

Journalism and Environment: Motivating the Public Opinion

- *Climate change, development, democracy and the media*

“Urban elites may be concerned about preserving the tigers, but our readers say they are the ones who get eaten by tigers.”

Editor of newspaper published from the interior

Climate change, development, democracy and the media

- *The media has to reach at least three distinct audiences about battling climate change to effective:*
- *1. The world's poor*
- *2. The elites in the developing world*
- *3. The voters in the industrialized nations.*

The poor – or the less well off

- **They are often treated as passive actors in the climate change effort**
- **But they are a force because of their numbers – and their votes in democracies.**
- **They have to be brought into to debate – and the action plans.**

The paradox of the poor

- **The effects of climate change hurt them the most and doing nothing about it will ultimately hit them harder**
- **But drastic, immediate actions to curb effects of climate change will make it difficult for them to raise themselves out of poverty**

The paradox of the poor

- **Living standards translate into energy use. Building better schools takes energy. Health, food production, transportation – all, ultimately, are energy**

Other inconvenient truths

- **The carbon footprint for an Indian is a meager 1.2 tons a year, compared to the global average of 4 tons.**
- **An Indian used the equivalent of 512 kilogrammes of oil, compared to 3,698 kg by a European.**
- **Cutting back emissions by 30 percent in India could mean 17.5 million poor people by 2030**

The message for them

- **Anti-growth messages are irrelevant. You can't ask anyone living on less \$1 a day to reduce his carbon footprint! He doesn't ride in SUVs or in planes.**
- **In many places in India – and elsewhere – the rural poor have seen some of the beginnings of the effects of climate change in the past year**
- **Unseasonal rains that threaten their livelihood**

The message for them

- **More frequent floods**
- **Prolonged droughts in areas like Bundelkand that once used to have steady rainfall**

Making the link

- **Link their concrete experiences to climate change**
- **But don't make it a doomsday scenario that breeds fatalism**

What can they do?

- **There's precious little they can personally do because of the already sparse lifestyles**
- **Here's a metaphor for the change that could come in many areas:**
- **About 75 percent of rural families use firewood and other biofuels – that produce a lot of smoke – for cooking; but they don't have alternatives**

What can they do?

- **What if they could get less polluting alternatives?**
- **They could get lo-tech solar cookers**
- **Or they could get electricity**

Making another link

- **Since coal is used to generate most of India's electricity, more power could lead to more pollution**
- **But even that is probably less polluting than millions of open hearths burning wood, leaves and cowdung**
- **However, the next link would be to see the need for cleaner electricity generation – because otherwise there would be more unseasonal rains and floods**

Making another link

- **Fitting better pollution controls in existing and new power plants would help save the planet, while helping the people**
- **A greater impetus for investments in wind farms, solar arrays, nuclear plants that are cleaner could help solve both problems**

Where the poor matter

- **In India, more people in rural areas vote compared to the urban voters, especially the middle classes and the well-off**
- **By raising the awareness of these issues – and more important – making the links, the poor can be empowered to demand these changes**
- **Journalists have to be the catalyst for public debate leading to consensus for change**

Getting the message across

- **In India – as elsewhere – the message has to be in the idioms of the people in their languages**
- **Journalists need to be trained to turn complexities of the climate change store into folk tales**
- **In addition to print and TV, community radio will have a greater role, especially if they can involve their audiences**

Getting the message across

- **Become technologically more adventurous: Try the cellphones – which are becoming more ubiquitous – to get the message across.**

The relatively well-off

- **The well-off – the middle classes and the rich – have to be brought into the public debate as well**
- **Even if they are apathetic as voters, they are powerful in setting the public agenda and influencing policy**

The relatively well-off

- **Of course, there is also basic message of conservation for them as their carbon footprints are disproportionately large**

The industrialized nations

- **It is convenient to blame China and India for global warming**
- **But the media has to put this in perspective – The link between fighting poverty and economic expansion**
- **How low their individual carbon footprint is compared to industrialized nations**
- **The link between energy use and better living conditions**

The industrialized nations

- **The media in the industrialized nations helps set the public debate on climate change policies**
- **By raising consciousness about the development dilemmas of the poor and the developing nations, the media can help voters of developed nations find solutions**

The industrialized nations

- **Development in these countries will go on relentlessly**
- **So solutions – that come at a cost to the industrialized nations – will have to evolve**
- **Not handouts or donations, but:**
- **Enhancing the clean development mechanism**

The industrialized nations

- **Technology transfer and investment in developing new technologies**
- **Fostering entrepreneurship in the developing countries for cleaner development**
- **Policy decisions on climate change will have to deal with this factor**
- **Let's not forget we're all together in this**