

## USE THE GREEN MEDIA

By  
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### INTRODUCTION

The task of environmental protection and management is so vast that no amount of effort and investment by environmental experts and planners can be expected to achieve very much without the involvement of the media in motivating large-scale participation of the people.

The impact of industrial, technological and urban development on the environment in Asia has, in many instances, been negative. It is necessary to guard against industrial disasters such as that which occurred at Bhopal, India as well as the export of polluting industries and dangerous technologies to countries in the region. And great caution must be exercised to see that industries are located according to sound environmental principles and that the unplanned growth of cities is not allowed to continue.

Another area of environmental concern is the threat posed by the development and increasingly widespread use of new technologies in agriculture. This extracts a high price in terms of residues of fertilizer and pesticides in food chains as well as requiring high energy use. Ultimately, there will be a need to produce less per hectare but from a greater variety of crops and more genetic strains for each variety, enabling even small farmers both to meet their food needs and to guarantee their livelihoods.

Yet another long-term environmental problem to be faced is an increase in global temperature, caused by large-scale deterioration, the burning of fossil fuels and industrial pollution. The depletion of the ozone layer owing to atmospheric pollution is also a serious threat. How these factors may affect countries in the region have to be examined.

Traditional thinking about many issues, including environmental ones, has been compartmentalised. Decision makers, including government leaders, planners, economists, researchers, analysts and others, have viewed human activities as compartmentalised (a) within nations, (b) within production or operational sectors such as energy, agriculture and trade and (c) within broad categories of concern such as environmental, economic and social needs (Our Common Future). This compartmentalised view point causes people to separate global issues into, for example, an environmental crisis, development crisis or energy crisis.

Recently, however, some people concerned with environment and development issues have adopted an ecological view that such 'crises' and their causes are inter-related and should be viewed holistically.

## Environmental Education

Environmental education must deal with man-man and men-society relationship only as they affect or are affected by man-earth relationship. One of the definitions stresses Environmental Education as a process of re-organising values and clarifying concepts in order to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the inter-relatedness among man, his culture and his bio-physical surroundings. Still according to another definition, it is a way of implementing the goals of environmental protection. It is not a separate branch of science or subject of study. It has to be carried out according to the principle of life-long integral education.

It is vital that an entire society develop a new understanding and an acute awareness of humanity's relation to its environment. This calls for development and teaching of the environmental philosophy and related concepts at every point in the formal and non-formal educational process.

Development is the order of the day and is the keyword in the entire process of socio-economic transformation of the developing countries. It is, therefore, important to tie up the process of development with environmental education. Environment is not just pollution or conservation as argued by the developed itself.

We shall get a better perspective of the need of environmental education if we could distinguish between the degradation caused by affluence and degradation caused by poverty. The greatest threat to us is not the cause of preservation for preservation's sake. It is the scale at which the world's resources are being eaten up by the developed world."

Some of the important perspectives of meaningful environmental education include among others: environment is our total planetary inheritance; environment management is the use of these resources alongside the maintenance of future resources. Thus, there is a growing need for environmental awareness among the people, the policy makers, the planners, the technicians and professionals.

The objectives of environmental education has been very well summed up in the Belgrade Charter as follows:

(i) **Awareness:** to help individuals and social groups acquire an awareness of and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems.

(ii) **Knowledge:** to help individuals and social groups acquire basic understanding of the total environment its associated problems and humanity's critically responsible presence and role in it.

(iii) **Attitude:** to help individuals and social groups acquire social values, strong feelings of concern for the environment and the motivations for actively participating in its protection and improvement.

(iv) **Skills:** to help individuals and social groups acquire the skills for solving environmental problems.

(v) **Evaluation ability:** to help individuals and social groups evaluate environmental measures and education programmes in terms of ecological, political, economic, social, aesthetic and educational factors.

(vi) **Participation:** to help individuals and social groups develop a sense of responsibility and urgency regarding environmental problems so as to ensure appropriate action to solve those problems.

The objectives of a national environmental educational programme, however, would vary according to the number, type and severity of environmental challenges facing individual nations, and the different localities within these nations.

### **The Role of Mass Media in Environmental Education**

Communication and development are positively related to each other, one affects the other in the spirit of give and take. Likewise, communication and environmental education are also correlated. Communication creates consciousness among the people, planners, decision-makers and professionals about protection, preservation and improvement of the environment.

The role of journalists in disseminating information to the public and motivating interest in national issues cannot be discounted nor underestimated, as a force vital to any environmental campaign.

Journalists play key roles in transmitting information and translating into layman language the complexities of environmental issues. They can also inspire concern and motivate a sense of responsibility over such problems.

In the Philippines where numerous publications are in circulation all over the islands, the print media can influence public opinion and mobilise public participation in issues. There are at present national newspapers of daily frequency, magazines, comics and school publications.

Sad to say, Philippine media has shown very little interest in environmental issues when compared to the amount of devotion it pours on political hoopla and scandals.

Although environmental issues, particularly calamities, have been getting increasing coverage, there is no consistent effort by any newspaper establishment nor media organisations to adopt and pursue an environmental campaign. The few attempts at environmental crusading by some exceptional media practitioners have been desultory and inconsistent due to many constraints.

An editor, for example, would assign a reporter or agree to run a suggested series on a prevailing crisis. Such series have been appearing sporadically on the front page of national dailies.

When a calamity or disaster occurs, environmental sorties will also make it to the front page. Every now and then, an editorial may appear only if the problem is critical and the impact directly affects or threatens the public. Examples are devastating earthquakes, typhoons, outbreaks of disease related to environmental degradation, floods, etc.

Analysing this state of environmental writing in the country, a veteran environment journalist commented in an interview, that editors and publishers may be fully aware of existing problems, but because of the very nature of their jobs and stature, they are seldom, if at all, exposed to actual environmental situations.

Many indeed are the constraints that tie the hands of editors and writers. Should any organisation or individual request them to commit their publications to the support of an environmental campaign, there is no doubt that they will think twice before making any deal. Profit considerations are definitely the deciding factor.

Unfortunately, most environmental problems in the Philippines are offshoots of industrial and other commercial operations. Textile plants, for example, spew chemical waste such as dyes which degrade river systems. Alcohol refineries dump tons of effluents into rivers that poison streams and turn agricultural tracts into fallow lands. Beverage and food processing factories, battery makers, tanneries and loggers, all contribute to environmental deterioration.

Would media establishments dare wage meaningful environmental crusades against these establishments?

According to Darryl DMonte, an environmental journalist from India who was commissioned to present a report before a regional conference of Asian mediemen on environmental reporting:

“Admittedly, the field of environmental reporting in the region is in its infancy. As pointed out, the journalists tend to generalise than specialise. The situation can improve only if and when editors and publishers stop regarding environmental reports as the fad. They have yet to regard environmental issues more seriously.”

In the Philippines, nothing can be closer to the truth. Down the ranks, environment reporters lack the necessary training and background to write more responsible and informative stories.

The environment writer, or more specifically, the reporter on the beat, cannot be blamed. He is not given a chance to hone his craft, mainly because his assignment to the environment beat is only transitory and he will be assigned after some time to another beat. Due to lack of fully trained environmental journalists, most of the stories that come to print are lacking in substance. These are obviously either: a) rehashed press releases, or b) reproduction of press releases.

However, the prospect for a serious and sustained campaign on environmental issues is no longer as dim as it used to be. More stories on the environment now make it to front pages of leading newspapers. We are also beginning to note more in-depth articles on new issues such as: geothermal operations, climatic changes, nuclear energy, toxic waste disposal, marine environment, etc.

More significantly, two well-based environmental organisations have finally emerged in the Philippines after several attempts in the past to organise one: The Philippine Environmental Journalists, Inc. (PEJI), and the Communicators League for Environmental Action and Restoration (CLEAR).

### **Some Practical Tips for the Green Media**

#### **1) Educate Yourself**

Much of the research you do will be to get enough background in an environmental area so you can write about it effectively. For example, if you have to write a story about how an area is losing vegetation because of over-population, you would benefit from background knowledge about the population issue, government policies on it, economic, social and cultural practices that could contribute to the loss of vegetation, Biological and weather conditions in the region and so on. This background would also help you to identify good sources for interviews in governmental and non-governmental bodies.

## **2) Be an educator**

In addition to educating yourself, you need to help educate your readers. Reporters need to help their readers see how small action could have a much greater effect. Some people might disagree with the idea that creating environmental nonmetal awareness is a key role for environmental reporters. They might say this is a job for an environmental activist or a government official; journalists are only supposed to report the news, not help people to understand it. Others might argue that the role of the media is only to inform, not to educate. But such a position negates the responsibility of a reporter. And, particularly in Asia, where the news media can play such an important educational role, it is a waste of effort not to try to do so.

## **3) Be a watchdog too**

Accepting an educational activity for the media, however, does not negate another key function of environmental reporting that of being a watchdog. Being a watchdog is one of prime goals of investigative journalism. To perform this role, a reporter also needs to have some knowledge of the situation. Being a watchdog means knowing what parties are involved in a particular event, what government agencies should be monitoring it, what actions are being taken and what others should be taken. It means trying to find out all that should be done and, if not, why not. It means doing some investigation and, for that, a journalist needs to know about the issue in some depth and have some good sources to help him or her.

## **4) Know your source**

Media must realise that its strength lies in two factors: a good grasp of environmental issues for credibility and a strong linkage with other environmental journalists as well as with NGOs on environment, for a stronger position.

## **5) Project the positive**

Environmental journalist need not dwell on negative aspects all the time. It would be good for a change to write about the positive side of an issue. Environmental journalist Darryl D'Monte of India said: "People as a whole either not comprehend the complexities of a situation in an environmental controversy or are too confused by conflicting claims and counterclaims (of published news items). They then look to the editorial columns of newspapers to be guided in framing their opinions... Stronger still are columns of well-known journalists or even guest contributors who have the knowledge and experience to project a convincing view-point. Yes, to project a convincing viewpoint positively."

## **6) Keep it simple**

For journalists, reporters or writers, even though you might be dealing with technical thinking and writing styles, do not bring them into your writing. If you must use a technical thinking and writing styles, do not bring them into your writing. If you must use a technical term, define it as soon after you use it as possible. For example: "The

chemical that seeped into the irrigation canal was teratogenic. This means that the chemical can affect the genetic characteristics of an organism so that its offspring may be misshapen or deformed.”

Never use the stiff, formal writing style of science and technology. You do not have a captive audience, therefore, you must write to interest people so that it will be easy for them to understand the points you are trying to make.

### **Some Practical Tips for Environmentalists On How To Use The Green Media**

**1) Organise the Media.** Identify journalists, broadcasters or TV personalities on the local level whom your organisation would like to tap to form the “green media”. These should be media practitioners who are respected in the community and those who are of ‘like-minded’, persons of proven ability, experience, and dedication.

**2) Educate the Media.** Media practitioners do not become environmental journalists overnight. Education can be in the form of seminars, workshops, press conferences, scholarship grants, exposure trips and others. Put them in your mailing list and send them your regular newsletters, brochures, survey results, and other helpful materials that they can use for their write-ups or commentaries.

**3) Appreciate the Media.** Give honours or awards to media practitioners who are supportive of environmental issues, give them incentives such as free T-shirts with slogans such as “I am an Earth Saver... my Ink is Green”.

**4) Feed the Media.** Reporters, journalists, broadcasters are just too appreciative when fed newsworthy issues. Feed them with news briefs, fact-sheets or news releases. Hold regular press conferences with them over a cup of coffee and some peanuts.

**5) Keep a Media Directory.** Keep in handy a list of “friends in media” with their addresses and telephone number. It would also help to know their work habits or daily work routine so that you can easily track them down when needed.

**6) Fund the Media.** This is a “call-to-arm” of all funding agencies (United Nations, foundations, governments, private sectors, etc.) to allot part of their resources to fund a green Media Blitz Project for the purpose of organising environmental media practitioners to make them “partners and friends” of environmentalists. Part of the project should be the education and conscientisation of the media. This workshop is a step in the right direction. IOCU can drum up a Green Media program or project.

**7) An Alternative Philosophy for Media.** Our experience in Konsumo Dabaw shows that as consumer activists and change agents with various concerns and advocacy's, sustain ability of our struggle would have been impossible if not anchored on a deeply rooted philosophy and lifestyle. Social transformation to be effective should be anchored on values formation and transformation beginning with man himself. Media practitioners should also be crusaders who believe “that the manner in which we live over ordinary lives does make a difference. For far from helpless, we, as individuals working in cooperation with one another, are the only source of vitality that can breathe new life into our faltering civilisation. While we encounter enormous difficulties, we

encounter even larger opportunities to create a workable and meaningful future for mankind... we believe in the principle of stewardship, recognising that the earth and the fullness thereof is a gift from a gracious God and that we are called upon to cherish, nurture and provide loving stewardship for the earth's resources... and therefore our lifestyle consist not in multiplication of human wants, but in the voluntary simplification of those wants .”

In conclusion, I would like to quote Senator Orlando Mercado, a former broadcaster and now a member of the Philippine Senate, who is himself an environmental advocate, when he said: “To keep the people informed and sensitised about environmental concerns, media should...write, write...talk, talk, talk. Keep the issue alive”.

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