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Mobilizing community action for wetland conservation: The influence of *Soun Aoundh Pukk* radio programme

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Abstract

Environmental education and awareness are increasingly crucial for achieving sustainable development, especially as global challenges like deforestation, pollution, and climate change intensify. Media, in its diverse forms, is a critical tool for disseminating environmental information and mobilizing public action. This article evaluates the role of media in fostering environmental awareness, with a focus on the All India Radio programme “*Soun Aoundh Pukk* (Our Surroundings)”. By exploring qualitative data from print and electronic media, this study highlights how “*Soun Aoundh Pukk*” effectively raises awareness about the Nowgam Wetland. The programme's educational content, interviews with stakeholders, community engagement initiatives, awareness campaigns, myth debunking, and highlighting of government and NGO efforts have significantly increased public awareness and community participation in conservation activities. The article concludes that media, particularly “*Soun Aoundh Pukk*,” plays an essential role in environmental education, advocating for continued support and expansion of such initiatives for sustainable ecosystem preservation.

Keywords: Wetland conservation, *Soun Aoundh Pukk*, radio programme

Introduction

Environmental education and awareness generation are increasingly recognized as vital components for achieving sustainable development. As global challenges like deforestation, landuse transformation, pollution, and climate change intensify due to rapid urbanization and population growth, the need to educate and inform the public about sustainable practices becomes more urgent. Media, in its various forms, serves as a critical conduit for disseminating environmental information and mobilizing public consciousness and action (Mishra 2021) ^[6]. The Nowgam Wetland, located in Bandipora district of the Kashmir Valley, is a critical ecosystem (seasonal wetland) supporting a diverse range of flora and fauna. Despite its ecological significance, the wetland faces threats from urbanization, pollution, and encroachment. High illiteracy rates and school dropout rates in the study area hinder the effective implementation of environmental education programmes. Thus, public awareness and community engagement are essential for the conservation among such populations regarding conservational strategies (Dervash *et al.* 2017) ^[1]. The radio programme “*Soun Aoundh Pukk* (Our Surroundings)” has emerged as an influential platform in raising awareness and educating the local population about the importance of preserving the Nowgam Wetland. This article attempts to assess the role of media in generating environmental awareness, analysing the relationship between environmental education and awareness and role of

All India Radio programme (*Soun Aoundh Pukk*) in sensitization of masses for conservation of Nowgam wetland (J & K).

Methodology

This study employs qualitative analysis, examining various print media (books, journals, magazines), and electronic media (television programmes, social media and radio) to explore media's role in raising environmental awareness and promoting education.

Media and Environmental Awareness

Print Media

Print media, including newspapers, magazines, and journals, have been instrumental in popularizing environmental issues (Jana 2015) ^[2]. Notable publications in India like TerraGreen, Down to Earth, National Geographic, and Sanctuary Asia have been pivotal in educating the public on environmental matters. These platforms offer in-depth coverage and analysis of environmental challenges and solutions, targeting both the general public and younger audiences (Sompura *et al.* 2022) ^[9].

Electronic Media

Electronic media, particularly radio and television, provide powerful platforms for environmental education (Saneh 2018) ^[8]. Programs like Paryavaran Darshan on Doordarshan and various documentaries on channels like

National Geographic and Discovery Channel effectively use audio-visual elements to engage and inform viewers about environmental issues. Campaigns like NDTV's Greenathon and Zee Media's My Earth My Duty leverage television's broad reach to mobilize public participation in environmental conservation efforts (Zahra 2021)^[10].

New Media

New media (web based technology), encompassing the internet and social media, has revolutionized environmental communication. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook facilitate the rapid dissemination of information and foster interactive dialogues on environmental topics (Rahim and Jalaladeen 2016)^[7]. Online portals such as the India Water Portal provide valuable resources and information on water conservation and climate change, accessible to a global audience. But higher illiteracy and school dropout rates in the study area encumbers the effective execution of environmental awareness programmes on web based technologies.

Traditional Media

Traditional media, including folk art and street plays, remain effective in reaching rural and less literate populations. These culturally resonant forms of communication can effectively convey environmental messages and mobilize grassroots action (Zahra 2021)^[10].

Literature and conservationist attitude

Kashmiri literature has profoundly influenced the conservationist attitude towards natural assets. Through its rich tapestry of poetry, prose, and folklore, Kashmiri literature has deeply invoked the importance of preserving the environment and living in harmony with nature.

One of Nund Reshi's famous verses that reflects the importance of nature and the environment is: "*Ann Poshi Teli Yeli Wan Poshi*."

Translation:

Food will last as long as the forests last (or) Food is subservient to forests.

This verse underscores the interdependence of human sustenance and the preservation of natural habitats, which include forests and wetlands. It highlights the critical connection between ecological health and human well-being. While there isn't a specific shlok explicitly focused on wetland conservation, Nund Reshi's teachings often emphasize the interconnectedness of human life and the natural world. His poetry advocates for a balanced coexistence with nature, which can be interpreted as an endorsement of conservation principles (Kaw 2004)^[3].

Kashmiri literature, with its emphasis on the spiritual and cultural significance of the environment, plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards environmental conservation. By embedding environmental consciousness within the cultural narrative, literary works encourage the community to recognize the value of natural resources and the importance of their preservation. This cultural legacy not only reflects the traditional wisdom of respecting and protecting the environment but also inspires contemporary efforts towards sustainable living and environmental stewardship. Through the powerful medium of literature, the conservationist ethos

is perpetuated, fostering a collective sense of responsibility towards the natural world. Our literature has deeply invoked the conservational approaches of natural assets.

Overview of "Soun Aoundh Pukk"

"*Soun Aoundh Pukk* (Our Surroundings)" is an All India Radio programme broadcasted in the local language, Kashmiri since 2015. It focuses on various regional, national and international environmental issues. The programme aims to educate and engage listeners by providing information, hosting discussions, and encouraging community participation. In order to accomplish the objective of mass environmental awareness, "*Soun Aoundh Pukk*" programme platform was extensively availed.

Role of "Soun Aoundh Pukk" in Sensitizing the Public Educational Content

The programme regularly features segments dedicated to environmental education, highlighting the importance of wetlands like Nowgam. In addition to other environmental topics, Dr. Moonisa Aslam Dervash (ICSSR-PDF as an expert) and Meraj Ud Din Ahmad (Host of the programme), discuss topics such as the ecological benefits of wetlands, the specific flora and fauna of Nowgam, and the threats these types of ecosystems face. By providing scientific and practical knowledge, "*Soun Aoundh Pukk*" empowers listeners with the information needed to understand and appreciate the value of the wetland (Dervash *et al.* 2017)^[11].

Interviews with Local Stakeholders

"*Soun Aoundh Pukk*" frequently includes interviews with local stakeholders, including conservationists, government officials, and community leaders. These interviews provide a platform for discussing ongoing conservation efforts, policies, and community initiatives. Hearing from respected figures in the community can inspire listeners to take action and support conservation measures (Manzoor and Akram 2019)^[5].

Community Engagement and Participation

The programme encourages active participation from its audience. Listeners are invited to share their observations, concerns, and suggestions regarding the Nowgam Wetland. This inclusive method encourages community members to feel a sense of ownership and accountability. The programme also highlights successful conservation stories and community efforts, motivating others to get involved (Manzoor 2017)^[14].

Awareness Campaigns

"*Soun Aoundh Pukk*" has been instrumental in organizing and promoting awareness campaigns. These campaigns include clean-up drives, tree plantation activities, and educational workshops conducted in collaboration with schools and local organizations. By broadcasting these initiatives, the programme amplifies their reach and impact, encouraging more people to participate.

Addressing Myths and Misconceptions

The programme addresses common myths and misconceptions about wetlands. By providing accurate information and debunking false beliefs, "*Soun Aoundh*

Pukk” helps change attitudes and behaviours that may be harmful to the wetland. This is crucial in a region where traditional practices and superstitions can influence public perception.

Highlighting Government and NGO Efforts

“*Soun Aoundh Pukk*” ensures that listeners are informed about the efforts made by government bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in wetland conservation. This includes information on policies, funding opportunities, and conservation programs. By keeping the public informed, the programme encourages accountability and support for these initiatives.

Impact Assessment of “*Soun Aoundh Pukk*”

Increased Public Awareness

There has been a notable increase in public awareness regarding the Nowgam Wetland since the inception of the programme. Surveys and feedback from the community indicate a higher level of understanding and concern for wetland conservation.

Enhanced Community Participation

The number of community-led conservation activities has risen, with more individuals and groups actively participating in clean-up drives, awareness campaigns, and other conservation efforts.

Policy Support

The heightened awareness and community engagement have also translated into greater support for conservation policies and initiatives. Local authorities report an increase in public backing for measures aimed at protecting the wetland.

Relation between Environmental Education and Awareness

Environmental education fosters a deeper understanding of environmental issues and promotes responsible behaviour towards the environment. It is a lifelong process that empowers individuals to participate in environmental conservation actively. Incorporating environmental education in school curricula and adult education programs ensures a broad-based understanding of environmental challenges and solutions. And promoting the awareness campaigns on electronic media (for example; “*Soun Aoundh Pukk*”) creates an active niche also for those stakeholders who have never attended formal means of education.

Conclusion

Media, in its various forms, plays a crucial role in raising environmental awareness and promoting education. Effective communication strategies that leverage print, electronic, and new media, alongside traditional forms, are essential for reaching diverse audiences and fostering a culture of environmental stewardship. Government initiatives and educational programs must continue to evolve and expand to address environmental challenges comprehensively. Ultimately, a well-informed public is better equipped to make sustainable choices and advocate for environmental protection. The radio programme “*Soun Aoundh Pukk*” has played a pivotal role in sensitizing the public about the conservation of the Nowgam Wetland.

Through its educational content, community engagement, and active promotion of conservation efforts, the programme has successfully raised awareness and inspired action among the local population. Continued support and expansion of such initiatives are essential for the long-term preservation of the Nowgam Wetland and other critical ecosystems in the region.

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