

# Mainstreaming environment issues in media through an interactive and participatory approach

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Indian media is obsessed with the coverage of politics, films, and sports. With the advent of electronic and digital media, news space in Indian media has increased several times in the past two decades. However, issues concerning majority of the people like health, environment, and other socio economic subjects remain neglected in media.

More than one lakh newspapers and magazines are currently published in India. Around 17,000 newspapers are published every day in different languages. There are 800 channels and 36000 weekly magazine publications and thousands of web portals. Yet there is a lack of diversity in news coverage. (RNI India with 56 crore social media users is the second-largest market in the world, next only to China.(Digital India: Mc Kinsay).

There are many reasons for neglect of relevant issues like environment, science and health in Indian media. In India, most news organisations don't have a regular and full-time correspondent to cover environment, climate change and related subjects like energy. The coverage of such issues is restricted to expert column and comments on global or national events importance.

Coverage of politics, crime, films, and sports, and other day-to-day events which are relatively easy to understand get more space in the process. Moreover, in the name of efficiency, reporters increasingly cover a vast range of beats, making it as difficult as ever to satisfactorily portray the complexities of climate change. Put simply, journalists and editors striving for fair and accurate reporting are getting swamped by these larger-scale pressures

One of the major reasons for the poor coverage of important issues is lack of skill and capacity on the part of reporters to cover technical and scientific subjects. Journalists are not sensitized to cover stories related to technical subjects like climate change, energy conservation. They also do not have access to experts and other concerned persons working in such fields.



This problem can be addressed through interactive and participatory approach to orient and train the regular reporters. This has been demonstrated at the national and international levels with regard to reporting of environment and climate change. The Centre for Media Studies (CMS), a Delhi based think tank, has adopted the same approach in a three-year intervention of engaging media through sustained interaction and participation. It has produced desired results of increasing the coverage on climate change in the regional and national media.

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## **Need for training on climate change reporting**

A journalist working in any news media is expected to cover different issues as per the requirement of the media organisation. In Indian media, there is not much scope for covering specialised or scientific subjects by the persons having an educational background or interest in the same.

In most organisations the specialized beats are given based on the experience of covering general news. A very few journalists get such opportunity and most of them get their lessons of learnings while covering the subject itself.

As a reporter, most journalists are required to cover different subjects which they haven't studied or learned in their degree courses. As the techniques of covering any issue are the same except having basic knowledge about the subject. The Journalists who cover politics, crime, cinema, and entertainment can be also asked to write a report or cover the news item on the issue of science, environment, IT, economic issues, and other specialised beats like conflict; terrorism, and disaster management etc.

Most of the journalists have to take extra efforts to gain knowledge from concerned experts about the subject. Full-time reporting doesn't allow them to do short or crash courses on the subjects. Most of the time they look for such kind of training that can be provided them during their job and also give them access to experts to answer their queries and share updated information about and recent developments occurring all over the world related to the issue.

Such kind of training builds their capacity in a short time and develops the confidence to write on the issue which otherwise they wish to avoid.

Some media houses provide the training while on the job but such examples are very few. In this background CMS, launched a media training program on climate change to build the capacity of the media persons to do quality reporting on the issue and bring the climate change and related different aspects into the mainstream.

The initiative was launched as a media capacity building program in Nov 2016 with the support of the Indian Himalayan Climate Adaptation Project of Swiss Development Cooperation and GIZ, a German agency, works in the field of international cooperation for sustainable development, to orient and train the

journalists of the Himalayan and coastal region on the issue of climate change to trigger sustain interest among media persons about the subject and mainstream the issue in the media with quality reporting.

### **Structure and tools of the training program:**

The programme was designed to provide journalists in a very short period basic knowledge about climate change. This included science behind climate change; the impact of climate change on livelihood, National and state action plans on climate change; national-level policies affecting the climate change adaptation; programs on climate resilience and development policies.

An exposure visit was also part of the program to showcase the different adaptations initiatives started at the community level to combat and adapt to climate change. It was followed by a full-day session on writing skills, knowledge about resources and experience sharing.

The major tool used to obtain the expected outcome was training sessions by experts, specially designed capacity building modules for media persons, identified common and state-specific issues, exhaustive resource material developed for the training purposes; as well as training media manual for the journalists on climate change and adaptation.

To sustain the interest of journalists after the training workshops, a small grant was planned to provide selected journalists to write in-depth articles on climate adaptation. The fellowship program was designed after conducting a telephonic assessment study with journalists who were either covering environment or who intended to cover such subjects. The fellowship was aimed at improving the quality of reporting, increasing scientific accuracy in reporting and effective communication for vulnerable mountain communities.

The modules for the three-day residential training was divided in major four sessions to cover basic concepts of climate change and science of climate change; major impacts of climate change in especially on livelihood in local context; how temperature increases in course of time and the kind of measures have been taken to mitigate the climate impact at policy level. To cover these topics experts on each subjects were identified in consultation with state level climate change cells and environment nodal departments. Resources were also pooled from others public and private related institutions from all over the target states. To showcase the local perspective of impact of climate change and adaptation measures many scientists were taken on the board from state level.

First day comprised of three technical sessions wherein scientists gave the specially prepared presentations for media persons. Each presentation was prepared in simple and understandable language that media persons can grasp in short span of time without getting lost in scientific and technical jargon.

### **Implementation of the training program:**

To organize the trainings workshop, a team was formed consisting of three executives, team head and a climate change consultant. The team started the work to understand the geographical and social status of the respective state and understanding the issues related to climate change through secondary research.

A recce visit was done in each state before the training program by CMS Advocacy team to interact with state government officials of environment departments to understand the local issues confronting the climate change and adaptation process and to finalise the modalities of training workshop. The visiting team were also having meetings with local media persons to understand their needs and specific expectations from

the training program to write a quality report that can cater to their target audience.

The state level departments concerning the climate change and environment were involved in conceptualising sessions and organising field visits. Journalists from print, electronic and digital media with experience of writing on environment issues or those showing inclination to cover the subject were identified by the visiting team in each state.

The module for the first day of the session was designed in such a way so that media persons get knowledge about basic aspects of climate change and how it is different from the change in weather (basic concept); major impacts of the climate change especially on livelihood; disaster management like drought; floods and melting of glaciers. The major aspect of the climate change that is mitigation and adaptation was kept for live demonstration, wherein participants were showcased the live examples of adaptation of climate change.

Second day was kept for field visit where journalists were exposed to see that how communities are getting engaged in adaptation to climate change at ground level through different initiatives. The third day focused on developing the skills of media persons so that they can cover issues pertaining to climate change in a better way. A session on bridge the gap between the scientists, media and civil society was also conducted on last day of each workshop where representative of these sectors discussed that how frequent flow of information and communication can help to generate the awareness on climate change in the public.

In addition, promotion on social media was also done to create the awareness so that more and more journalists can participate in the workshops.

### **The outcome of the program:**

The three-year project was well received by the media. CMS could reach to around 450 journalists during the project period

and around 550 stories got published in state and national level media. Many in-depth stories appeared in *Times of India*, *Down to Earth*, *Deccan Herald*, *Dainik Bhaskar*, *India Today*, *Outlook* to name a few. In fact, these stories helped at a great extent to mainstream the issue of climate change in the media. Many stories also appeared in the regional publications that created a buzz about the local issues concerning climate change and adaptation.

Stories about the science of climate change, features on the adaptation measures taken in the Himalaya region to combat the adverse climate impact, drew the attention of different stakeholders working in different states on the issue. During the national consultation, which was a culmination of the media engagement project, many scientists, including Director of DST appreciated efforts of CMS for bringing the initiatives and issue of climate change adaptation in fore front.

The training workshops provided them intensive knowledge- based information about different aspects of climate change mitigation and adaptation. This objective is being achieved by designing the format of each workshop in a way to make it interactive, while also exposing all participants to live examples and case studies of mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Manuals helped the media persons to provide them information regarding resources like relevant websites, names of the experts and global and national overview about the subject. The manual became very popular among environment journalists and most of the journalist writing on the environment issues got the copy of it and appreciated it for having hands on information.

The enthusiasm shown by media persons especially of the Himalayan region encouraged some state government

departments to initiate similar training and orientation schemes of providing knowledge and streamlining the coverage on the issue by providing them fellowship and awards. For example, the Directorate of Environment of Manipur Government has launched a state level media fellowship program soon after the completion of CMS program; to sustain the efforts of engaging the media on the subject.

Mass Communication departments of about one dozen universities in the Himalayan region have kept the manual as reference material in their departments post training program.

### **Lessons Learnt and way forward:**

Though the three-year program mainly covered the Himalayan region and four states of the coastal and plain areas, journalists from other states also showed keen interest. The response from participants in workshops as well as applications received for the fellowship program was highly encouraging.

It was also felt that there is need for designing the training program at district level as many district level journalists who participated in the workshop expressed that there aren't enough resources to elicit the relevant information from district level department

It was also realised that there is a need of some kind of comprehensive capacity building training on the subject of environment or climate change as many new developments/ research or policy level changes keep on occurring every year. Besides, the media scenario keeps on changing rapidly, many young journos who aspire to write on the subject look for regular and sustained training on the issue that encourage them to cover such issues.

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