

Role of Media in Generating Public Awareness in Disaster Risk Reduction

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Abstract: *Media can play a positive role in Disaster Risk Reduction. It has an important and significant role to play especially in developing and large country like India where it can reach every nook and corner easily, timely and is also cost effective. It is not only cost effective but also has a wide reach which can help in educating the people about preparedness and mitigation measures and thus help in reducing the impact of disasters. It can also play role in timely broadcasting of warnings and thus reducing the damages caused by the disasters and help in evacuating people to safer places and saving lives. Therefore, role of media is a very responsible. It acts like a bridge between Disaster Risk Reduction Planning organizations (Government or Private) and the public both before and after the disaster. In countries like India because of sheer size where it is difficult for the government agencies to reach every village, media with its reach can help in making people in every region aware of their vulnerabilities.*

Keywords: positive role, cost effective, wide coverage, reliable information, code of conduct

1. Introduction

Recent images of dead bodies floating in rivers and hundreds of cremations of Covid - 19 victims shook us all. In recent past we have seen such images which make us think whether these should have been published. We see journalist making videos of the victims instead of helping them to come out of distress situation. All these media coverage make us think whether there are any ethics or rules of news coverage. Where should be the demarcation line beyond which the coverage should be stopped? Whether the role of journalist is to first help the people in distress and then interview them. These are some of the questions which come in our minds sometimes when we watch news coverage of disaster events.

Widespread reach of media has both advantages and disadvantages. Common person without any training shoots films on his mobile and shares with media agencies and media agencies in order to gain advantage broadcast these news clippings shot by amateur people. While these personal footage of incident can be very helpful in coordinating and reaching out relief and rescue operations on time but these footages being covered by general public may show only one side of story and be their personal viewpoint

These are some of the questions which I discuss here in this article

Media nowadays plays a very significant role in disseminating information. The types of media are numerous ranging from broadcast media like TV and radio to visual, print and variety of social media. Nowadays, it is not only government agencies which are providing information but there are many other sources for public to get information. Problem with a consumer is to identify the authentic and reliable source of information.

Media covering disaster events should try to aim at providing accurate, timely and reliable information and

inform and educate the people about the hazards instead of trying to develop its image only as a source of entertainment. Most often we find media trying to sensationalize the stories, covering only the negative aspects of impact of tragedy either the death or destruction caused by the disaster or failure of Government efforts in dealing with the situation.

Most of the time we see T.V channels claiming of “reaching first” to the sight of tragedy, trying to take interviews of the victims who are already in so much distress, and giving sensational “breaking news”. Media should refrain creating fear amongst the effected people. The aim should not be to present all events with same view point. Reports related to disaster events are more sensitive and so has to be presented differently. Media should develop its image as a reliable and authentic source of information and help in educating the people and thus reducing the impact of disasters. Media coverage of disaster event impacts the relief received from donor agencies and various government policies for the affected region. Thereby, it is essential that the coverage of disaster situations in done efficiently and accurately.

With emergence of variety of social media sources like twitter, Facebook, Instagram etc it has become easy for general public to cover various events and upload information for public. Many times this information which is not edited is uploaded by people who are not professionals can misguide the people as these are personal views. With variety of media sources now available there is Infodemic of information

2. Role of Media in Different Stages of Disaster Management

Process of disaster management is expressed as Disaster Management Cycle it has three phases. Each phase is characterized by different planning activities related to Disaster Management. Media can play important role in covering all aspects of these three phases of disaster management.

Volume 10 Issue 6, June 2021

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1) Pre –Disaster Phase – Preparedness and Mitigation

Pre disaster phase focuses on activities related to preparedness for any forthcoming disaster, the expected impacts and losses, risks, vulnerability and capacity building. In this phase various structural and nonstructural policies related to mitigation of occurrence of disaster and minimizing the impact of disaster are planned and implemented. Media plays important role during this phase. Dissemination of early warning, which should be broadcast timely, accurately and preferably in local language is very important. Educating people about various hazards their region can face by conducting various activities publishing and distributing pamphlets, brochures, hoardings etc. Identifying and informing the vulnerabilities of the region to the communities and generating awareness among the communities. Media can inform people of region about the Disaster Management Plans of the area. It can create awareness about what steps to be taken during the emergency. Media can play important role in giving feedback to the planners about the progress of various disaster management activities being undertaken. Whether they are being implemented properly and on time in a region. Information Education and Communication – IEC is very important tool for creating awareness among community related to hazards which can occur in the region and all three depend on media.

2) During the disaster or Emergency phase – Search, Evacuation and Relief

Immediately after the disaster is the evacuation and relief phase. Whereby the victims are evacuated to safer places. They are provided immediate relief in terms of shelter, medical help, food, water and other necessities. Depending on severity of disaster government, non-government agencies, National and International agencies participate in relief operations. Immediately after a disaster has struck media can help in communicating the severity of impact both to public as well as administrative agencies so that relief operations can begin on time. Media can playing a role in projecting core needs of communities and in informing affected people of where they can access aid. Media also plays important role in search and rescue operations.

To begin with, the information needs of the people affected by disasters should be met. Such information actually helps the condition of the victims which is of supreme importance. Such information is usually of facilities on the ground that could help them make their condition better. Further media coverage of disasters is a direct dissemination of information to the government, donors and the people at large. This coverage actually shapes opinions of the people on the ground situation. In fact such coverage also influences donor policy and various government policies for the affected region. Thereby, it is essential that the coverage of disaster situations in done efficiently and accurately,

3) Post Disaster Phase – Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction

Third phase which is after the disaster has occurred is the recovery and rehabilitation phase. In this phase short term and long term measures are undertaken to provide rehabilitation to the people. It also involves reconstruction and rebuilding of damaged physical structures and

rehabilitation of population effected by disasters. Media can cover the response and recovery actions of agencies providing realistic picture of actual projects undertaken. Equity in distribution of relief material, highlighting special needs of certain group of people can shape the DRR policies of government. Highlighting success stories, covering positive actions, community participation and their role are some of the important aspects which can be covered by media. Focus on negative aspects, repeatedly showing death and destruction creates fear in the public mind.

3. Ethical issues in Reporting Disaster Events**1) Accuracy**

One of the most important aspect of reporting of any disaster event is that it should be accurate and correct. Information should be based on factual information. It is very important to check actual facts before reporting. How the story is presented, the choice of words and visuals are very important. It is important for media to filter out unwanted information and stay in context. These media coverage can be used by various agencies as source of information for various purposes like to provide relief to the victims so actual and correct reporting is very important.

2) Sympathetic coverage

Media persons covering event should take precaution not to cause problems to local people by forcing them to give views and taking their interviews as the people are already in distress. Many a time we see the journalists force people to give interviews. Safety, privacy, convenience and comfortability of local people is very important.

3) Balanced view

Balanced reporting covering both negative and positive side of the event is important. Positive stories bring hope and increases confidence among the affected people. Negative stories reflects poor image of the region and country so proper care to be taken to cover the event by media persons. Showing or covering negative stories, deaths and damages, failure of agencies, blaming the administration, comparing the event management with other parts of world created bad image of the country. Role of local communities in handling the situation should be highlighted.

4) Post disaster coverage

There should be post disaster coverage by the media. It helps in checking the work being done by government, NGO's for rehabilitation of victims. It is important that progress of rehabilitation activities are checked and reported time to time. Most of the time it is seen that maximum coverage of disaster event by media is only first few days later the relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities are not covered.

5) Media as a bridge

Media should act as bridge between the people and the administration. It should provide the feedback from people affected by disaster to the administration regarding their needs and it should also inform the public about relief measures and other policies formulated by government to provide help.

4. Type and Mediums and Emergence of Social media

Each type of media has its own advantages and limitations. Providing accurate information both to people affected by disaster as well as government and other agencies providing rescue and relief. Communications in local language, accurate reporting, reaching out on time to local people so that they can take timely actions like evacuation, locating shelter homes, taking advantage of help being provided by various agencies are important roles of media.

- 1) **Print media** like newspaper, magazines, and reports are traditional medium of reporting. It is possible to write and cover in detail the event. Only problem with print media is that it can sometime give late information. Reporters also have more time to research and verify. Therefore, in-depth, analytical content is possible in case of newspaper reporting.
- 2) **Television** As a visual medium, there is a vital need to address and keep dignity issues as a priority. There need to be guidelines in place as to what to do when filming a live report from a disaster zone from this perspective.
- 3) **Radio** This is a medium that reaches the majority of the population, including very remote locations. It is also the medium that stays active the longest after a disaster strikes. Radio reporters need to be well positioned for emergency communications. Content can be localized to deliver specific helpful information. The emerging field of community radio should also be explored. Radio can be very important medium of communication as it can broadcast important messages like warning, evacuation instructions in local language which is understood by local population. As it is based on satellite based communication system it can be very vital source of communication. Its affordability is another big advantage
- 4) **Online writing** since this is an interactive medium, it gets a lot of comments. There needs to be continued moderation of both the stories and the feedback to ensure it doesn't spark something problematic. Since these are personal views the writer has to be very conscious about what is being reported.
- 5) **Twitter** messaging are live and instant. There is both advantage and disadvantage of instant messaging. Accurate and sensible reporting is to be kept in mind. There are chances of misinterpretations and misunderstanding
- 6) **Facebook and Other social media** are all personal reporting. There is not much of control on what and how the reports are being reported. Though there are provision to block social media during sensitive events and Government can control what is being shared by the people

5. Conclusion

For the media to build this positive image it is important that disaster management institutes, government agencies and the media to build a good workable relationship and filter the relevant information which is to be communicate to the people. It is the responsibility of the DM organizations to provide reliable and usable information to media and media

to present that information without any bias. Because, ultimate aim is benefit of the people.

For this it is necessary to have a code of conduct, identify the areas where the news reporting should be informative and positive, regular interaction among the media and DM organizations to be maintained. This would help in gradual buildup of trust among people, and of DM agencies on media and vice versa. Sometimes in order to collect funds the relief agencies working in the areas repeatedly convey to media the stories related to distress as a result negative image is projected. Therefore it is necessary to first screen the stories which are presented by the media for this a committee can be formed having representations from DM agencies (including government and NGO's), public and media fraternity to review the stories presented by the media. Media organizations can train journalists to cover disaster news with emphasis on positive coverage to increase the motivation of survivors and people living in similar conditions.

Media most of the time is neutral and shows what's going on and it's on the viewer perspective how they perceive such news.. Media has pre and post role in disaster and play vital role for the same. Media is one of the most important tool that helps the Government as well as the local community for DRR measures. Media too needs training with regard to DRM activities, information dissemination and synthesis of information.

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