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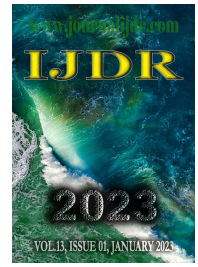
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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ROLE OF MEDIA IN DISASTER MITIGATION

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ABSTRACT

Effective, reliable communication is vital to disaster reduction. Communication technologies, skills, and media are essential to link scientists, disaster mitigation officials, and the public; educate the public about disaster preparedness; track approaching hazards; alert authorities; warn the people most likely to be affected, assess damage; collect information, supplies, and other resources; co-ordinate rescue and relief activities; account for missing people; and motivate public, political, and institutional responses. Let us explore the involvement of the media in disaster mitigation and practical means for improving relationship among the media, disaster relief and scientific communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Media throughout the world plays a vital role in educating the public about disasters; warning of hazards; gathering and transmitting information about affected areas; alerting government officials, relief organizations and the public to specific needs; and facilitating discussions about disaster preparedness and response lending transparency to the whole operation. For the media to fill these roles most effectively, the scientific and disaster mitigation organizations need to establish and strengthen working relationships with the media. It is a challenge for disaster mitigation organizations to act to sensitize the media and to make themselves a reliable source of usable information for journalists. It may be emphasized that the importance of providing reliable information to the media, as early as possible, in a concise and readily understandable form, and linked where possible to newsworthy events. It's important to create and take advantage of mechanisms for journalists and disaster mitigation officials to spend more time together and learn about each other's work. Regular, routine interaction, before a disaster strike, lays the (ground) ground work for effective working relationships in the aftermath of a disaster. Moreover, the experience, Sensitivity, and trust that such contact facilitates contribute to the quality and focus of media coverage relating to disasters. There is growing need for the disaster mitigation community to identify specific themes to convey to the media and the public. One vital factor in effective communications is the creation and repetition of precise, effective messages, both through the mass media and in other alternative forms of communication, such

messages can empower people to take practical steps to protect themselves from natural hazards and to demand attention by private and governmental organizations towards disaster prevention, mitigation and response. Effective working relationship require the media, NGOs (Non-Governmental relief or development organizations). Scientists, government agencies and international organizations to recognize that, while they have much in common, they also often have distinct objectives and needs. It is important to recognize those differences and to work together to explore ways of helping meet each other's needs. It is also important to recognize differences among media (print Vs. broadcast, radio Vs. television, domestic Vs. international, etc.) and to take in to account their distinct characteristics, potential, and needs. It may be noted that the media and relief organizations at times, and appropriately, challenge each other and ask difficult, penetrating questions. After all it is through the media that the agencies are accountable to the public

The focus and impact of Media coverage and Public Communication by agencies.

It is hoped that disaster mitigation organizations would focus more of their public information efforts, and that the media would focus more of its coverage, on disaster prevention and reduction, instead of loss of life and damage to property. Both disaster mitigation agencies and the media, for example, should identify and communicate to the public specific measures that have either succeeded or failed to reduce the impact of natural hazards. Some times the public and media are obsessed with death and dying. A new story about the

damage inflicted by a cyclone, for example, could just as easily include information about the types of structures that survived and those that did not. There are opportunities for interesting, important news stories before and long after disasters, as well as in the immediate aftermath of a disaster "event," where most media attention is now focused. Similarly, most disaster prevention and response is local. Although many people mistakenly believe that international aid funds most disaster relief, the UN has acknowledged that international aid seldom exceeds 4 percent of the economic loss. Hence it is important for the media to report how the people solved their problems. The absence of such stories has a demonstrable impact on the recognition by government officials and the public that there is much that can be done to protect both lives and property before and during a natural disaster.

Many times the links between important information and stories that appears "newsworthy" in the eyes of the media and the public and difficult to establish, as suggested by a report at the world conference from the UN Food and Agriculture organization (FAO). "When images of tortured, starving faces and the bloated bellies of dying children lead the nightly news, the world rushes food and assistance to the hungry. As the food aid arrives, it feeds the news as well as the starving." Despite the impression that many western observers share that Africa is "a continent of recurring famine. "The FAO report continued it is drought, not famine that is Africa's" Principal natural disaster. Famine is not the necessary out come of drought. These are proven strategies to reduce the effects of drought and prevent even the most vulnerable populations from starving." In 1992, for example 12 southern African countries were hit by a drought that caused greater crop failure than Ethiopia, the Sahel, and the Horn of Africa faced in 1984-85. But a rapid response by the countries involved, as well as international organizations such as the FAO, prevented that drought from causing famine. "The unprecedented early response prevented a famine and as such a major news story." "What went largely unreported." The FAO concluded, was the "story about millions who could have died but did not." There is growing concern about the impact of the information that does reach the public. New attention should be paid to the impact of the images of disaster relief activities portrayed through the media. It is important to consider practical, specific strategies for both the media and relief organizations to improve the accuracy, timelines, quality, and cost effectiveness of the information they disseminate about developing countries. Relief agencies routinely convey images through the media is an effort to motivate support, raise money, or increase their own visibility. There is much disaster mitigation organizations can do directly, and in co-operation with the media, to help focus public attention on disaster preparedness and prevention and to avoid many of the unintentional consequences of the images used by one in the media.

Outcome of the Yokohama conference: In fact, the Yokohama strategy and plan of action for a safer world, adopted unanimously at the world conference, reflects many of the key issues concerning the use of communications in anticipation and response to, natural disasters. For example one of the ten principles identified in the yokohama strategy stresses that "early warnings of impending disasters and their effective dissemination using telecommunications, including broadcast services, are key factors to successful disaster prevention and preparedness." In assessing the status of disaster reduction midway through the IDNDR, the yokohama strategy notes that; Education and training programmes and facilities for people professionally involved and the public at large have not been sufficiently developed with a focus on ways and means to reduce disasters. Also the potential of the information media, industry, scientific community and the private sector at large has not been sufficiently mobilized. Therefore, in the strategies for the next century, the conference has included significant attention to the role of communications, such as "improved risk assessment, broader monitoring and communication of forecasts and warnings." And placing higher priority on the compilation and exchange of information on natural disaster reduction, especially at regional and subregional levels, through the strengthening of existing mechanisms and improved use of communication techniques."

In the plan of action, included in the yokohama strategy, specific steps for more effectively using communications in response to natural clusters have been suggested. Many of the recommended actions deal with predicting, tracking and providing warnings regarding natural hazards, for example:" incorporate cost-effective technologies in reduction programmes including forecasting and cost-effective technologies in reduction programmes, including forecasting and warning systems" and "improve the communications on natural disasters among the countries of the region in the context of preparedness and early warning systems." The plan of action also addresses the important roles of the media and of public education. Establish and implement educational and information programmes aimed at generating general public awareness, with special emphasis on policy makers and major groups, in order to ensure support for, and effectiveness of disaster reduction programmes, Enroll the media as a contributing sector in awareness raising, education and opinion building in order to increase recognition of the potential of disaster reduction to save human lives and protect property....(collect and disseminate) documentation and information to improve public awareness of natural disasters and the potential to reduce their impact. Finally, a number of the recommendations deal with organizational communications and communications for scientific development and policy formation, "endeavour to document all disasters; (improve) The exchange of information on disaster reduction policies and technologies; (Formulate) education and training programmes and technical information exchanges aimed at human resource development." The media can play a unique role in disaster mitigation. Although the aims of the media and those of disaster mitigation organizations are not synonymous, without compromising the independence and integrity of either, much can be done to communicate to the public the information that will help many save their own lives. Media should facilitate more humane uses of communications to save lives, reduce damage to property and the environment, and increase public understanding in the face of natural disasters.

Principles and Recommendations on Media, Scientific information and Disasters: The vital role of communications in all phases of disaster mitigation was highlighted at the world conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, May 23-27, 1994, in yokohama, Japan. In addition, the world conference featured the Roundtable, The Media, Scientific information and Disasters by the Anneberg Washington programs, in co-operation with the IDNDR Secretariat in Geneva. The principles and recommendation of the Roundtable on the Media, Scientific information and disasters still have the relevance;

1. Media throughout the world play a vital role in educating the public about disasters, warning of hazards, gathering and transmitting information about affected areas, alerting government officials, relief organizations, and the public to specific needs and facilitating discussions about disaster preparedness and response.
2. Timely, accurate and sensitive communications in the face of natural hazards are demonstrated, cost-effective means of saving lives, reducing property damage, and increasing public understanding. Such communications can educate, warn, inform, and empower people to take practical steps to protect themselves from natural hazard.
3. Scientific and disaster mitigation organizations should seek to develop working relationships with the media based on mutual trust and the recognition of differing characteristics, goals, and needs regular, effective communication among those disparate groups, before, during, and after disaster "events" can greatly enhance those relationships.
4. Disaster mitigation organizations should seek to provide reliable information to the media, as early as possible, in a concise and readily understandable form and linked, where possible, to newsworthy events.
5. Disaster mitigation organizations should seek to identify and communicate specific themes and messages, both through the mass media and in other alternative forms of communication.

6. Media and disaster mitigation organizations should take advantage of opportunities to work together, to provide relevant training for reporters and field personnel to enhance disaster preparedness, mitigation and relief efforts and the timelines, quality, and accuracy of reporting about natural hazards.
7. Media organizations should address disaster prevention and reduction in coverage relating to disasters. Disaster mitigation organizations and the media should identify and communicate to the public specific measures that have either succeeded or failed to reduce the impact of natural hazards.
8. Media Organizations are encouraged to evaluate their reporting about natural hazards and disaster preparedness, and where appropriate, to work with disaster mitigation organizations to improve the quality the quality, accuracy, and thoroughness of such reporting.
9. The IDNDR Secretariat should communicate the outcome of the conference to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and support ITUs efforts to develop an international convention on Disaster Communications.

CONCLUSION

The role of media, awareness and training in disaster management in Himachal Pradesh with special reference to Mandi district.

The role of media should be effective to information and awareness community. Some times it is observed that they are creating panic during any disaster situation among the public and administration. So it is needed that media should be trained skillfully so that the tool of dissemination of information can be applied effectively.

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