

Chapter 12

Climate Change and Sustainability Issues in Indian Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

Climate change conferences had wide media coverage – be it on newspaper, radio, television or the internet. The terms such as ‘climate change’, ‘global warming’, and ‘El Nino’ are gaining popularity among the public. This study examines the news coverage of climate change issues in the major daily newspapers—The Times of India, The Hindu in English, and the Dina Thanthi, Dinamalar, and Dinamani in regional language (Tamil)—for the calendar years 2014 and 2015. This chapter describes how climate change influences nature and human life, and it is the basis for social and economic development. The news coverage of climate change and sustainability issues helps the reader better understand the concepts and perspectives of environment. Climate change communication in regional newspapers and local news stories may increase the public’s interest and knowledge level regarding climate change and sustainability issues.

INTRODUCTION

Major environmental issues in India are air pollution, water pollution, land degradation, ocean and coastal threats, resource depletion, deforestation, shrinking wetland, endangered species, loss of biodiversity and climate change/global warming. These environmental problems are adversely affecting the health and life of biological nature including humanity. India suffers from the effects of climate change, especially it impacts the vulnerable groups such as indigenous community, rural poor and children. The

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devastating deluge of December 2015 in Chennai was a result of the rise of sea surface temperature to above normal in the Bay of Bengal causing unprecedented heavy rain. Climate change and sustainable development are interrelated. Climate change influences nature and human life and it is the basis for social and economic development (IPCC, 2007). Climate change is included as one of the goals in the new agenda for sustainable development to ‘take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts’ (Sustainable Development Goals, 2015). It is a serious global environmental issue and it affects millions of people worldwide.

In developing countries, poor and marginalized groups are worst affected by the impacts of climate change such as drought, floods, extreme weather events, shortage of food and drinking water. India is one of the countries in Asia most susceptible to climate change. The devastating deluge of December 2015 in Chennai, Tamil Nadu was a result of the rise of sea surface temperature to above normal in the Bay of Bengal causing unprecedented heavy rain. A study on climate change in Anna University in 2013 predicted that temperature will rise to 3.5° C in Tamil Nadu by the end of this century. According to the predictions, the temperature will rise by 1° C in next 30 years and the sea level will rise by 53 cm by the end of this century along coastal Tamil Nadu. According to the report ‘Natural Disasters Saving Lives Today Building Resilience for Tomorrow’, the coastal cities in India will be at risk as an impact of flooding due to rising sea levels and extreme weather conditions (2014).

Combating climate change to achieve sustainable development is a challenge for society. Sustainable development is a goal for the present and future generations to achieve equal rights and opportunities that help lead a good human life (Brundtland, 1987). It is also a goal to raise the standard of living of the poor. The socio-economic-environmental dimensions must be in balance to attain sustainable development. Sustainability is understood as continued growth; and establishing sustainability in policy circles is the outcome of enormous communicative effort by key decision making and policy planning fora such as the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Conference of Parties (COPs) on climate change (Miller & Dinan, 2015). Sustainable development is the idea of progress, and progress is one of the most powerful notions in the modern world. Sustainable development involves economic growth, environmental conservation, social justice and not just for the moment, but in permanence (Dryzek, 2005).

Media coverage of climate change and sustainability issues help the reader better understand the concepts and perspectives of environment. Climate change conferences had wide media coverage – be it on newspaper, radio, television or the internet. Newspapers have played an important role in disseminating climate change and sustainability issues discussed in the conference. The terms such as ‘climate change’, ‘global warming’ and ‘El Nino’ are gaining popularity among the public. News reporting on climate change must address the challenges posed in the deeper social and economic dimensions of sustainable development. Reporting needs a multi-faceted approach, in making people understand the complexity of climate change. Although facts, figures and rational analysis are necessary, they are insufficient in persuading individuals and communities to adopt more climate friendly lifestyles, practices and use of technologies. Senior journalist G. Krishnan (2009) said, “reporters are often reluctant to admit that they do not understand the subject; instead, they merely reproduce the contents of the press releases or briefings.” This study aims to analyze the framing of climate change and sustainability issues in dominant newspapers in Tamil Nadu. The objectives of the study are:

- To examine how climate change and sustainability issues are represented in the Indian newspapers
- To identify the prominent frames in the Indian newspapers

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