

Role of Media in Achieving a Sustainable Society

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Abstract

This paper studies media's role in contributing towards a sustainable society. The term sustainable development and a sustainable society are well-defined in particular in the context of India's pursuit of Digital India. Despite the Indian Government's future vision for India and the subsequent careful and well-planned policies, an ever growing population will predictably mean an augmented pressure on the society, environment and culture. Therefore, it is argued that if India is serious in following a path of sustainable development, the Indian population needs a behavior change towards sustainable actions. This change in behavior cannot be accomplished by itself but needs conscious efforts on the part of the society and government as a whole. It is recommended that Education for Sustainable Development of all sections of society can contribute to this behavioral change. Bearing in mind that a considerable part of the Indian population is not enrolled in the formal education system, the case is made for an increased role of the media in spreading Education for Sustainable Development. Numerous recommendations are then made as to how the current developments in the media sector can be utilized to make continuous progress towards a sustainable Indian society.

Keywords: Media, Sustainable development, Behavior change, Sustainable Society

1. Introduction

In the post globalization era, the mass media plays a significant social institution which caters to the social and economic requirements of wider social groups and at the same time it has been playing a vital role in developing countries like India. Moreover, the mass media has to educate people for changing their traditional attitude to suite the modern progressive needs.

In this paper an attempt has been made to understand media's role in contemporary society, while changing the perspective of people. If media is used properly, it can accelerate growth rate at one hand and it can also awaken people for sustainable development.

The hypothesis developed in this paper is the pursuit for sustainable rural development incorporates both empowerment of marginalized section of society and sustaining the rural resources -both human and material. Grounded on this hypothesis, it is contended here that media can play an important role in this process. To illustrate this, the paper will be divided into three sections. First section of this paper deals with the role of media in sustainable development, second section deals with the contemporary media scenario and how it works. Third section contains how the media can play an important role in sustainable rural development. Frame of reference in which all this discussion has been made is limited to India.

Sustainable development has been well-defined in numerous ways, but the most frequently quoted description is from the Brundtland's Report also known as Our Common Future.

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (Brundtland Commission: 1987)

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The view of sustainable development is deep-rooted in this sort of systems rational. The term is used for refining the quality of life for the rural poor by developing aptitudes that promote education and health, participation of the community, food security, sustainable economic growth, and environmental protection thereby empowering community members to leave the cycle of poverty and attain their full potential.

1.1. Role of media in Modernization

Media plays an important role in sustainable rural development through spread of knowledge, providing opportunity for discussion of issues, impart ideas, skills for a better life and create a base of consensus for stability of the state. From onset of the media in India various attempts were made to exploit its potential for development purposes. The Indian media was initiated since the late 18th century with print media in 1780; radio broadcasting was initiated in 1927. The history of structured communication in India can be found in the rural radio broadcast in the 1940's. The regular daily Television transmission started in 1965 as a part of All India Radio and in the year 1995, Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL) launched public Internet access in India. Media scenario essentially includes TV, radio, newspapers, advertising, other print media forms, social marketing or cyber journalism. These mediums are not merely entertainment based but they are also vital means of education on various aspects of life. Today the mass media -print, electronic or even cyber remains the most important media for its capability to scrutinize public affairs without fear or favor. In the recent years there has been a steady trend towards what we can describe as micro media — the media of small newspaper, limited circulation journals and community radio.

1.1.1. Newspaper as a medium of Sustain development

The supremacy of the press arises from its skill of appearing to the minds of the people and being capable of moving their emotions. However, it has been noticed that the press has not met the requisite interest in Sustain developments. In order to correct the disparities noticed in the media coverage of Rural Development Programs and to make certain that these program are portrayed in proper perspective, numerous steps are taken to sensitize the media about concerns relating to rural development. Newspapers and magazines are very important source of information to the public, they have a significant role to play in fulfilling the goals of sustainable development by educating, informing, sensitizing and conscientizing the public relating to various aspects of sustainable development. For the purpose of creating awareness in respect of rural develop programs among the general public and opinion makers and for disseminating information about new initiatives, the Ministry issues advertisements at regular intervals in national and regional press through DAVP. While applying the news Value's, selecting the angle and focus, journalists should see the events from the perspective of environment and development. They should remain unbiased; without highlighting favors to any section of the society or a group.

1.1.2. Radio as a means of sustainable development

Radio is a fascinating medium among the various mass communication media because of its special characteristics. It continues to be as relevant and potent. An estimated 833 million people in India live in rural areas and a very large proportion of whom, both men and women, are either solely or considerably still dependent for their livelihood on farm as well as non-farm activities. The 2006 Community Radio National Guidelines of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting envisage marginalized communities in rural areas to own, manage, and operate radio stations with the assistance of non-profit civil society and voluntary organizations. Fifty percent of the content has to be generated in local dialects with the participation of the local community for which the station has been set up, with a transmission within the radius of 10 kilometres (6 miles).

Radio has certain distinctive advantages for development by providing a blend of programmes of information, education and entertainment in accordance with the communication needs of the people it serves. However, this potential has largely gone untapped. Unlike the Newspaper, radio gets through to an illiterate population. Compared to television or film, radio is relatively cheap and portable, so radio broadcasts can be localized to each community, thus appealing to local people.

1.1.3. Television As A Medium For Development Communication

Television was introduced in the country on 15th September 1959. As a medium Television plays an important role in sustainable development by providing forum for discussion of issues, through exchange of knowledge, teach ideas, skills for a better life and create a base of harmony for stability of the state. Today television in our country is also used as a medium for social education, weapon against ignorance and awareness among the people, through its programs like Educational Television (ETV), Countrywide Classroom (CWC), and Teleconferencing etc.

TV has been used as a support to satellite communication technology to successfully bring in development. Satellite communications technology offers unique capability of being able to reach out to the most remote corners of the country. In India, ISRO has continuously pursued the utilization of space technology for education and development. This has been done through different projects like Educational TV (ETV), SITE, Kheda project and Country wide classroom (CWC) project. These programmes have been designed to cater to the country's need for education, training, and general awareness among the rural poor.

1.1.4. New Media as a medium of Development Communication

New media or computers started creeping in the Indian Society around 1986. The actual transition in India happened after 1996 when several independent media houses brought out news website. Today, new media has become an active tool in the run to development communication. This takes various forms like E-Governance, E-Choupal, Telecentres etc; it acts as the interface between the computer and the farmer. Farmers can use the kiosks to check the current market prices of agricultural commodities, access market data better farming practices. Initially apprehensive, farmers have slowly but steadily familiarised themselves with the new system. But it becomes the responsibility of media to stop practices of such that of paid news or the ones that create cheap sensationalism or be defamatory. New Media's interactivity and easy access have made it a commendable medium for development communication.

1.2. Media and Social Change: Challenges Ahead

At present media has to face many challenges to bring social change. It is perceived that "Interest in sustainable development and reduction of poverty has grown along with the spread of globalization." The role of media can be supporting and effective when good governance is accomplished.

Mass media can play significant role in reporting best practices in sustainable rural development through the following course:

1. By firstly identifying the target audience and their concerns of sustainable development.
2. Support and build and a learning community.
3. Special training should be given to the journalists, reporters and program makers; production of content ideally should be written, designed and directed by the local people.
4. Successful case studies should be highlighted for inspiration.
5. There should be more concerted effort between audio and written material, and audio-visual.
6. The language used should be simple and understandable to all.

Mass media has a very positive role to play in the development of any society. Instead of celebrating scams, politics and other concerns, mass media must put forward a positive debate.

Conclusions

There are communication gaps between the mass media and the society. Currently, mass media is not properly stimulating sustainable rural development. Still many challenges are to be taken for bringing social change in India. The mass media can encourage more participatory development on different levels. It can take in large number of people in social change process. It can transform Indian society from tradition to modern by developing it as an information community, rich in advanced in technology and information. Information automation and use of mass media only facilitate future change.

In spite of the communication and information technology revolution, there no appropriate change in the lives of millions of the poor. Indeed the assurance of the new information age — knowledge for all- seems as a distant dream. Today media has become extremely commercialized, and social responsibility has taken a back seat. There has been drop in segments relating to development and health. The government-controlled media has never looked into regional variations of the problems, and the need for customizing the messages. Hence, spending so much transmission time on such issues and messages could never give positive result. Community radio can help in development of local area by highlighting their problems and disseminating important information. Steps have not been taken by the government to popularize this form of radio to sustain and persuade communities to set up these. The state-controlled television, Doordarshan, continuous to telecast its programmes without keeping the target audience in mind. Educational TV or Country Wide Classroom projects are more successful on pen and paper than practically. Programmes like Gyan Darshan, though educational and informative in its approach, but lacks efficiency in its presentation. School and college goers who are most used to private satellite channels are rarely even aware of these programmes. This can be done by being more appealing and attractive by the use of pictures and info-graphic in its approach. In such a situation it is necessary for a developing country like India, to rethink their research priorities and communication policies to address the information problems and knowledge gaps in social

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development. Putting communication resources in the hands of community is a way to attain success in developmental projects with the use of mass-media.

Thus the role of media has always been vital and would continue to be so, with a sense of responsibility in achieving a sustainable society

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