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Media Coverage Of Environmental Issue In Indonesia

By

Agnes M A Iswari
Introduction

Talking about environment, we have to realize that environment is a new issue in the world. It came around twenty years ago when Europe got an acid rain. More than a thousand hectares forest was damaged by this acid rain, and plenty of fish were killed in the lake. At the same time, water in the rivers were also polluted by industries waste.

The environment issues became a more crucial issues with the rising of two big events. First, was, when many countries felt that a global warming happened in the earth. And the second, was the discovery of the hole in the ozone layer. In the last two decades, the global warming shows the biggest increase in scale the last 10,000 years. The hole in the ozone layer also getting bigger and bigger every year. These things make people realize that everybody has to do something to save the world.

In Indonesia, environment is also a new issue. The government established a new institution to handling environmental things namely PPLH (The Developing and Environment Controller) in 1978. And in 1983, PPLH was changed to KLH (Office for Population and Environment). The establishment of PPLH was a milestone of the history on environment journalism development in Indonesia.

But there is a difference between environment awareness in Indonesia as a developing country and in developed country. In developed country, the awareness of the environment problems has
been risen, and the role of mass media in environment issue is also large. The media do not only convey informations, but also create public opinion.

In handling the environment problem, Indonesia has to face two contradictory issues. First, the government program on environment handling is a long term program. It makes only the next generation who has a chance to get the benefit of the current attempt. That’s why most of the Indonesian people do not interested in dealing with the environment issues.

Second, the priority program of the government is how to increase the quality of life. Many people in Indonesia are still lack of housing, food, and clothes. It make most of the government programs were designed for short term plan. And, Industrialism is the best answer to increase our income per capita rapidly. Industries are being considered as a saviour, because industries raise up income per capita, absorb employees, etc. But, the problem is, industrialism is the biggest polluter in Indonesia.

All the reasons makes environment being the next priorities in Indonesia. Making environment to be more popular to every social layer in Indonesia is not easy. There is a gap between environment problem and public needs and understanding.

Environment Problems in Indonesia

With the problem that have been talked in the introduction, being a Minister of Environment in Indonesia is really a difficult assignment. As the first step, he has to prepare the infrastructure, for examples find and educates staff, create an environment law and regulation, guide lines to handle the problem technically in the
field, etc. While preparing the infrastructure, he also has to encourage public awareness on environment.

The second step is enforcing the regulation in cooperation with many parties linked (industries, government ministries, community, etc). And, another action which cannot be left is evaluating.

KLH has been successfully created an environment law in 1982, and a conservation law for biodiversity in 1990. The institution also has launched a regulation that controls industries’ activity concerning its waste handling. KLH also has launched an activity namely Amdal (Analisa Dampak Lingkungan), that must be proposed by everyone who wants to construct an industry activity or develop an industry area. Amdal is a kind of feasibility study concerning about environment while planning industry or industry area.

In the implementation of handling environment, Indonesia as a big country (735,268 square miles) and being the fourth biggest population in the world, environment problems handling has a lot of diversity, such as dig the sand from the river, waste from industries, and deforestation. These make KLH have to make a priority, which one must be handled first.

The first priority is to clean up the rivers, since water is the most important thing for the people. A lot of the poor people use water from the river for their daily needs. As a pilot project, there are 24 rivers in 12 provinces have to be cleaned up from hard polluted by industries. The program name is Prokasih (Program Kali Bersih = Clean River Program).

Minister of environment cooperate with the governor (head of the province) in inviting the industries which dispose their waste to the rivers. Industries have signed an agreement to build a waste
water treatment, at least 2 years after signing the agreement. By 
the waste water treatment, industries have to decrease the level of 
their polluting waste under the level that permitted by the 
government regulation.

Now, the two years after the agreement signing, five industries 
are punished in accordance with their mistakes. Two industries now 
are still in process in court, and 3 industries got administration 
sanction.

After ProKasih, KLH will handle the air pollution with the same 
treatment as ProKasih. The names of this program is Prodasih 
(Program Udara Bersih = Clean Air Program). In Prodasih, government 
will start from the vehicles, which move everywhere and spread up 
their gas emission, and then, handle air pollution from industries.

KLH also work on law for dig sand up from the river to protect 
the river from landslide, and silting up of the river. It’s rather 
Difficulty because it must be dealing with a lot of institutions.

Deforestation problems are handled by KLH cooperating with 
Forestry Departement. Indonesia has a sustainable development to 
take care the forest and also the other natural resources. Indonesia 
apply a partial trees cut down to preserve the forest. The 
threatened species are also protected by law, and somebody who get 
cought trading the threatened species or owning it, will be 
punished.

In controlling and evaluating the program, KLH in specially and 
the Indonesia government face a big problem. It is how to monitor 
everything in the line. The government budget to protect environment 
is very low, and the manpowers is not enough to cover all over 
Indonesia. The police, judge, and the apparatus in the field don’t
have enough experience to control the situation. That’s why KLH often cannot do anything with many environment violations. In the court KLH is also lost. As one of KLH’s effort to overcome the problems above is by educate their staff overseas.

**Indonesia Media Role on Environment Issues**

We have to realize that the role of the media in the environment issues in Indonesia is not as good as the media in the developed country. As a media, it still cannot reach all social layers in Indonesian community, especially for newspaper. It’s not only because of economic situation, but also because of the traditional culture. Indonesia People are more familiar with audio visual media than printing media (reading).

The industries role and consumerism which is adapted from developed country still going on, and it makes environment campaign by media is rather difficult. Issues around how to save energy, decrease household waste, save the paper, plastic, etc that are often written in newspaper gets only a little response.

It means media function as a creator of public opinion in environment issues has not happened yet. Despite of this, the environment writing in Indonesia show the amazing increase. Every media has an article or news about environment at least once a week, even though it doesn’t have special environment page now.

It’s happened in Kompas as well. Articles and news about environment always appear every week. But, still not in a proper proportion, neither in the length of the article nor in the right position (page).

The journalist who cover environment issue, is also getting
more and more. They are young, bright, and have an exact background, so they can write environment clearly. It decreases the gap between environment issue and public audience.

The media in Indonesia channeling what is happening in the field and in the public, to the decision makers. A lot of reports about deforestation, polluted rivers, polluted air, and trade of threatened species come from mass media. Lack of government manpower in handling environment needs a big role of mass media.

Some examples of media report which make government to take an action are river pollution in Bekasi (a small district, near Jakarta), dust pollution from the cement industries, dam the river up for personal villa, deforestation in Irian Jaya, etc.

In the other hand, Indonesia media help the government to spread every action in environment. There were many regulations and laws from KLH spread by media to public. The KLH program on Prokasih also get a support from media, and that's make Prokasih news often write in the front page.

The most important things in the cooperation between media and KLH is the relationship between Minister of Environment with journalists. He is very easy to find, and he always gives journalists data they need. Media have a freedom to critic the government action too. These make environment developing in Indonesia gives a bright hope in the future.

The large media acces, help government and public to get many informations about new invention. In the other hand, pers also writes the unfairness (of the developed country do to developing country). For example developed countries are unwilling to decrease their carbon emission to protect global warming, but they ask
developing country to save their forest. Developed country also try
to access biodiversity in developing country free, and then they will
sell the result of biodiversity engineering to developing country.
Those are published by media too, to remind public that unfairness
is still happen.

Conclusion

Media role on environmental issues is becoming important in
Indonesia. The latest survey carried out by the Kompas Daily showed
that science and technology articles (including science, technology,
health, and environment) are the fourth most favorite readings. The
survey also showed that the quality and quantity of the environment
articles getting better.

But as a journalist we have to increase public awareness about
environment problems. And, to enrich journalist knowhow on
environment, it is good to make a regular meeting, such as
communication forum. In this forum, we can exchange our experiences
and make an information network on environment.**

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To be presented in Seminar-Workshop on Environmental Policies and

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