

PH05

Print Media and Climate Change in Bangladesh: The Missing Health Issue

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Abstract: Bangladesh is vulnerable to the context of climate change. Objective of the paper is to know the media role in highlighting the climate change in Bangladesh. Content analysis has been made based on the published news in the daily news paper. Total 117 reports have been made within the 2 months. 77 percent of the climate change reports have been made as coverage of the meeting of the Prime minister or Ministers at home and abroad. Other 23 percent reports were the coverage of UN organizations activities, NGO activities, Civil Society's movements and articles of climate experts from the country. Health-related issues such as the burden of diseases—what proportion people are exposed to climate change and incidence of waterborne, vector borne diseases, have not been covered within the reports and was likewise missing in the speech of the Head of the State and other stakeholders such as development partners, NGOs.

INTRODUCTION

The global emissions of carbon dioxide from fossil fuel combustion, and of other greenhouse gases from industrial and agricultural activities, are rapidly and now dangerously altering the global climate [1]. Weather and climate affect the key determinants of human health: air, food and water. They also influence the frequency of heat waves, floods and storms as well as the transmission of infectious diseases [2], [3]. All over the world, climate change related impacts including prolong flood, heat wave, drought, sea level rise, salinity, temperature and rainfall variations have become very evident [4]. People are directly exposed to changing weather patterns (temperature, precipitation, sea-level rise and more frequent extreme events) and indirectly through changes in the quality of water, air and food, and changes in ecosystems, agriculture, industry, human settlements and the economy. These direct and indirect exposures can cause death, disability and suffering [5], [6]. WHO has estimated that, globally, over 150000 deaths annually result from recent change in the world's climate relative to the baseline average climate of 1961–1990 [7]. Fourth Assessment Report (AR4) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states clearly that climate change is contributing to the global burden of disease and premature deaths [5].

Both developed and developing countries are facing the adverse effects of climate change, such as prolonged floods and severe drought in South Asia and Africa, heat waves in Europe, devastating cyclones and tidal surges (Katrina and Rita) in Atlantic coasts [4]. Compared to the developed ones, developing and underdeveloped countries are most vulnerable to climate change and climate variability [8]. Climate change is projected to increase threats to human health, particularly in lower income populations, predominantly within tropical/subtropical countries [3]. Among the many developing countries, Bangladesh is highly vulnerable to climate change [4], [6], [8]. According to the Global Climate Risk Index 2009 of *GermanWatch*,

Bangladesh is the top most vulnerable country in the world [9]. It has been experiencing various climate change related events like heat waves, cold waves, flood, drought, salinity intrusion and cyclone over the years causing direct and indirect adverse impacts on human health. Added to this, high population density, low level of literacy, low per capita income, high level of poverty, subsistence focus, resource poor setting, inadequate infrastructure, and long coastal belt have made the climate vulnerability of the country more severe, costly and devastating[6].

Compared to the complexity of climate vulnerability and health problem, little research has been done so far in Bangladesh to know household's perception and their coping [10], [11] strategies about the effect of climate change on health. Few researches have been done to know students, educators and scientists' perceptions in USA and Canada and concluded with emphasis on local or community response to climate change [12], [13], [14], [15]. Global Environmental Change and Human Health (GEC&HH) recognizes the growing need to better understand the multi-faceted and complex linkages between global environment-al change and human health. However, as yet, little research has been undertaken on the many important aspects of health caused by climate variability. Nor has there been any sustained attempt to establish an international research community [8], [16]. In Bangladesh, the association between climate variability and hospital visits for non-cholera diarrhoea has been studied [17]. Matsuda and De Magny studied the effect of climate change on cholera disease [18]. Probable direct and indirect impacts of climate change on health have been studied by Shahid based on secondary data [6]. Most of the studies are based on secondary data, except the study of CCC [8]. Field level data are necessary to understand how people deal with all the health problems associated with climate change. Rahman focused on health effects of climate change, existing response means and possible actions to reduce the health impacts of climate change [6]. Climate Change Cell (CCC) of Bangladesh has identified climate change and health as priority issue and conducted a study to show the possible overall impacts of climate change on human health of Bangladesh [8]. The study explored the effect of heat, cold and flood on incidence of diseases, sickness or illness. However, based on the literature review, there is little research has paid attention to know how household perceive climate change and how do they cope with incidence of diseases caused by climate change or what types of coping strategies are used by the households in order to cope with health problems caused by climate change.

In the context of recent climate change scenarios, Bangladesh is vulnerable to tropical cyclone, flooding, sea level rise, heat wave, cold wave, saltwater intrusion, water and vector borne diseases. situation in many respects Government and other stakeholders are concerned about the upcoming danger to the country posed by climate

change. Print media can be an important agent of change in Bangladesh regarding climate change issues. In this article we analyzed the role of print media in highlighting climate change and health issues in the country.

OBJECTIVE

To describe how media has covered climate change issues and its impact in Bangladesh.

METHODOLOGY

Published online daily news reports, editorials, independent analysis, letters were collected from 14 Bangladeshi and 7 English newspapers for approximately two months from 20 September to 20 November 2009. Content analysis was completed to evaluate the themes in relation to climate change coverage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total 117 reports on various issues of climate change and Bangladesh were found. On average, two reports were printed every day by the daily newspapers. Seventy seven percent of the reports concerned meetings in general of the Prime Minister or Ministers at home and abroad. The other 23 percent of the reports covered UN organizations' activities, NGO activities, Civil Society organized processions, roundtables, seminars and articles from climate experts in the country. The covered included climate change, CO₂ emissions, ozone layer depletion, global warming, sea level rise, inundation of southern Bangladesh, emergence of climate refugees, salt water intrusion and reductions in food production. Health-related issues such as the burden of diseases—what proportion people are exposed to climate change and incidence of waterborne, vector borne diseases, have not been covered within the reports and was likewise missing in the speech of the Head of the State and other stakeholders such as development partners, NGOs. Climatic variability can have a strong impact on health and needs to be highlighted in print media. Heat, contamination of water, shortage of water, increased salinity, shortage of food and tidal surges may have important impacts on health.

CONCLUSION

Coverage of reports on climate change is deficient. None of the daily newspapers has done any independent research on climate change and its impact on health in Bangladesh. Special issues on climate change, editorials and round table discussions with experts are insufficient within the context of the problem. As a result, there are no strategic plans regarding the management of or adaptation to climate change issues in Bangladesh. Print media has the potential to influence climate change policies through independent research, roundtable meeting with development partners, UN bodies, and can highlight the damages up to the need.

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