



## Media coverage on bio-diversity and conservation strategies

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Like in any part of the world, the North Eastern part of India is afflicted with myriad environmental threats. Since the time of development of press and media, much concern related to protection, conservation and ways of sustainable development are seen being highlighted both in the local, national and global sphere of media coverage. Through audio-visual showcase, people have been aware of several issues of conservation and different conservation strategies for proper management of bio-diversity status and their ecology. Such awareness has also led to major industrial houses in carrying out Corporate Social Responsibility towards conservation practices.

Anthropogenic factors can be attributed to the causes of bio-diversity destruction, so in the coming years proper abiding of laws and legislations will go a long way in safeguarding bio-diversity. Here we are going to delve on the prospects of conservation of bio-diversity which have come to light through media coverage.

Concerned citizens of a developing country like India have long believed that the media should serve the role of a watchdog. Many even feel that one of the prime watchdog duties of the media and press is while reporting on the Environment. As human progress has undoubtedly caused significant changes in the ecosystem, citizens have increasingly depended on the media to be better informed. Even though there are criticisms about the actual fulfilment of this role by the press and media to be still more authentic and have true values. Therefore, environmental journalism is growing in stature and respect.

Media is used as a persuasive measure alongside environmental regulations and economic market-based instruments (incentives) in order to ensure effective implementation of policy. This approach seeks to change perceptions and priorities by internalising environmental awareness and responsibility into individual decision-making. It uses religion and social pressure to underline the significance of environmental responsibility. This persuasive approach can take the form of education, risk communication, provision of information and knowledge as well as training. The media have an important role to play as an integral part of this tool.

There is no doubt that the media plays an instrumental role in modern societies. With regard to environmental policy, media have a central role to play — especially in promoting environmental awareness and education. In fact, the various media, such as newspapers, radio, TV and the internet, have a two-pronged role. On the one hand, they help to explain the environmental policies, regulations and plans to the public and on the other they reflect the concerns of the public regarding different environmental problems and thus pressurize the decision makers to solve a specific environmental issue.

In a report that was published in the Hindustan Times, Bhopal dated May 18, 2005 it mentioned the activities that the media was taking in order to create attention on Environmental issues. A voluntary organisation Winrock International India organized two events — a workshop on 'role of media in environment' and

a panel discussion on 'corporate social responsibility'. All speakers, including CEO of Lake Conservation Authority J S Mathur, Abhilash Khandekar, Chief of Bureau, Hindustan Times, Surojit Mahalanobis of The Times of India, New Delhi, Rajesh Badal of Aaj Tak, Bhopal and Sushmita Malviya of Hindustan Times, Bhopal stressed on the need for greater coverage of environmental issues by both print and audiovisual media.

It needs to be mentioned here that in the state of Assam, Aranyak in collaboration with the Forest Department and Wildlife Institute of India has carried out camera trapping to monitor the tiger population in Kaziranga. The result of the first year camera trapping exercise indicates that this tiger reserve has 32.67 (+7.79) tigers / 100 km<sup>2</sup> which is the highest tiger density in any wild tiger resident area of the world. In fact, this report which was released in 2010 has now attracted more attention from national and international agencies as per conservation of bio-diversity in Assam is concerned.

In such measures the media can make use of new presentation techniques and methods to get the message on the environment across to the public or the decision makers. Also, the media should strategise and make use of easy, simple terms and hold an optimistic view towards environmental problems. This is vital to the success of the media in relation to environmental issues and will enable them to play their rightful role in environmental policy.

### **Role of Media in creating Public and Environmental awareness and education**

Public environmental awareness and education can be increased by the media through several actions. Some of them are –

- Generating public awareness and environmental education about relevant laws and regulations.
- Action can be taken in a variety of areas to increase environmental awareness and education. Some of these categories are: environmental legal rights and responsibilities and associated consequences, use of

the media, awareness raising campaigns, incorporation of environmental issues in mainstream education, increasing awareness and education in target groups and encouragement of public participation in environmental matters.

- It is to be noted that there are many sectors of society involved in developing and delivering educational courses and public awareness campaigns. These include Governmental institutions at the national, regional, and local levels; domestic and international NGOs; primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools; journalists and the media; celebrities; and other individuals and institutions.

In such an initiative, the World Bank Mission under the leadership of Mr. Grahame Dixie and Mr. Paul Ryan on 14th March 2010 visited Joint Forest Management Committees in Kokrajhar district. In due course of the session, Mr Ryan emphasised on timely early sanction of funds for plantation activities and intersectoral involvement in Joint Forest Management activities particularly fishery, dairy and agriculture for all round economic development of the communities in Joint Forest Management areas. Occasions like these are thereby brought to the light of public and Government through highlight by the media. So, it has to be understood that the role of media in making the Government bodies and also the general public aware on issues of national importance is huge.

Funding for awareness and education initiatives may come from a variety of sources. Often, it comes from the budgets of specific agencies or Ministries; it is uncommon for such initiatives to receive funding directly from the central budget. Some States have accessed their national Environment Funds to provide partial funding for environmental awareness and education. Environmental education and awareness raising can include any of the following types of activities :

- Reorienting current education and awareness programs to include environmental dimensions;

- Basic education and awareness programmes (e.g., in schools);
- Adult and community education and awareness programmes; and
- Education, training, and awareness programmes for professional, technical, and vocational personnel.

### Methods and techniques of working with the media

- The print, broadcast, and Internet media can be a powerful ally in educating the public on environmental matters. In order to perform this role effectively, it is often necessary for the Government to work with the media. This is often done informally, through regular briefings and information centres. Observance of the Elephant Festival every year in the month of January in Assam not only cements the bondage and interdependence between man and elephant but it is also an occasion to shed light on forest resources of the North East before tourists and visitors coming from within India and abroad. So in organising events of such a huge magnitude with proper coordination, assistance is equally sought from the Government and the media has to be responsible in bringing out such events to the fore.
- Some States of the North East have found that educating the media can be quite effective in building capacity to report on environmental matters and they are taking up measures in this direction.
- Capacity building efforts can provide journalists with basic environmental information on a specific topic or general environmental information. Information centres that are accessible to the media and to the public constitute one approach. These centres may be run by a governmental agency or Ministry or by an NGO. An information centre may disseminate recent information (such as press releases), have a public library with a range of environmental resources, and actively disseminate information.

- In addition, journalists can build capacity of their peers through networking.

### Educating Community and Traditional Leaders

In Assam, Forest Protection through Community Participation is gaining great pace. Assam is one of the World's biodiversity "Hot Spots" with a remarkable array of endemic plants and animals. Hollong is a lofty tree of the evergreen rain forests of Upper Assam and it attains a height of above 45 meters and a girth of 5–7 meters. It is declared as 'State Tree of Assam' by the Government of Assam. Hollong Tree is revered as a sacred tree through the ages by the Moran Community because of religious and cultural reasons. The ritual of Community Puja below the Hollong tree during the month of Phalgun (February-March) is still prevalent. In fact, it has come to light through media participation that during the 7th Biennial Conference of the All Assam Moran Student's Union(AAMSU) held at Kakopathar on 6th and 7th June, 2009, a pledge was taken to preserve this tree as 'JATIYA SAMPAD' (Community Asset) of the Moran Society. The efforts made by Moran Community to protect the religious sentiments by giving protection to Hollong as a Jatiya Sampad will not only go a long way in protecting Hollong trees but will also protect to bring back the lost glory to these forests. In attaining such steps, the efforts of the Assam Forest Department have to be lauded in protecting and preserving Forests and Rain Forest Ecosystem through Community Participation.

Traditional, religious, and local community leaders can play an influential or even decisive role in how people act. This is particularly true in rural areas. Education of these leaders can assist in facilitating the implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). In working with such leaders, particular attention may need to be paid to issues of :

- **Language :**  
Educational materials may be more accessible if they are in the local language. Translation can greatly increase the costs, but it may be necessary to consider whether

limited translation might make the material functionally accessible.

- **Literacy :**

Posters, radio presentations, and other approaches may be advisable if the local population (or leaders) have limited literacy.

- **Clarity and Plain Language :**

The materials should be easily understood, particularly if they are written in what may be a person's second or third language. This means short sentences, simple words, and active verbs.

- **Awareness and Education on Rights, Responsibilities, and Impacts :**

The link between environmental law and social responsibility in the context of enforcement can best be illustrated through environmental education and public awareness initiatives. Public awareness and participation is important in all aspects of enforcement, not only in understanding basic environment and human rights, but also in fostering a sense of responsibility and proactive environmental citizenship.

- **Involving Celebrities in Media Campaigns**

As in any advertisement or public awareness campaign, the involvement of people who are well-known and respected public figures and effective use of the media can be a potent way of increasing understanding of the importance of environmental issues and enforcement. Newspapers, television, radio, magazines, and other media can be used to quickly reach a large number of people.

- **Focusing Environmental Awareness Campaigns for Specific Sectors**

Awareness raising campaigns are often most successful when they are targeted at specific groups because information can be tailored to the activities, needs and challenges of the group. Additionally, involving organisations and communities in environmental protection and enforcement can create a sense of stewardship towards the environment, ease hardship through the collaboration and

provide a forum for new ideas and greater participation. Examples of such collaboration and stewardship are provided in the initiatives of some NGOs and organisations in the private sectors. They have been active in raising public awareness of environment development issues and mobilised people to take actions that have contributed to positive changes for the environment.

### **Environmental awareness in Teaching Programmes**

Environmental awareness, although essential to good citizenship, is not always a prominent feature of education programmes in institutions of primary or higher learning. It is stated that "education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of the people to address environment and development issues", moreover, education is stated to be an indispensable means of "achieving environmental and ethical awareness, values and attitudes, skills and behaviour consistent with sustainable development and effective public participation in decision-making". This emphasis has influenced reform of educational systems and practices in many States already where environmental education is being introduced into the curriculum of educational institutions for pre-school through institutions of higher learning.

- "Mainstreaming" environmental education programmes into schools as a regular part of the curriculum increase public environmental awareness and demonstrates a commitment to environmental protection. Environmental education can be integrated into existing disciplines or it can be taught as a subject in its own right. It can be taught as early as primary school as well as in adult education programmes.

- **Environmental Education Programmes for Women and Youth**

There are responsibilities and roles of the State in integrating women's role in the field of environment and development and in recommending the establishment of national organisations to evaluate development,

environmental policies and programmes related to women. This responsibility does not rest solely with the State environmental agency, however; NGOs (at national and community levels) have increasingly demonstrated their potential, both independently and in collaboration with governments, to assist in mobilizing and unearthing the full potential of women as major contributors in national environmental management through workshops and training programmes.

- Young people comprise nearly 30 percent of the global population and will be the decision makers of the future. Their way of thinking about the environment is already shaping the world of tomorrow. The involvement of today's youth in environment and development decision making and in the implementation of programmes has been internationally recognised as critical to sustainable development.

- **Educational Campaigns for Public Involvement in Compliance Monitoring**

An educated public can be one of the most powerful weapons in the world's battle against harm to the environment. The ways that the public can assist in enforcement efforts are as numerous as the potential approaches for increasing public awareness. Citing such an example, it is reported that elephant mortality due to train hits is a recurring feature in Assam, taking a heavy toll of wild elephants every year. In 2010 itself, 7 wild elephants were killed in separate incidents of train hits. So, the wildlife wing of the Forest Department jointly with Wildlife Trust of India, an NGO has devised a package of measures and initiated several steps aimed at mitigating elephant mortality due to train hits in Assam after holding a series of meetings. These

measures include speed regulation of trains including ensuring 'Caution Speed' in all the identified elephant corridors in the state, improving the visibility by reducing the slope, levelling the embankments, clearing scrub jungle, regular awareness meetings/training of crew lobby including loco pilots, display of sign-boards etc.

The power of the media to set a nation's agenda, to focus public attention on a few key public issues, is an immense and well-documented influence. Not only do people acquire factual information about public affairs from the news media, readers and viewers also learn how much importance to attach to a topic on the basis of the emphasis placed on it in the news. Newspapers provide a host of cues about the salience of the topics in the daily news – lead story on page one, other front page display, large headlines, etc. Television news also offers numerous cues about salience – the opening story on the newscast, length of time devoted to the story, etc. These cues repeated day after day effectively communicate the importance of each topic. In other words, the media can set the agenda for the public's attention to that small group of issues around which public opinion forms.

Walter Lippmann had very rightly remarked that the news media are a primary source of those pictures in our heads about the larger world of public affairs, a world that for most citizens is "out of reach, out of sight, out of mind." What we know about the world around us is largely based on what the media decide to tell us. More specifically, the result of this mediated view of the world is that the priorities of the media strongly influence the priorities of the public. Elements prominent on the media agenda become prominent in the public mind.

