



# Trends in the Coverage of Environment in News Channels

An Analysis by CMS ENVIS Centre



INDIA<sup>TV</sup>

TIME<sup>S</sup>  
NOW

समाचार 24



आज तक  
सबसे तेज

STAR  
न्यूज़  
आपको रखे आगे



एनटीवी टुडै

NTV  
इंडिया

एन  
न्यूज़ 24/7



2  
ZEE NEWS

NTV  
24x7

CNN  
IBN  
India's Best English News Channel

न्यूज़ 24

news 24

ETV

SADHNA  
NEWS

NEWS 24

LIVE  
NEWS

NTV  
PROFIT

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## Preface

Green Voice of CMS Envis centre, now is 12 year old quarterly and has been analyzing media coverage of environment. We feel that the media coverage on environment is an important indicator of it being on national agenda. By tracking media coverage, CMS Envis centre tracks the priority given to various environment issues in media and its implications

This monograph is for the period of 2009-2014, when activities at home and abroad on environment have been hectic. In that process the role played by news media is vital particularly when their proliferation in Indian is unprecedented.

Does our news media reflect all such trends and debates on environment in the last decade? This monograph is a small step in that direction. It suffers from certain limitations to do with its scope. First, it is limited to only to five news channels. The coverage analysed is limited to prime time (7 to 11 PM) of channels. We need to bring in other media and match the coverage with hectic activities on ground.

We welcome any suggestions towards making this exercise more reliable, relevant and insightful to help develop corrective action initiatives for NEWS media and other stakeholders. We believe that the media is a strong platform to protect environment and promote sustainability practices.

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# 1. Introduction

To bring back concern for environment and make it as an agenda of the country, at both the macro and micro level, mass media is a reliable source. Knowing the way mass media, news media in particular, reflect environment in their coverage, is important to get an accurate picture of where the country stands in examining the specifics of environment.



This monograph tries to reflect the concerns and priorities at the macro-level going by the extent and scope of coverage by news media. With their recent proliferation, TV channels, particularly round-the-clock news channels, have become the agenda setters and path makers for public policies and priorities.



Significant developments in the last decade with regard to climate change and the proliferation of news channels in the country raise hopes that the media will take up the coverage of environment with new-found enthusiasm. Also, because a number of government agencies and civic and community groups, have promoted the cause with innumerable campaigns, a considerable increase in the coverage of environment in the public media is expected.



Considering that national news channels reflect the trend in the coverage of environmental issues, five prominent channels, that together account for almost two thirds of national news channel viewers, were monitored and analyzed.



News channels have a prominent role when it comes to determining the agenda of the times, and the extent of attention they get with regard to their immediate importance . Of course, special programmes aired by news channels are also taken seriously, which is exactly why they have also been covered for the tracking and analysis.



## 2. An Overview, 2009-2014

A six-year review is critical to understand the direction the news media of the country are taking in the context of environmental movement. What could be some such insights that require to be taken note for further initiatives and correctives?

A real breakthrough in the coverage of environment concerns by news channels is not a possibility as long as TRP-driven content priorities are followed. Under this model, it is politics, sports, entertainment and crime which gets prime concern of channels, even news channels. Any deviation otherwise is sporadic or temporal and that too when sponsorship is forthcoming.

Even against that background, it should be of concern that despite the proliferation of channels and competition between them and so much happening around, the news coverage of environment has not increased in the last decade, including in the last six years. An equally important concern is that the coverage of environment was not consistent as compared to the coverage of crime or sports or even entertainment. The interest of the news channels seemed to be around other events or on the availability of sponsorship.

One would have expected some change for good because of increased competition between channels during these years. But there is no definite indication to that effect, since the competition was primarily a fight for TRPs. And competition, as we know, unravels both creativity as well as concerns.

One reason why news channels were not able to do justice to the coverage of environmental issues could be because there has been a shift of certain topics from bulletins to features, sponsored or otherwise. Another reason could be that some of these issues are not adaptable to bulletins, given the time limit. - (bulletins cannot accommodate lengthy or difficult or complex concepts). Or it could also be because the costs involved in reporting on the current and contemporary issues of environment are much more than in the case of print. And for channels, field-based visual backup only matters when done professionally.

However, taking a shift from bulletins, TV channels have aired debates, quizzes, documentaries, and interactive or live coverage of celebrities. For example, NDTV launched environmental initiatives by airing special programmes, which led a few other news channels to follow suit.



Earlier, some such issues were “spoon-fed” to news media by Government agencies. Now in the case of channels, it is the corporate and such other lobbies or PR agencies which feed news media.



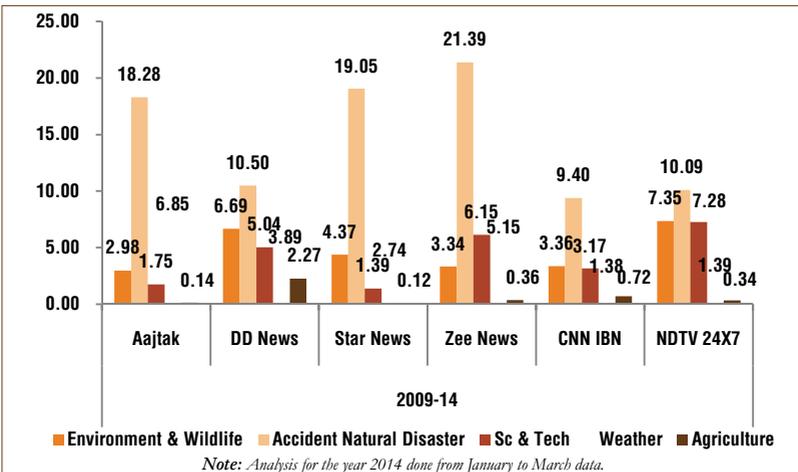
This analysis indicates that news channels did not have a strategy, or a focused pursuit to follow up with some concerns and build consistencies with the aim of accomplishing communication tasks. This is particularly because one of the argument made, the then Cabinet in favour of TV in India going for colour, was that it would help present complex environmental and wildlife coverage much more effectively. Sadly, there is no evidence of such trend, despite the best kind of resources being used up to produce contents for channels.



Negatives disasters floods, earthquakes, tornados and hurricane or such stories get relatively better coverage, perhaps because it is easy to report about health, damage, loses rather than so much about causes, consequences or analysis into reasons for environmental decline and disastrous.



More often it is innocuous coverage by channels, particularly in news bulletins. For example in the week long global COP conference in Hyderabad 2012 (October – December), what got coverage relatively more? It is delegates food preferences, local shopping and the like rather reflecting their perspective on the theme of conference or summing up of the conference papers and deliberations. An analysis of coverage of such global meets to do with environment brings out the need for sensitising media itself about the significance of such meets/conferences. There is no evidence in the coverage of such conferences and events at home and abroad have added to knowledge base or understanding or motivation level of people.



### 3. Methodology

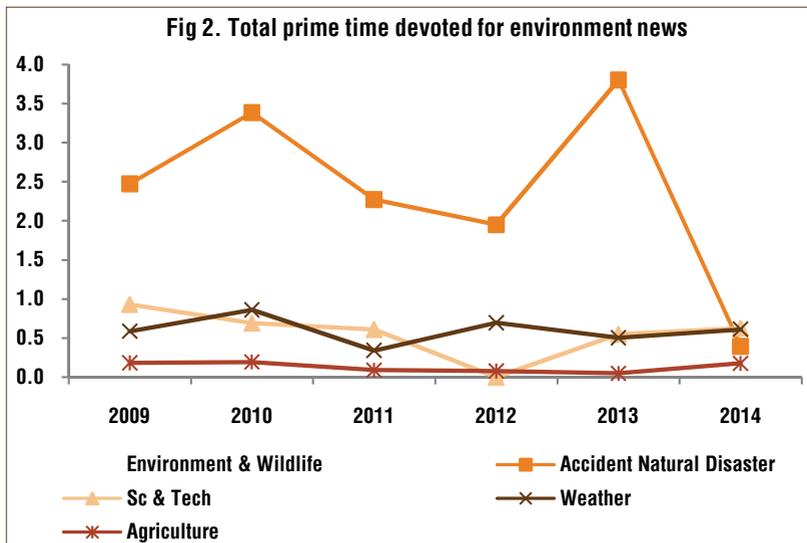
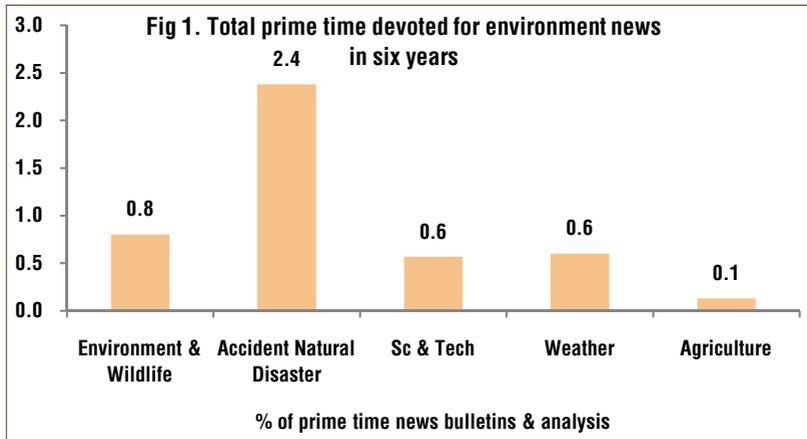
CMS ENVIS Centre has undertaken significant experimentation over the years to develop a robust and rigorous methodology to analyze environment-related content of news channels. The data generated through this research was both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Essentially, the study adopted the following procedure for data collection and analysis:

1. Determining the channels to be studied: The channels to be studied were determined based on their viewership, longevity and popularity. Broadcast media that has viewership across the country in both English and Hindi, include DD News, Aaj Tak, CNN IBN, NDTV 24X7, Star News (now ABP News) and Zee News.
2. Determining the time span of the news cast for the study: The prime time programming serves as the industry benchmark for news channels; a time slot during which significant events and issues of a particular day are prominently covered. Therefore, prime time band from 7 to 11 pm was selected for the study.
3. Recording and classifying the news: The news was recorded and the tapes were then reviewed. This was done for six years (2009-2014) The first three months (January to March) of the year 2014 was taken into account. Thereafter, the news stories were listed under various predefined categories, such as politics, business, sports, environment, crime, etc., to generate quantitative data. The contents were listed and documented in the log sheets.
4. Further classification and analysis was done of environment related news: Then, environment related stories were separately reviewed and classified.

## 4. Analysis of Prime Time Coverage

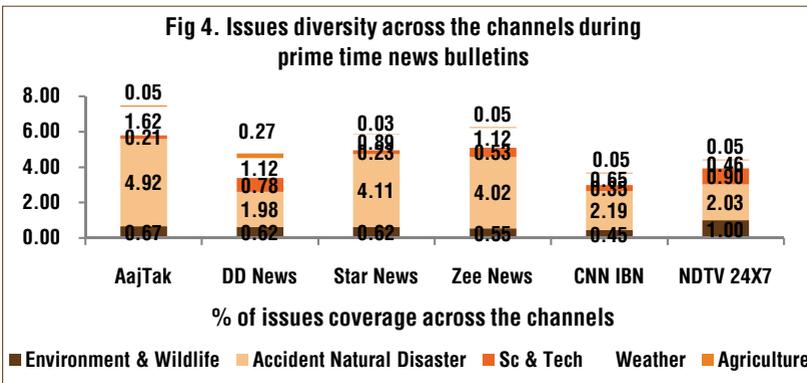
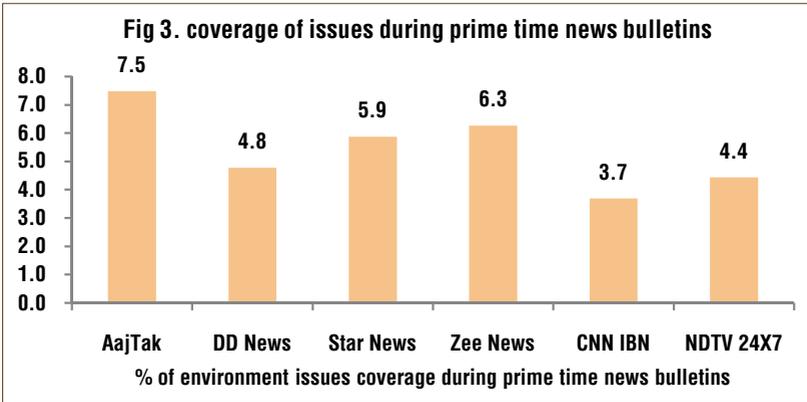
In the last six years, environment and wildlife news coverage comprises just about 0.8% minutes in prime time Hindi news bulletins, followed by weather, science and technology news, which got 0.6% minutes of coverage. On the other hand, news of accidents/natural disasters accounted for 2.4% minutes of prime time news, while agriculture got 0.1%. (Fig.1). These prime time news (7 to 11 pm) figures are based on the coverage of six Hindi-English News channels –Aaj Tak, DD news, ABP news, Zee News, CNN IBN and NDTV 24x7.

In year 2009, 1.5% minutes were allotted to environment & wildlife news, which fell to 0.2% minutes in the year 2014. (Fig. 2) The span of six years



witnessed a steep decline in allocating time to environment & wildlife news during prime time news bulletins. Science & technology news were covered in 0.9% minutes in the year 2009 and 0.6% minutes in the year 2014. Agriculture and weather received hardly any attention in these six years. In this entire period, the maximum coverage was of accident & natural disaster news.

Among the channels, the quantitative coverage on environment was maximum on Aaj Tak at 7.5%, followed by Zee News at 6.3% and Star News (now ABP News) at 5.9%; DD News and NDTV 24x7 News were gave almost similar importance to the coverage of issues at 4.8% and 4.4% respectively. CNN IBN followed closely behind with 3.7% coverage of environment issues in prime time news bulletins (Fig.3).



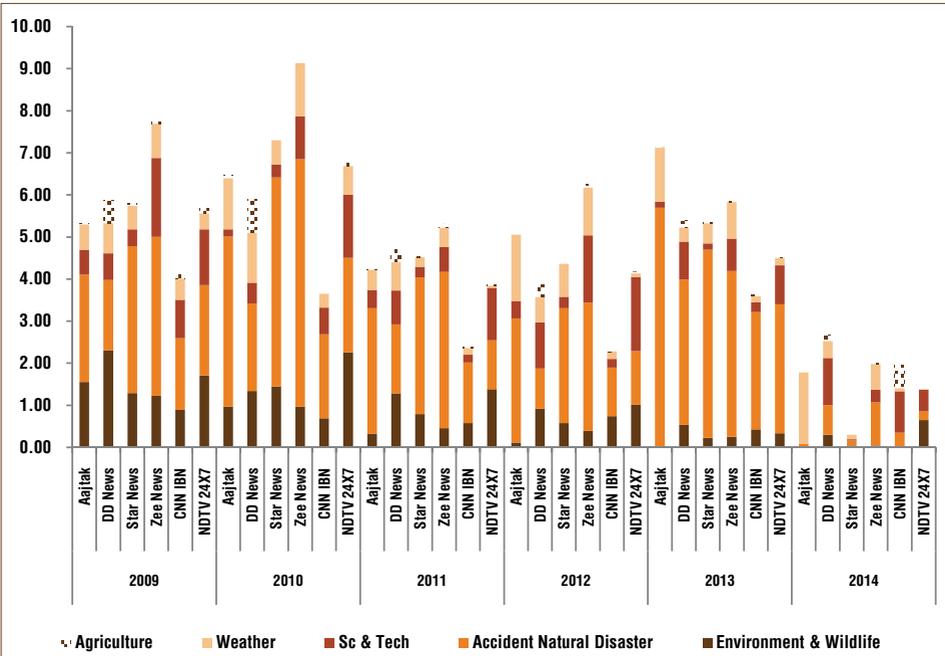


The comparative analysis of various channels' coverage showed that Aaj Tak, Star News and Zee News had the highest coverage of natural disasters.

NDTV was the only channel to raise various issues of environment & wildlife through live debates.

The media in six years has majorly focused on issues of international affairs, national & state politics, elections, natural security, business & economy, arts culture & heritage, crime-legal, corruption, terrorist attacks, health & medicine, law & order, film & entertainment, religion, education, public policy & governance, corruption, media and others.

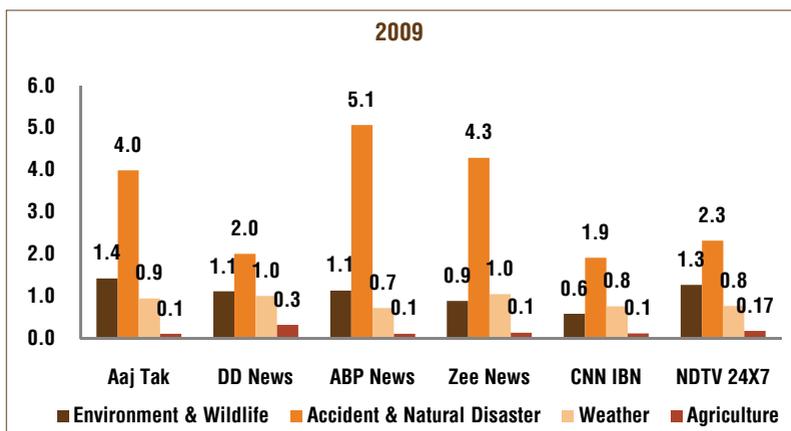
Media has a significant role in promoting environmental awareness and education in modern societies. It is essential that government-made policies be thoroughly discussed in public. Various media such as television, newspapers, radio or social networking sites help communicate environmental policies, regulations and plans to the public and then convey the concerns of the public regarding different environmental problems to the government. Thus, it puts pressure on the decision makers to act on specific environmental issues.



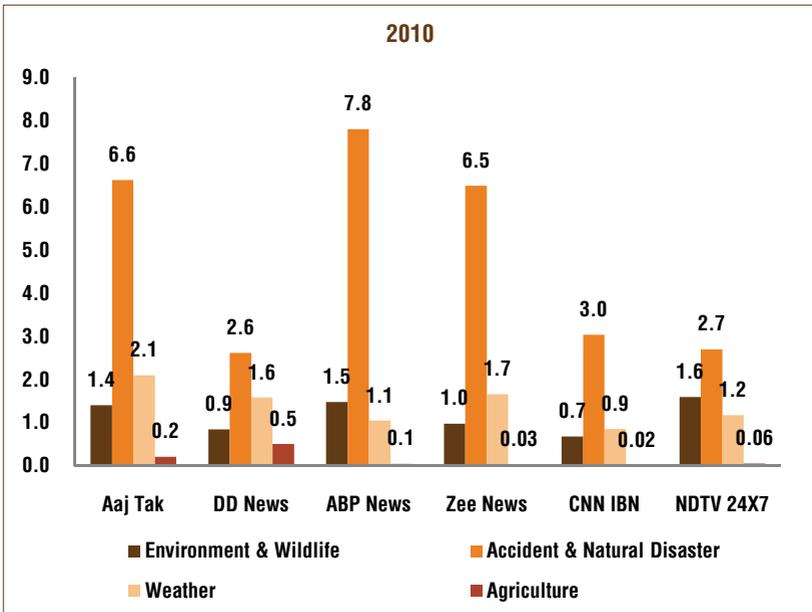
## 5. Year-wise Trends in Environmental News Coverage

Trends in the coverage of environment by six prominent news channels (Aaj Tak, DD news, Zee news, ABP, CNN IBN and NDTV) suggest that in the last five years (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013), the media rarely focused on environmental issues, such as agriculture, weather, natural disaster and wildlife.

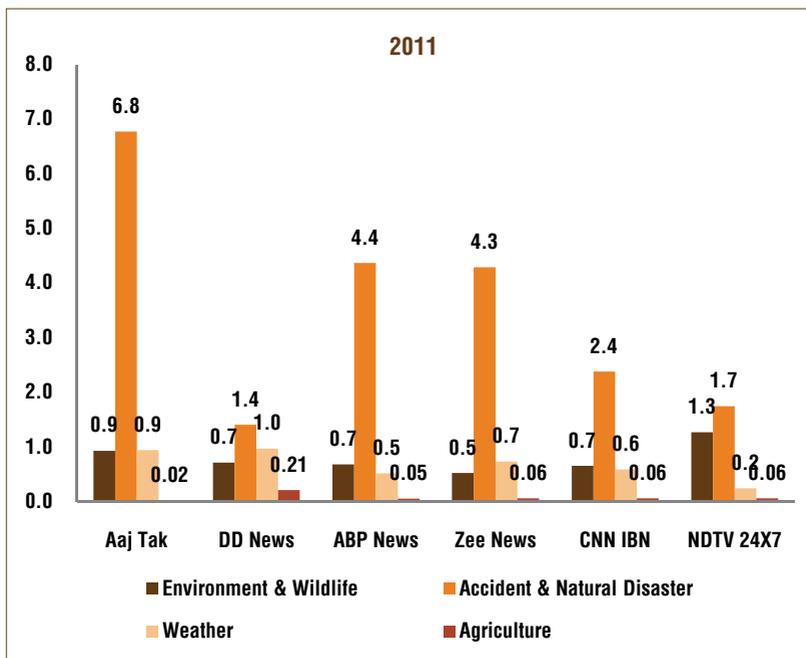
In 2009, coverage given to agriculture was such that it could be missed at the blink of an eye. The coverage of weather news was also abysmal with the maximum airing time being of 1% in Zee News. Environment & Wildlife received more or less the same amount of attention, the most coverage amounting to just 1.4% on Aaj Tak. News on Accidents & Natural Disaster was fairly dealt with by three of the six news channels i.e., ABP News (5.1%), Zee News (4.3%) and Aaj Tak (4.0%). Looking at the overall coverage by the channels, it is evident that less than one percent of the total time was devoted to important issues like environment and wildlife. The month-wise analysis reveals that there was no story on environment and wildlife in the month of April on four prominent channels, i.e. Aaj Tak, CNN-IBN, NDTV 24x7 and Times Now. With a total number of 1371 stories (358 stories by NDTV, 342 by DD News, 278 by Aaj Tak, 167 by CNN-IBN, 145 by Star News and 81 by Zee News) on Environment & Wildlife, December was certainly the best month this year in terms of coverage of this issue. Film & entertainment news reigned primetime, followed by National Politics, International Affairs, and Crime.



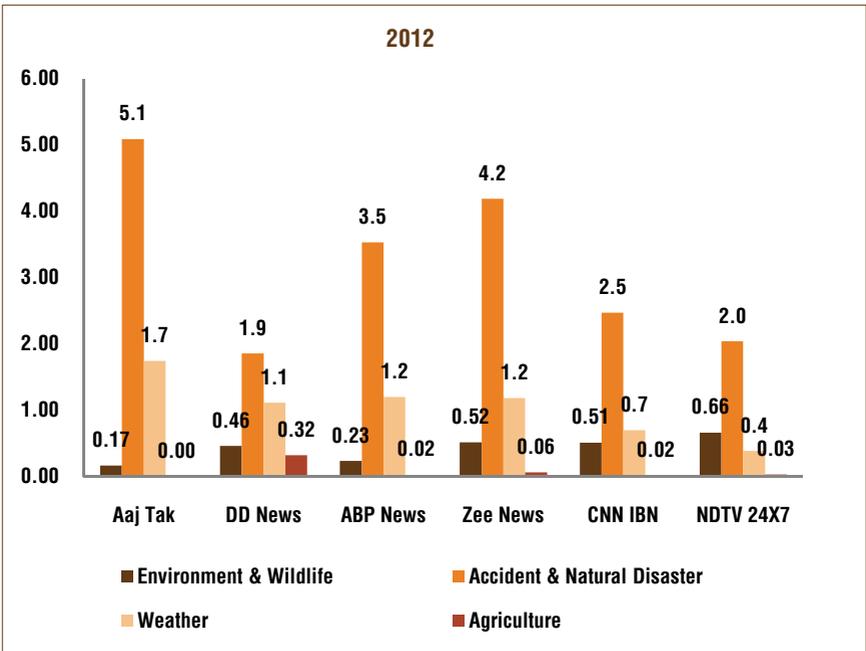
In the year **2010**, news aired on agriculture-related issues, as usual, was extremely less. NDTV fared better than the rest of the news channels, with 0.06% of total coverage time. Weather news was also minimal, with Aaj Tak giving the most coverage i.e. 2.1%. Environment and wildlife, again, got just mentionable coverage, accounting to not more than 1.6% of annual broadcast. Accidents & Natural Disasters received fair attention by all of the six news channels. While ABP News devoted 7.8% of total coverage to this issue, Aaj Tak and Zee News followed close behind with 6.6% and 6.5% of coverage. The September month witnessed an all-time low in Environment & Wildlife category, with just 43 stories covered in this topic by the channels in general. The major dearth was reported throughout the October-December quarter; the data shows only 3.58% coverage in October and 3.23% in the month of November. The month of December was also no better with only 6.95% of coverage on Environment and wildlife. The coverage of international affairs was the highest for all the months, followed by Film & Entertainment news.



In **2011**, news on agriculture remained the least favourite genre. Weather news, as usual, hardly featured in any of the news channels. Environment & wildlife continued to be at the bottom, taking barely 1.3% of primetime on NDTV, and not even 1% coverage in the rest of the channels. News on Accidents & Natural Disasters received the most favourable coverage on Aaj Tak (6.8%), followed by ABP News (4.4%) and Zee News (4.3%) The month of September saw the steepest decline in the total coverage time from 219 mins to a measly 41 mins – comprising of 20 minutes contributed by Aaj Tak, 9 minutes by Star News, 6 minutes by DD News, 4 minutes by Zee news and 2 minutes by CNN-IBN. A disappointing finding was that NDTV 24\*7, which had topped in environmental coverage in April, May and June, did not cover this beat at all in September. In terms of primetime percentage in 2011, international affairs stories were at the apex, followed by film and entertainment, national politics and crime stories.



3.4. In 2012, news on agriculture received almost negligible coverage by all the news channels. Attention to environment and wildlife was also limited, with the coverage not going beyond 1% in any of the news channels. Weather was also an ignored aspect with coverage time only reaching a maximum of 1.7%. Accidents and natural disasters got a fair amount of attention in each of the channels, with Aaj Tak leading the pack with 5.1% of coverage time. The month of June witnessed the most coverage given to environment. For the first time, DD news topped by dedicating 192 minutes of stories of the total minutes of 435 covered by all channels (44% of the total coverage). NDTV 24X7 occupied the second slot with 103 minutes of stories, followed by Star news (90 minutes) and CNN-IBN (26 minutes). The main focus of primetime coverage this year was on National Politics, International Affairs and Film & Entertainment news.



## CBD COP 11, Hyderabad (8 to 19 October 2012)

India hosted the sixth meeting of the Conference of Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (MoP-6) and eleventh meeting of the Conference of Parties (CoP-11) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at Hyderabad from 1-19 October, 2012. CMS Environment had undertaken analysis of 636 print media coverage from July – Oct 9, 2012, to understand the role of media in bringing the CBD convention agenda and related issues in the public and policy domain.

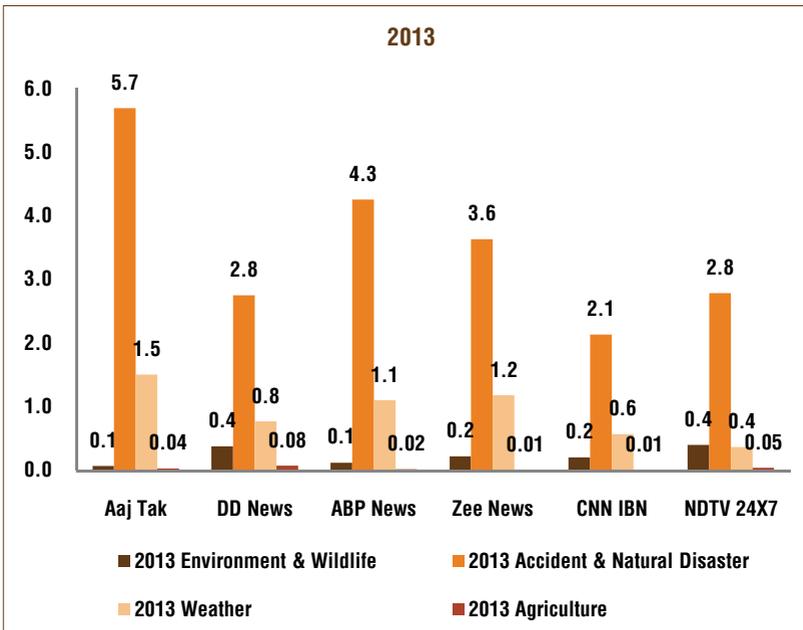
**Delegates:** Media coverage concerning COP 11 delegates in English dailies was 10% and Telugu dailies covered 14% stories. The media focus was on delegate shopping, about the dance forms of India, cultural programmes, Hyderabad Biryani, delegate's fashion statement, local slangs learnt by them, sight-seeing, parties, Golf tournament etc. 73 such stories were printed in the dailies in the first 9 days of COP – 11. Rather, the stories could have highlighted the importance of the convention for each country's delegation and what's their take on issues like bio-piracy, finances, access benefit sharing, costal & marine and geo-engineering, the role of convention parties, delegation number, type, their hopes and expectations.

**MOP – 6/ COP - 11:** COP agenda, blue agenda and general biodiversity issues were highlighted in 39% of English paper stories and 45% in Telugu dailies. However, during the month of September, only 14 stories pertaining to such issues have appeared in all the newspapers and prelude to COP, no efforts were made by the media to sensitize and make people well informed about the COP to CBD in general, its agenda, targets, proposed outcomes, relevance, and, most importantly, India's role in these initiatives.

**Local Media:** CMS Environment study highlights that the news stories about the city's preparation for hosting COP and its security arrangements got maximum (32%) attention of English dailies, while in Telugu dailies 16% of stories were concerning this. 52 such stories appeared in the entire month of September and 54 in the first nine days of Oct. The coverage has been on the status of Hyderabad preparedness in hosting COP and how the city is spending recklessly on making/ revamping roads, dividers, installing & painting railing, pots and plants, city landscaping, making and installing sculptures, city beautification and renovations of the Hyderabad Zoo, Shilparam and other tourist sites.

**National Media:** The national print and electronic media showed less interest for COP with almost negligible coverage in Oct first week. It is shameful considering that it was the first time that an event of such scale and importance was organised in India. More efforts towards engagement and involvement of Hyderabad people in the convention should have been made by the media by educative reporting on biodiversity and CBD COP issues. News stories on what is being organised, how local people can participate and engage themselves in various programmes could have been effectively disseminated. Sadly, even the stories done had failed to communicate to common people about how they can also be part of CoP 11.

In **2013**, none of the six prominent news channels gave any coverage to agricultural issues. Meanwhile, environment and wildlife, though covered, hardly received even 1 percent of coverage time. Weather, too, received meager attention by all the news channels, the most coverage being of 1.5%, on NDTV. News on accidents and natural disasters found adequate time slots on all the channels, especially on Aaj Tak, which gave the issue 5.7% of coverage time. 2013 was perhaps the year that recorded the most tremendous changes in stories coverage by all major news channels. CNN-IBN, which had topped the July chart for maximum coverage on Environment & Wildlife with 130 minutes, followed by DD News (51 minutes) and NDTV 24X7 (49 minutes), gave absolutely no coverage to this issue in the month of September. Worse off were Zee News, ABP News and Aaj Tak, who did not cover a single story on environment & wildlife during the period of July-September 2013. The month of December, again, recorded a tremendous drop in environmental stories coverage. Only NDTV 24X7 spent 11 minutes on environment & wildlife followed by CNN-IBN (2 minutes). Zee News, ABP News and Aaj Tak did not cover a single green issue, while DD News spent only one minute. Overall, the primetime slot on six prominent news channels during this year was dominated by news on international affairs, crime and national politics.



## 6. Environment Related Programmes across the Channels

Environment & Wildlife issues were covered very less during the prime time news bulletins by channels, however, the classification of issues covered by these news channels are quite consistent and systematic in their coverage. Besides the coverage of issues in prime time news bulletins, channels also tend to report or launch their own research based programs on major environmental issues. It is worth mentioning that, the channels' initiatives to highlight major environmental issues take precedence to the National policy development. The channels NDTV, CNN IBN and Zee News had launched several green programs that focused on conservation, campaigns, or reducing/recycling the waste generation.

### 6.1. 'Greenathon' NDTV Initiative



Launched in April 2008, the NDTV-Toyota Green campaign was India's first ever-nationwide campaign to save the environment. The Greenathon was a 24-hour live fund-raising event that brought together people to donate money to support TERI's Lighting a Billion Lives initiative, which aimed at providing solar power to villages without electricity.

There were many simultaneous 24-hour activities conducted across India as part of the Greenathon 1. There was a 24-hour Green marathon held in Mumbai, while Delhi saw the filthy Yamuna being cleaned up in a 24-hour clean-up drive, and in Pondicherry, students of St. Patrick School participated in a 24-hour Quizathon for environment. A 12-hour beach clean-up drive was also held in Mumbai. A galaxy of film personalities, celebrity chefs, composers and singers, Chief Ministers, Members of Parliament, India's leading corporates, environmentalists, NGOs and educational institutions and citizens from around the country supported the cause by participating in various activities.

This environment campaign had 3 more editions, which involved a combination of musical extravaganza, live chats with celebrities, simultaneous green activities across India, reports on environment and green pledges by celebrities, politicians and the common man. The Greenathon helped raise over Rs 2.4 crore in pledges, while the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> editions helped raise Rs. 3.92 crore, 11 crore and 8.89 crore respectively. Since its launch in 2008, The Greenathon Campaign has already funded solar lanterns for over 600 villages benefitting thousands of households.



## 6.2. NDTV 'War against plastic waste'



Greenathon 4, NDTV's campaign against plastic waste, was launched with a 'Clean the Yamuna' drive on the banks of the Taj Mahal in Agra with the campaign ambassador Priyanka Chopra highlighting the issue of plastic and other waste choking the country and the need to reduce and recycle. This was followed by a month-long awareness drive with waste-related and other innovative environment programming across the NDTV network leading up to the telethon.



The Greenathon 4 was broadcast live for 12 hours across the NDTV network and raised funds to support The Energy & Resources Institute's - "Lighting a Billion Lives" initiative which solar powers rural villages in India. In keeping with the green theme this year, the set of the telethon was made of recyclable products such as light bulbs, cardboard boxes, tin boxes, used newspapers, plastic bottles, paper plates, etc. Once again supporting this Green Initiative and raising awareness about the environment, Actor Milind Soman started his 1500 km Green Run on April 20, running from the Qutub Minar in New Delhi, across 5 states and ending his Green Run today at Yash Raj Studios in Mumbai. Milind's 1500 km run in 30 days during the gala programme was recognized as a World Record by the Limca Book of Records, which was a milestone for NDTV-Toyota Greenathon 4's environmental awareness campaign.



NDTV-Toyota Greenathon 4 saw Rs. 8.89 crore being raised to benefit 508 villages. Greenathon 4 also came in for praise by the Supreme Court, which issued a notice to the Centre and states seeking their response on banning plastics.



## 6.3. Zee News 'My Earth My Duty'



Zee Media launched 'My Earth My Duty' campaign in 2010, a multi-city initiative aimed at increasing awareness and protecting the Environment, with awareness camps, rallies, skits, discussions, oath ceremonies, painting competitions and other engaging activities across India. The month-long sessions not only apprise people of the challenges posed by the degrading environment, but also share handy solutions to combat the phenomenon. As part of this vision, a week-long pan-India plantation activity is carried out, kick starting on the eve of independence every year, urging citizens to collectively fight against the menace.



The campaign has been received well by over 50 million youngsters, who along with other partners have planted more than 1.4 crore trees in over 1.5 lakh villages and cities across India.

The endeavour for such valuable contribution has been recognized by Limca Book of Records besides winning several other awards. In an unprecedented achievement, it has also represented India at the Earth Summit 2012, Rio.

#### 6.4. CNN IBN - Saving the Ganga

On the World Environment Day, CNN-IBN focuses on ‘Saving the Ganga’, which runs in six regional languages including History TV 18 India, and is one of the highest rated TV shows. The 45-day campaign highlights how the sacred river is dying despite thousands of crores of rupees being spent to save it. CNN-IBN’s special report shows how dams and pollution are killing the river in every state it passes through.

CNN-IBN reached the ancient city of Varanasi, and found why the river is the most polluted there despite huge amount of money being spent on cleaning it. For this series, journalist Bahar Dutt undertook a 2400 km journey as she followed the river Ganga from its source, the Gaumukh Glacier, across five states to the Bay of Bengal where it empties into the sea. In the second series, she spent six months trailing the Western Ghats from north to south, meeting the people that inhabit one of the worlds ‘hottest hotspots’ and filming the unique biodiversity of this landscape for a programme entitled ‘Saving India’s Western Ghats’.

This film received the Series (based on Environment and Wildlife) Award in 7th CMS VATAVARAN 2014 competitive edition, among other notable awards.

<http://ibnlive.in.com/chat/bahar-dutt/saving-the-ganga/961.html>



## 7. Need for Systemic Studies

The prime news value of the media is conflict or disorder i.e. negative events. A familiar adage in journalism is ‘bad news is good news and usually good news is no news’ unless of course it happens to the most powerful. The media coverage is also event-driven. In other words, a coup or an outbreak of disease or a cyclone will receive immediate coverage but the ongoing reconciliation efforts, or the development of environmental policies or sustainable economic growth which may take many years, won’t receive the same coverage, if any.



India’s media industry has led to the launch of several hundred channels. Thirty years ago, India had only one television station. Today, there are more than 800 channels. According to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, or I&B ministry, as of March 2013, there were 410 news and current affairs channels and 438 entertainment channels. However, a slowdown in India’s economy and a subsequent fall in advertising revenues, worsened by an overcrowded market, have led to mass layoffs and the closure of several channels.



The CMS media centre regularly keeps monitoring prominent news channels and considers it a fallacy to think that media coverage, favorable of course, helps determine the outcome of several issues. The coverage of environment stories on the prominent six channels during prime time news bulletins has fallen considerably in the last six years. According to the findings and cross sections of the coverage, the news are mostly based on the certain or immediate outbreak of a disaster, if any, in a particular year.



That news channels lacked motivation to cover environmental issues is more than evident. The news of entertainment, politics and bulk of commercial advertisements is the most intact value in news channels. The 24-hour news channels either seek news on localized road accidents or gossips of celebrities or review the soapy serials. Balancing the news by the channels of the local, national or global is essential to upkeep the quality of news broadcasting. The viewers are up-to-date with news on politics, entertainment, crime and corruption, but very less is known about conservation of the environment. It is essential to increase the coverage of environmental issues or policy-driven news so that awareness reaches the farthest corners of the country.





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