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Report On The Regional Mass Media Conference
On Environment And Development,
New Delhi,
18-21 February 1985
FOR PARTICIPANTS ONLY
19 March 1985
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

REPORT ON THE REGIONAL MASS MEDIA CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

New Delhi, 18-21 February 1985
1. The Regional Mass Media Conference on Environment and Development was organized by ESCAP in co-operation with the Department of Environment, Government of India, and the Indian Environmental Society, New Delhi, from 18 to 21 February 1985 at New Delhi, India.

2. Media representatives of the following countries participated: Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand. *The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization were also represented.

3. In his welcoming address, Dr. T.N. Khoshoo, Secretary, Department of Environment, emphasized that environmental problems recognized no political boundaries and that co-operation among countries was essential in dealing with the problems. However, while it would be useful to think globally, action programmes, by necessity, had to be planned and implemented locally. As different groups looked at environmental problems differently, it would be essential to present those problems in the right perspective based on a sound scientific foundation, and the media could play a very significant role in presenting a balanced picture. He recalled that the region had a long history of environmental protection and that it should be feasible to blend traditional approaches with modern technologies to ensure environmental improvement. Mr. S.S. Gill, Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, felt that environmental degradation was mainly due to the profit motive and to the vested interests of industrial entrepreneurs and certain other sections of society which needed to be curbed. It was a gigantic task for the media alone to attempt to create environmental awareness in the face of such enormous challenges. Society as a whole had to act to redress the situation. The media could at best play the role of a catalytic agent and not of the prime mover.

4. The Chief of the Environmental Co-ordinating Unit of ESCAP introduced the conference theme and mentioned that ESCAP had recently prepared a report on the state of the environment in Asia and the Pacific. The report highlighted environmental conditions and trends in the region and the national and regional responses to those problems. It made projections to the year 2000 and suggested policy options and recommendations. The report had been discussed at the Ministerial-level Conference on the Environment in Asia which had adopted a Declaration and Framework for Action Plans for the Management of the Asian Environment and made suggestions for co-operation in the field of the environment concerning natural resources. He stressed the need for an adequate follow-up of the decisions of the ministerial-level Conference to reverse the trends of
environmental degradation. He emphasized that the media could play a central role in suggesting ways and means of ensuring wide publicity for the outcome of the Conference, seeking public participation in initiating activities of environmental improvement and in promoting awareness about critical environmental issues in the region.

5. In his inaugural address, His Excellency Mr. V.N. Gadgil, Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting, mentioned that India had a rich tradition of environmental protection, but had suffered environmental degradation owing to rapid industrial and other developmental activities. He commended the work of international agencies such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), ESCAP, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) and World Health Organization (WHO) etc. and in particular IUCN in the preparation of the World Conservation Strategy and ESCAP in the preparation of the report on the state of the environment for Asia and the Pacific. He highlighted the role of the media in promoting environmental awareness among the masses and stressed the power of the "spoken word" in promoting the environmental ethic.

6. His Excellency Mr. Vir Sen, Minister of State for Environment and Forests, in his address as Chairman, stressed the importance of the role that the media could play as a watchdog of society. They could be "social engineers" and could be effectively utilized for transforming the values and ethics of society towards environmental protection. He recalled the contribution made by the late Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi in catalyzing the global environmental movement, a role which was being ably continued by her successor. He described the various programmes launched by the Government of India in promoting environmental management and commended the work of ESCAP in the integration of environment and development and in the preparation of the state of the environment report for Asia and the Pacific.

7. The Conference adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the Conference.

2. Election of officers.

3. Adoption of the agenda.

4. Promotion of environmental awareness through the media:

   (a) National programmes of promotion of environmental awareness by the media;
(b) Ways and means of strengthening the programmes of environmental awareness by the media.

5. State of the environment for Asia and the Pacific.


7. Other matters.

8. Adoption of the report.


8. The Conference elected Mr. Chanchal Sarkar (India) as Chairman, Mr. Xu Zhenglong (China) and Mrs. S.C. Weerasinghe (Sri Lanka) as Vice-Chairmen and Mr. Teodoro Y. Montelibano (Philippines) as Rapporteur.

9. In its introductory statement, the secretariat, while outlining the genesis of the Conference, mentioned that the promotion of environmental awareness was one of the priority areas identified by the Commission in its work programme. The secretariat had, therefore, undertaken several activities for different target groups, among which was the publication of the ESCAP quarterly Environment News which was meant to service all target groups. At the political level, two ministerial-level conferences - one for the Pacific in 1982 and the other for Asia in February 1985 - had been organized to promote action-oriented environmental activities. Essay competitions and surveys of environmental education and awareness programmes had been undertaken for students and youth. For highly-qualified technical personnel, expert group meetings/seminars/workshops had been organized in areas of environmental concern such as marine environmental protection, desertification, deforestation and industrial pollution control. In addition, manuals had been prepared on environmental impact assessment and for safe handling of agro-chemicals. The secretariat was endeavouring to promote the incorporation of an environmental component into the training programmes of planners and decision makers and to organize orientation courses for senior officials. Promotion of environmental awareness by the media was the most important activity of ESCAP in that area. It had organized a series of regional conferences/seminars, national seminars and study tours on environmental journalism and disseminated feature articles on the environment. The current Conference formed part of those efforts.

10. Turning to the immediate objectives of the current Conference, it was mentioned that ESCAP had prepared a comprehensive report on the state of the environment for Asia and the Pacific. The report had brought out the salient features of regional environmental problems and the efforts being made by the /countries
countries to mitigate them. It also made environmental projections for the future and several broad policy recommendations. The Ministerial-level Conference on the Environment in Asia, while discussing the report, had adopted a Declaration to launch country-specific action plans for the management of the Asian environment. The present Conference might suggest ways and means of promoting environmental awareness in the region and, in particular, for the dissemination of information on the outcome of the ministerial-level Conference and the concerns expressed in the regional state of the environment report.

Recommendations of the Conference

11. The Conference was appreciative of the efforts made by ESCAP in preparing the state of the environment report for the region and the report on the Ministerial-level Conference on the Environment in Asia held at Bangkok on 11 and 12 February 1985. Those reports had provided excellent background material for the meetings. The following recommendations, arrived at after the discussions, were addressed primarily to ESCAP but also, through it, to sister United Nations agencies, national Governments, non-governmental organizations and also to media organizations and journalists of the Asian and Pacific region.

(1) The absence of enough information and its lack of reliability for reporting on the environment by the media were identified as major constraints in all countries of the region. It was suggested that ESCAP should periodically prepare and circulate in the region fact sheets, case studies etc. for use in further dissemination at the local level and in training programmes for media people.

(2) The Conference recognized that reporting on environmental issues required specialized knowledge and skill in investigation and presentation. ESCAP should, therefore, consider organizing and promoting:

(a) Training courses involving media people (including those working in government) and interested non-governmental organizations wishing to focus on environmental themes. Wherever possible, an environmental component should be integrated into all training programmes of development agencies;

(b) Study tours for media reporters to places of interest from the environmental angle.
(3) The Conference felt that ESCAP could set up a system of awards for excellence in the production and dissemination of environmental information through print and the electronic media. Specifically, it could recognize excellence in:

(a) Environmental reporting;
(b) Production of documentaries on environmental themes;
(c) Public interest advertising on such themes.

(4) The Conference felt that while the present regional meeting served a useful purpose in terms of exchange of information and experience:

(a) Added emphasis must be given to national-level seminars for media persons and the dissemination of information in local languages. Those would not only be economical but could make more effective use of local resources. ESCAP should also take steps to follow up those initiatives.

(b) Meetings of decision makers in the media could be organized to exert influence on giving greater media importance to environmental issues.

(5) The Conference urged ESCAP to reach out to professional bodies in the scientific and business communities and secure their co-operation in programmes for the promotion of environmental awareness.

(6) ESCAP should encourage the preparation of national-level surveys of environmental coverage in the media, and prepare a "State of environmental coverage report" as a supplement to the state of the environment report.

(7) The Conference recognized the equipment and programme limitations of the mass media in many countries for environmental communication at the local level under conditions of illiteracy and ignorance. The use of traditional media (mime, puppetry, balladeers, village theatre, etc.) rooted in the cultures of the region could be developed as powerful communication tools for environmental messages. Such tools, using low-cost techniques, were already being successfully used for other types of development communication (nutrition, health, family planning etc.) and could, through the catalytic efforts of ESCAP, be propagated in the region.

(8) Recognizing that environmental messages must reach and be absorbed not only by élite groups but also by ordinary people, such messages (packages, modules, literature) must be made available in as many national and subregional languages.
languages as possible. ESCAP was, therefore, urged to encourage the translation and wider dissemination of such material, particularly through non-governmental organizations.

(9) Wherever necessary, ESCAP should catalyse round-the-table discussions between official environmental agencies and development authorities in both private and public sectors on the one hand, and the media and non-governmental organizations, on the other.

(10) The Conference resolved to constitute an Asian forum of environmental journalists for which an ad hoc committee was set up with Mr. Chanchal Sarkar, an eminent journalist from India and editor of FACETS, as Chairman; Mrs. Jiang Xiao-Yu (Deputy Director, China Environmental News) of China, as Vice-Chairman and Mr. A. Sri K. Nayagam, (Assistant News Editor, New Straits Times) of Malaysia as Secretary.

The other members of the ad hoc committee would be Mr. Masud Ahmad (Indonesia), Mr. Krishna P. Sigdyal (Nepal), Mr. Teodoro Y. Montelibano (Philippines), Mrs. Chitra Weerasinghe (Sri Lanka), Mr. Banluchai Srisonghumuang (Thailand), Mr. Ahmed Nure Alam (Bangladesh) and Dr. Nilima Harjyal (India).

The forum would meet at an appropriate date to work out its objectives, terms of reference, membership etc. The Conference urged ESCAP to provide necessary support to the Forum's ad hoc committee until such time as its was formally constituted.