

COMMUNICATING ISSUES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND WATER

Dr. I. Arul Aram
Associate Professor
Department of Media Sciences,
Anna University Chennai.

ABSTRACT

Climate is changing. Lack of water or excess water causes drought or flood. Scientists, policy makers, activists and the media have united to understand why climates around the world are changing and strive for a low carbon future. The media is supposed to play an important role in stimulating discussion in developing countries. Public discussion of the policies and issues involved is urgently needed. This means those engaged in climate change issues must give journalists what they need for a good story. The media becomes a vital link between the scene of the disaster and the rest of the world. There are many emergencies that never attract enough media coverage and, in turn, public attention. As agenda setting theory shows if the media is devoting less space for a particular happening, people also give less attention to it.

The rising seas and temperatures cause havocs in several areas. The islands of the Maldives stand as an icon of climate change. The islands may disappear from the map of the world in not so distant future due to the rising sea level. Likewise, the islands in the mega delta of Sunderbans in the West Bengal state of India as well as in Bangladesh are prone to submergence due to frequent cyclones of the Bay of Bengal. This has led to adaptation measures such as floating seedbeds and desalination plants. Interestingly, even Royal Bengal Tigers of Sunderbans have taken to drinking salt water as a form of climate change adaptation! In parts of the state of Orissa, the sea has swallowed up to 20 km of shore land. The west coast of India is, of late, subject to severe and frequent cyclones. The awareness of coastal disasters that has been raised after tsunami is now being used to tackle impacts of cyclones.

The melting of glaciers due to global warming is not just a phenomenon of the Arctic and the Antarctic but that of snowy mountains like Himalayas as well. How much of such issue is covered and how it is covered in the media will also be discussed. At times, such issues are dealt with by scientists in a jargon filled discourse and that is one of the main reasons why such issues are not covered properly in the media. The tendency of the media is to ignore an issue when it is difficult to grasp or it is abstract.

Such tales of successes and failures have to be told and retold in the media so that people are sensitized to handle the effects of climate change. The paper examines citing cases the issues of communicating climate change and water through the media.