

ROLE OF NGOs IN COMMUNICATING CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA TO WOMEN IN CHENNAI

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Abstract: You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women, said Jawaharlal Nehru. India, the world's third biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, has 33 percent of people living in urban areas. Cities in India are considered to be the hub of economic growth and social development which contributes to the major Gross Domestic Product. The rapid expansion of urbanization has led these cities extremely vulnerable to climate change, especially to the large population of people residing in low-level coastal areas. With the variation and extremes in climate, the environmental degradation has also become a major threat to health and well-being of the population. The cities have barrier in resilience which includes poverty, lack of awareness, lack of infrastructure / finance, poor participation of public and lethargic attitude of the individual. Climate change is dire, making the urban women community victims most of the times. Urban women experience adverse effects of environmental and occupational problems. It is important these women get imparted on the changing urban realities and take precautions towards their health. Social media has been the instant and popular channel of communication of 21st century creating abundant opportunities for its users. Urban women are the majority users of social media. This knowledge can help them face challenges of climate change. Moreover, the local knowledge and the use of social media can trigger to spread information among other individuals, communities and institutions, and catalyze creative action. Social media, instead, will help to cut across economic and social divides. The role of this social media plays a pivotal role for the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to communicate to online users who are participatory in nature. The study focuses on how the Indian NGOs communicate climate change to women in Chennai, one of the metropolitan cities.

Keywords: Awareness, Climate change, NGOs, Social media, Women.

Introduction: India, the world's third biggest emitter of polluting greenhouse gases, has its urban population constituting 33% [1]. The sources of these greenhouse gas emissions range from energy, transport, agriculture, forestry, buildings, and waste. The energy consumed by the urban Indians is very much higher than that of rural areas [2]. According to Billet (2009), "The developing economy is more vulnerable to drastic climate change threats foreseen in the future" [3]. He also cites Ananthapadmanabhan and his associates (2007), "A citizen from the highest income group in India – comprising just 1% of the population – emits four-and-a-half times more CO₂ than a citizen within the poorest 38% of the population" [4].

The rapid expansion of urbanization has led these cities of India extremely vulnerable to climate change, especially to the large population of people residing in low-level coastal areas. With the variation and extremes in climate, the environmental degradation has also become a major threat to health and well-being of the population. The direct impact of climate change in cities includes sea level rise, problems in water supply and quality, health/diseases, heat waves, and risk of infrastructure.

According to ACCCRN (2013), Climate resilience is the capacity of an individual, community, or institution to dynamically and effectively respond to shifting

climate impact circumstances while continuing to function at an acceptable level [5]. This resilience has the barrier in cities which includes poverty, lack of awareness, lack of infrastructure and finance, poor participation, and lethargic attitude of the public thinking that climate change issues are not meant for them.

The pressure of the ecosystem increases as the urban population grows, making climate change scale up to heights and pose challenges for a developing country like India. All the more is the extreme vulnerable condition of the urban system which demands huge social and economic costs along with the ability of the people to cope with.

Objective of the Study: The objectives of the study are: (1) To study the contribution by Indian NGOs in communicating climate change through social media; and (2) To study whether the climate change communication by Indian NGOs are effective among women residing in Chennai who use social media.

Urban women and climate change: Climate change is dire, making the urban women community as victims most of the times [6]. Urban women experience adverse effects of environmental and occupational problems. The diverse role of urban women makes them predominantly vulnerable group in terms of reduced agricultural productivity, sea level rise, landslides, flood, cyclones, water scarcity,

and diseases. It is no doubt that their children suffer the most next to them.

Social media has been the instant and popular channel of communication of this 21st century creating abundant opportunities for its users. It includes social networks, social news, media sharing, micro-blogging, blog comments and forums. The power of social media has given the liberty for women to come forward in expressing their views and letting their contribution. It is a privilege for a democratic and developing country like India to have the statistics staggering where women play the majority of individual users in this networking. According to IAMAI-IMRB (2014), the current digital literacy of our Indian women is in awe, confirming that a woman drives the internet user growth in urban India [7]. Social media has become a promising and a personalized medium for a young nation like India. According to TRAI (2014), India has an internet population of 259 million [8]. The urban women having social media presence is a main advantage for them. This knowledge can help them face challenges of climate change by urban women of this 21st century.

Researchers assume that urban elites causing more pollution will have social media presence and thus it

will be a viable platform to mediate climate change communication. The explosion of social media and the high penetration of mobile technology have made the many tech-savvy Indians stay connected always. Moreover, the local knowledge and the use of social media can trigger the spread of information among other individuals, communities and institutions, catalyze creative action, and cut across economic and social divides.

NGOs and Social Media: Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are significant stakeholders of bringing in a change as far as environmental education is concerned. There are several NGOs who cater to issues like combatting climate change. Some of these are active online and provide updates related to climate change. Further, these NGOs collaborate with the other stakeholders such as government and industry for sustainable development.

Here, the role of social media plays a pivotal role for these NGOs to communicate to the online users who are participatory. NGOs communicate climate change online by means of managing Facebook pages, tweeting, updating on websites, news services, uploading videos/photos, and posting blogs.

Below are some of the NGOs whose online activities have been discussed in this paper.

Organizations	Online Activities
<p><i>Indian Youth Climate Network</i></p> <p>Indian Youth Climate Network (IYCN), an NGO established in 2008 consists of young people & youth-oriented organizations to take action on climate change [9].</p>	<p>Indian Youth Climate Network maintains featured blogs /youth initiatives/Facebook fan page/e-articles.</p>
<p><i>Greenpeace India</i></p> <p>Greenpeace India, an NGO started in 2001, strives to focus on many issues including 'stop climate change'.</p>	<p>Greenpeace India pulls in virtual mobilization by maintaining twitter account/blogs/websites/Facebook fan page where it posts images, converse over comments, conduct campaigns/updating on YouTube/Flickr/Google+/sharing e-articles.</p>
<p><i>Exnora International</i></p> <p>Exnora International, an NGO founded in 1988, focuses on mobilizing and empowering communities to take part in preserving nature and preventing environmental degradation, thereby improving the quality of life of the common man which includes climate change.[10]</p>	<p>Exnora International maintains by updating events/ news/ photos/ videos on websites.</p>
<p><i>Centre for Science and Environment</i></p> <p>The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), an NGO established in 1980, uses knowledge-based activism to create awareness about problems and proposes sustainable solutions for issues including climate change.[11]</p>	<p>CSE maintains a Facebook fan page/Twitter account/volunteering services page/Blogs/Forums/ e-Help /and discuss training programmes.</p>

Climate change mitigations related to urban women using social media can be executed by communicating through such cyber platforms organized by NGOs. With the continuous usage of social media channels by

women, it will be one of the best ways to mobilize other women to spread the word on their health and well-being.

Theoretical frame work: According to Wasserman and Faust (1994), Social network analysis offers a framework to analyze how social media can be taken advantage of to spread awareness on climate change. According to this theory, each user is treated as a "node" and his /her communication with other nodes are treated as *ties, edges, links, or connections*. These ties form clusters of such nodes, thus forming social networks on the basis of communication frequency, friendship, kinship, financial exchange, sexual relationships, or common interests or beliefs [12]. Through the right choice of words, visuals, and videos, social media sets agenda by shaping public opinion and helping in policy formation.

Research Methodology: A survey has been undertaken with 100 women who use social media in Chennai using simple random sampling. The sample included students, married women and working women.

Data Analysis and Findings: The following are the findings:

- a. All women respondents in Chennai who were students, housewives, working women were aware of the term 'climate change'.
- b. 67.9% of women respondents in Chennai say that they have not been affected by climate change. Remaining women respondents in Chennai complained of skin allergy, metabolism changes, and migraine problems due to overheat and pollution.
- c. 89.3% of these urban women respondents in Chennai are also in the notion that women are not the worst victims of climate change in India. This myth should be busted through climate awareness programmes. Remaining respondents agreed saying that due to the diverse responsibilities, women are the most vulnerable.
- d. 78.6% of the women are not aware of the online services of NGOs. Remaining respondents could recollect Greenpeace, Exnora International, Arumbugal, MSSRF, and IFMR-Lead.
- e. It was also disheartening that 96.4% of the women respondents in Chennai do not follow any social media page of any Indian NGO. There is thus a need for vibrant Indian social media initiatives on climate change.
- f. 92.9% of the women respondents do not comment over any climate change blogs, posts and tweets related to Indian women by Indian NGO.

g. 71.4% of the women respondents do not like any climate change images related to Indian women by Indian NGOs.

h. 82.1% of the women respondents do not share any climate change blogs/posts/tweets/images related to Indian women by Indian NGO with their Indian women friends or relatives.

i. 89.3% of the women respondents in Chennai say they do not register for volunteering in climate change programmes related to Indian women through social media of Indian NGOs and do not end up contributing to such services.

j. Even in case of mobilizing people for climate change issues related to Indian women, only 14.3% recommend others to contribute to Indian NGOs through social media.

k. But it is happy to know that 59.3% of women respondents in Chennai say that climate programmes related to Indian women conducted by Indian NGOs are effective for the victims of climate change.

l. It is most welcoming to know that 50% of the women respondents in Chennai contribute to reduce emissions in their personal life. This includes saving power, fuel, using more of public transports, and avoiding plastics.

It was found that use of social media for combating climate change by women respondents in Chennai is minimal. It is also clear that since the majority of the urban women respondents in Chennai are not visibly affected by climate change, the respondents ignore the issue.

Suggestions: Majority of the women respondents in Chennai say that proper awareness of climate change has to be spread among urban literates. NGOs have to come forward in spreading awareness jointly with the other stakeholders. Cyber security has to be strengthened so that females come forward in more numbers in using social media.

Conclusion: We are running out of time to avoid planetary catastrophe. The situation of urban women affected by climate change in India has to be improved. This may be done by engaging the urban women through social media by creating awareness and devising a programme of climate action. Thus focusing on issues related to women, health, sanitation, environment and climate change through social media will enable them to bring forth an equitable, sustainable and resilient city to live in.

Limitations: Since online survey did not fetch enough results due to Facebook privacy settings, the researcher had to resort to an offline mode. Hence time limitation affected sample size.

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