding of complexities involving environmental issues. More to it, the media houses' willingness to carry story. But I feel that if we make environment into a common man's issue, our editors will be forced to carry such stories.

Q.6. Do you feel that media sees environment with very narrow perspective? Down To Earth has been doing a remarkable job in raising issues before the governance and public to protect environment, if you can elaborate, how does DTE define environment?

Answer: DTE reports on everything but from environment and science eyes. Our biggest contribution is interpreting everything from human perspectives and writing and researching them with simplicity. For example, we see rise in car consumption as a threat to environment while the rest of media see it as a sign of economic growth. We then do a story on the environmental meaning of economic growth. So, the conclusion: growth leads to pollution. is there a growth that is environment friendly.

Q.7. Do you see international media working differently than Indian media when it comes to addressing environment issues?

Answer: Yes, to some extent. They have dedicated staff for such kind of stories. Also they have better interactions with scientific and research community than us.

Q.8. How do you see the role of regional media in facing the challenges on the environmental front in future?

Answer: I think regional media is the first one to be writing about environment. Environmental stories are the most suitable stories at regional level.

CONCLUSION:

Having gone through different articles, research papers, media reports from across the world on environment related issues, it was clear that the number of natural disasters and extreme weather events have gone up many fold. And the lack of aggression in reporting these issues in media was also confirmed with the interview of noted environment journalist and Senior Editor of *Down to Earth* magazine, Mr Richar Mahapatra. He admitted the fact that media is not raising issues like inter-connection between rising urbanization and disaster, the increasing deforestation and the severity of flood in different parts of the world.

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