

Media Roundtable on Reshaping the future of Environmental Journalism: Issues, Challenges and the Way Forward

September 4, 2012 | 02:30 – 04:00 pm | Conference Hall, Centre for Mass Communication, University of Rajasthan

Theme: Biodiversity Conservation

Participants: Bureau Chief; Senior Journalists; Media, Promotion and Publicity officials of Govt of Rajasthan; NGOs

Background

Media plays varied roles – sustains, enriches, endorses, enables and empowers. Mass media are change agents, socialisers, set public agenda. In recognition of their special role, mass media are described as the Fourth Estate and Watchdog. But on behavioural change, media are supportive, not substitute for action or implementation. Newspapers, internet, television, and radio broadcasts are all potential means for highlighting the environmental issues among masses. Despite its potential, mass media is not concerned with impact and implications of what is being presented today on the quality of life, the value system among the different sections of the public.

The Indian media scene has gone through a dramatic shift in the last decade both in terms of content and control. While media content is more and more market driven, control has now shifted. The growing influence of online media, civil society activists, and increasing pressure from the international community has changed the landscape of environmental communication across the globe.

Additionally, RTI and the spread of internet forums and blogs have created another important information source for news directors and producers looking for story ideas. This new network has made it possible for a small local story to become a nationwide sensation overnight.

Media operations depend on profit driven economics. Many news editors and producers consider coverage of environmental issues as yet another option instead of an obligation and to make a difference for the future. Environmental issues don't make headlines unless they turn into disasters. Complex issues have less chance of figuring in the news than simple/dramatic ones as the complex issues calls for more efforts and expenses. It is necessary to guard against the trend of succumbing entirely to market forces. The media also misses an opportunity to present the true picture in an appropriate manner. There is a dearth of quality programs on TV, and there are very few incisive articles on environmental issues in print media. Environmental reporters need to be sensitive and proactive and that is possible with periodic orientation. Environmental reporting should be more incisive and more appealing to the younger audiences, a target group that is essential for the media to sustain itself and

exert influence on the future. Reporters also need to work closely with such major environmental stakeholders i.e. civil societies, activists and professional bodies to expand their sources of reliable information.

The prospect of negative prognosis by media of environmental violations or degradation can prevent the society from further degrading the environment. Moreover, the prospect of positive media coverage highlighting a community's or industries good environmental record serves as a strong incentive.

Greater media attention, effective government initiatives and increased affluence have contributed immensely to environmental awareness. As the economy continues to grow, India will face a range of environmental challenges. The government, media, civil societies, institutions, businesses and the people themselves have always been, and will continue to be, the driving forces of this momentum. Media's significant role in this process leads to positive outcome only when it works with other stakeholders.

The Roundtable

In this context, CMS Environment proposes to organise a series of media roundtables across Dehradun, Jaipur, Goa, Kolkata and Hyderabad. This roundtable discussion seeks to foster a deeper understanding of the role of media in bringing biodiversity issues of Rajasthan to the fore. The discussion will focus on highlighting the campaigns initiated by media and its impact on the policy and the general public. The discourse will also facilitate sensitising media professionals about the complexities and challenges of covering the environmental issues and proactively working towards it. The discussions will also make the journalists aware about "how to enhance the quality of their programmes/ articles/ features as well as the narrative of their news. The use of social media for environmental education will also be discussed in this roundtable.

Format

The programme will begin with a CMS Environment presentation on How the media in Rajasthan is covering the issues of biodiversity (an analysis by CMS ENVIS Centre) followed by presentations by print, News channel and radio representatives on coverage/ campaigns on biodiversity related issues by them in the last one year. The open forum and the deliberations on the challenge, opportunities and the way forward will be part of the round table agenda.

Outcome

The proceedings of the roundtable will be compiled in a publication format and disseminated to media, policy makers and civil societies.