



## Media as a development partner

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### Abstract

The media plays a vital role in creating awareness, mobilizing people and making development participatory through advocacy and by transforming knowledge, skills and techniques to the people. Newspapers are an important form of mass media, which plays a significant role in health promotion and is crucial for social development. The media can make a difference by advocating the importance of good nutrition and its benefits, reaching out and empowering families to prevent causes of under nutrition like diarrhoea, malaria, poor infant feeding practices and poor hygiene practices. The major objective of this paper was to examine how media as a development partner and acts as a change agent. It also assesses the involvement of media in development activities through different strategic engagement of media in Rajasthan. It finds out challenges and suggests measures for the efficiency of the media as a sustainable partner. The media consequently has to be seen as an important partner in the development paradigm, with its own views and agenda, rather than a delivery mechanism for scientific messages.

**Keywords:** media, development, partner, advocacy, change agent

### Introduction

Looking back at the battle against malnutrition, it has become clear what key role advocacy has played. Much progress has been made in tackling malnutrition but there is a huge prerequisite of advocacy that needs to be done in the coming decades. Advocacy is the key to raising awareness through communication tools about a need, building public and political will, setting priorities and improving policies to leverage nutrition outcomes from actions taken across sectors and stakeholders [1]. The media, health professionals and educators are the gatekeepers of today's food and health information. They determine, for the most part, what consumers hear, read and believe about food and health. Among them, the media is probably nowadays the most important single information source on health and nutrition for the public. Thus, helping journalists to produce factual, intelligible, timely information on those topics is of critical importance. The media can make a difference by advocating the importance of good nutrition and its benefits, reaching out and empowering families to prevent causes of undernutrition like diarrhoea, malaria, poor infant feeding practices and poor hygiene practices. They can also advocate correct health and nutrition behaviour, such as promotion of breastfeeding, handwashing practices, and use of toilets and consumption of safe drinking water, disseminating information about government programmes to enable better utilization of services, disseminating updated scientific information on nutrition and health-

### Media as a partner in development

The national press definitely has to be transformed into a media of a billion people; they have to play a vital role as partners in India's economic development. In politics, there

are two components: political politics and the other important element, development politics. Most of the media give importance to political politics. The nation's important need is development politics. All these rural development programmes are very important and the media should highlight the positive aspects and provide solutions to difficult aspects through nationwide consultations. This will certainly make a difference in the implementation of the programme and bring smiles to the faces of a billion people. Communication is always a two-way process. Communication uses different forms like print, electronic and more recent social media to communicate. Media becomes an empowering tool, a tool that facilitates people's participation and paves way for development activities. Today, technology has been put to maximum use to effectively communicate the information towards developmental activities. The local and international media plays a vital role as the link between health workers and the larger public. Health authorities educate and entrust the media with essential health information, which is then transmitted to the public in readily accessible formats through a variety of media channels. For instance, in order to disseminate information about avian influenza to the wider public, the U.S. Government tasked the Academy for Educational Development with the responsibility of developing a training program to help the local media understand the complexity of this disease so that they would be able to report about it effectively. The communication media, in the context of development, are generally used to support development initiatives by the dissemination of messages that encourage the public to support development-oriented projects.

## Reviews on Media as a change agent and development partner

It is for us to consider that mass media is a tool that may influence the behaviour of the community. How far the mass media, particularly, the print media is catering to the needs of the readers with health and nutrition information in India is still a question to ponder. Is the quality & quantity of health and nutrition information same or varies in between English and Regional newspapers? In order to answer these questions, reviews were carried out on media as a change agent for health and nutrition with few challenges. Media can be a powerful advocate in the whole spectrum of development<sup>[2]</sup>. Due to lack of awareness about the various programmes/schemes, it has been felt to be one of the obstacles in achieving people's participation in the development process. The media plays a vital role in creating awareness, mobilizing people and making development participatory through advocacy and by transforming knowledge, skills and techniques to the people. Newspapers are an important form of mass media, which plays a significant role in health promotion and is crucial for social development (Mekan Mahejwar *et al.* 2014)<sup>[3]</sup>. The Internet has emerged as the new media and is getting strong and popular day-by-day surpassing all the mediums of information and communication.

Globally, mass media is one among the most believable sources of health and nutrition information for people next only to medical sources<sup>[4]</sup>. Exposure to mass media may have a considerable impact on the eating habits of people<sup>[5]</sup>. Newspapers form a vital part of the mass media for health and are considered credible<sup>[6]</sup>. A substantial proportion of health reports in newspapers today deals with topics related to diet and fitness<sup>[7]</sup>. Reporting on evolving diet and related health science issues present a particular challenge for Journalists as public's thirst for this information grows<sup>[8]</sup> (Gupta and Sinha, 2010; Hilbert and Sinha, 2009<sup>[9]</sup>; Motl *et al.*, 2005)<sup>[10]</sup>. Across the globe, many powerful examples show the might of the media in shaping opinions and bringing in changes within the communities. In Nicaragua, for example, an innovative radio program to teach mathematics to primary school students improved test scores, especially for children, in rural areas with less access to quality schools (Galda and Searle 1980).

The media can also improve public health efforts, as demonstrated by successful AIDS education campaigns in Thailand and Uganda. Empirical studies show that women's access to the media is associated with better health and fertility outcomes, even after accounting for different income and education (Chaudhury and Hammer, 2001; Thomas, Strauss, and Henriques, 1991). In Botswana, the media programs about the government, its procedures, and civil rights substantially increased people's knowledge about ways for them to participate in government processes<sup>[11]</sup>.

The role of media in health promotion is important. In order to increase the number of children less than a year old, receiving vaccinations in Manila, Philippines, radio and television broadcasts were created because almost everybody utilized one or both media channels<sup>[12]</sup>. According to a study done later to determine the efficacy of the campaign, using the radio and television "resulted in more children being vaccinated on schedule. These results show that in places where people use mass media regularly and vaccinations are available, effective radio and television

spots can increase vaccination rates and extend the reach of health workers."

A study was conducted in Iran in the year 2012 on quality of health news disseminated in the print media<sup>[13]</sup>. In the quantitative section of the study, 410 health-related news items, published during a six months span in Iran on the public press, underwent content analysis. In the qualitative section, FGDs were held with journalists, editors-in-chief and news gatekeeper. The quantitative phase showed that 18% of the news articles were not fit for dissemination in public. The qualitative phase illustrated multiple factors at various levels that affect the quality of news namely, poor knowledge, inadequate motivations and context related barriers. Thus, we see that the media can play a diversified role not just by dissemination of information but also by the way, it acts.

Kaiser J. Henry Family Foundation (2004) mentioned that there is an overflow of media messages. Most of the messages target children and are designed to influence and motivate them about the product. Children these days are spending more than five hours a day accessing some kind of media technology. The time spent on media is equivalent to a full-time job or any other activity done by them throughout the day, besides sleeping. Media messages, especially advertisements, generally target children and promote foods, which are not nutritious<sup>[14]</sup>.

In India, the circulation of newspapers has increased to 34% between the year 2006 to 2010 and India is the biggest newspaper market in the World with over 108 million daily sales (WAN, 2012). To tap the potential and outreach of radio as a means of mass communication in the rural areas, the Ministry continued to sponsor two weekly radio programmes 'Gaon Vikas k ore' and 'Chalo Gaun ki ore' over 30 commercial broadcasting stations and 15 primary stations in the North-East region for creating awareness about different programme/schemes of the Ministry. The sponsored programmes produced in 20 languages are broadcasted twice a week on every Tuesday at 8 pm. The media plays a vital role in creating awareness and influencing policy within the country and their role beyond conventional reporting to being partners who take a lead in communicating information that promotes inclusive agricultural productivity growth, better nutritional outcomes and strengthened livelihood resilience<sup>[15]</sup>.

Newspaper plays a major role in disseminating knowledge on various aspects of information relevant to the community. Reading newspapers give exclusive columns in which expert provides answers to the queries of individual readers on health, nutrition, legal matters, science, business etc. It is utmost important that the media understands its role in the local development of a community. The vernacular media actually represent a crucial role in democratization, raising awareness, fostering growth and building consensus in the community. The media should provide channels for participation, empowerment and exercise social rights, as they work together to transform individual experiences for community building<sup>[16]</sup>.

News coverage can have a strong influence on how the public and policymakers interpret and respond to social issues. To advocate effectively for policies that will improve childhood nutrition, advocates must be able to articulate a clear message that resonates with specific audiences<sup>[17]</sup>. Journalists should tell the story of childhood nutrition as it is debated by different stakeholders, they should know what

parts of that discussion are being emphasized and which, if any, are being neglected. For these reasons and such, we wanted to know how the news was covering childhood nutrition policies. To find out, we analysed a representative sample of newspaper coverage of policy debates around childhood nutrition to determine the dominant subjects, spokespeople and arguments being used on the issue.

Another study was conducted whose main objective was to analyse overall coverage of nutrition and health-related reports in leading newspapers of India published from Hyderabad and to compare the quantitative contribution of English and Telugu dailies pertaining to nutrition and health messages [18]. A total number of 92 reports on health and 34 messages on nutrition appeared in the Hindu and Eenadu during the study period. Of which, the Hindu published 45 reports on health and 21 on nutrition, whereas, Eenadu published 47 reports on health and only 13 reports on nutrition. The percentage of space occupied by health topics in both the newspapers put together was 2.30%. For nutrition topics, even less than 1% space was provided in these newspapers. In The Hindu, of the total news space available, only 1.01% was allotted to health reports and 0.67% to nutrition messages. In Eenadu, though the percentage of space for health topics was 1.29% (which is more than The Hindu); nutrition reports got only 0.32% space. The period of a gap for coverage of nutrition information in this vernacular daily ranges between two-to-seven days.

### The impression from the reviews

From the above reviews, it was analysed that Indian print media's contribution in the dissemination of health and nutrition information is meagre. One factor which is common to both language newspapers was, neither health nor nutrition news was covered regularly. The quantity of health and nutrition information catered by regional language daily is less than the English newspaper. It is essential to have research wings in academic institutions developing media personnel in reporting news, event analysis, and highlights. Participating media members must realize that continuous updating of knowledge in a research environment is essential for all media personnel. For example, before any issue is discussed in a foreign newspaper, it is sent to an internal research group where data is studied, verified and factual news is generated and sent for publication. Indian newspapers and news agencies should encourage research carried out by journalists within India in academic research institutions, which will definitely improve the quality of reporting and enhance the participation of journalists in national development missions [19].

### Scope of the work

Earlier media only thought and wrote about Early Childhood Care, Education, and ICDS for nutrition. Today, they have gained knowledge of different aspects. Why is media engagement vital in raising awareness of sustainable development? How can the media ensure systematic coverage and where can the media find accurate and reliable information? What will make the media consider covering sustainable development issues? In this context, Action Against Hunger India (AAH-India) conducted many activities with the media through different strategies for two years in Rajasthan and analysed the above aspects by

assessing the publication of articles in different newspapers. The major objective of this paper was to examine how media as a development partner acts as a change agent and assess the involvement of media in development activities through different strategic media advocacy. It also finds out challenges and suggests measures for the efficiency of the media as a sustainable partner.

### Methodology

Newspapers in Rajasthan were analysed in terms of number of articles and news segments, type of article and news, special column for news, geographical focus, issues covered, etc. in different districts and state level where AAH-India has organized different workshops, consultations and other activities during the period of April 2016 to November 2018. Both print and electronic media (Doordarshan show and Radio Talk Show), websites and POSHAN web page were also included while analysing in this paper. Three focus group discussions were held with journalists in different districts. An assessment has been done of the regional newspaper in Rajasthan for the duration of 1st to 30th November 2018 to know about how they are giving place to nutrition and health.

### Advocacy strategies for media

Media influences and shapes public opinion. AAH-India, therefore, invited all electronic and print media professionals to participate in the nutrition development agenda of the State of Rajasthan and India. The team in AAH-India used different strategies for media advocacy such as workshops, engagements with policymakers through workshops and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI), engagement through participation in stakeholders' consultation and dissemination workshop. Apart from that journalist exposure visit, one to one meeting with journalist, fellowships, media meet, Radio Talk Show, Doordarshan Talk Show were also covered. For awareness on nutrition including POSHAN and health programme AAH-India have developed POSHAN page and also published case studies, articles in the different newspapers, Journals and uploaded video in the AAH-India website. Through regular intervention with the National Health Mission, they informed the media personnel on development issues so that the policies of the Ministries are highlighted in the media. Media workshop and Journalist meeting events were covered extensively in the print and electronic media. To enable the media personnel to understand the rural development issues and problems and to encourage their participation in the development process, tours to the field was also organized. The print media especially the Hindi newspapers are a good source of information that can reach even the isolated communities. The main purpose of the journalist's exposure visit was to generate awareness among the media about the causes of malnutrition and the commitment of the organization to tackle malnutrition through their interventions for treating acutely malnourished children as well as focus on prevention activities in the grassroots for better health and nutrition. The 'Nutrition Champions' & 'POSHAN Abhiyaan mein Panchayat ki Bhumika' concepts are very popular on social media and liked, retweeted, shared and appreciated by the national, state-level officials and development partners.

### Major Findings

Media plays an important role in bringing policy changes, sensitization, and awareness among the community. The statistical findings reflect how the media is currently influencing the overall scenario of malnutrition in Rajasthan and forecasts how things may progress to reduce malnutrition in the coming years. The Government of Rajasthan implemented the POSHAN programme (a Community based Management of Acute Malnutrition) in 2015-16 and as a result after a screening of around 2.50 lakh children, 9,117 out of 9,640 children suffering from Severely Acute Malnutrition were successfully treated. Studies say that 12% of children with SAM would have died, so the programme definitely saved the valuable life of around thousands of children <sup>[20]</sup>.

There are several activities, which have taken course to engage the media for better understanding of malnutrition, its causes among children and approaches for prevention. The organization is focusing on encouraging media to get involved and perform an imperative role in shaping opinion around malnutrition in the country, which is yet to be analysed.

The total numbers of activities organized from April 2016 to November 2018 includes three media workshops, 5 journalist's exposure visits, 3 media meet with journalists, 2 PRIs workshops and 3 workshops for policymakers (where the media actively participated), 2 radio talk shows, and 1 Doordarshan show. Personnel who participated in these interventions included officials from the Departments of Medical Health and Family Welfare, Women & Child Development, Tribal Affairs, PRIs and journalists of course. They came to know about the importance of publications in print and electronic media while spreading awareness on health care practices & nutrition.

Altogether, during this period, the different National, State and Vernacular newspapers <sup>[1]</sup>, published 136 articles on health, nutrition and government programmes and schemes. In the year, 2017-18 more coverage was seen in diverse newspapers related to health and nutrition. In the year 2016 April to June 2017, 23 media houses engaged and published an article and after that 44 media houses showed interest in publishing article. In both, the consecutive years, Rajasthan Patrika and Dainik Bhaskar were forerunners in publishing an article related to malnutrition.

### In the initial year the topics mostly covered in the media were

CMAM/POSHAN, malnutrition, awareness on CMAM among Sahariya tribes, burden of SAM children, success of CMAM in Rajasthan, impact of media to combat malnutrition, success of POSHAN programme, MTCs, nutrition security, coalition for food and nutrition, ICDS, capacity building of FLWs, maternal and child care, success stories, Action Against Hunger's efforts to combat malnutrition, myths on malnutrition.

The title of news coverage used to follow a repetitive pattern while focusing on statements of Government officials. Most deaths of children due to malnutrition were reported with criticism of the governance. The journalists were not sensitized about the aspects of malnutrition. However, due to continuous engagements via workshops and meetings on malnutrition in the year 2017 the media

started publishing articles on diverse issues such as role of PRIs in POSHAN Abhiyaan, National Nutrition Mission, National Nutrition Week, success stories with intervention, Nutrition Commission etc. The style of reporting upgraded to positive & creative. The headings are now varied and more bent towards a diverse agenda to generate awareness among the public about the importance of nutrition for children. From the review of newspaper in Jaipur, Rajasthan for the month of November 2018, it was surprising that not a single article was published related to health and nutrition. From the FGDS with media personnel, it was marked that they have appreciated the efforts of aah in gaining knowledge on poshan rajasthan, national nutrition mission, nutrition of children and the importance of publishing articles. They started publishing articles in their newspapers and suggested updates from the district level on quarterly basis. They became interested to publish case studies of poshan programme as a tribute to the hard work of the government and health workers.

Poshan rajasthan facebook page has created a lot of awareness among the stakeholders on varied activities when updated from time to time. The cmam programme was implemented in 13 high priority districts of rajasthan. The second phase of poshan is now called as integrated management of acute malnutrition (imam) and was implemented in 20 districts of rajasthan. The media in rajasthan has become a significant source of knowledge on nutrition for the community and contributed in scaling up of the nutritional programmes while creating awareness among masses on adverse effects of the malnutrition to bring behaviour change.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper concludes that the media has an important role in health and nutrition in India. Today the media is a partner for sustainable development in health and nutrition <sup>[21]</sup>. It can help us to raise the awareness and to discuss the nutritional aspects in health editions. It can help the public by publishing exemplar success stories and empower rural populations to fight causes of malnutrition, infant mortality and childcare practices etc. Communities, individuals, governments, and the academia alike need to be mobilized and empowered to raise their voices, to be part of collective national and community efforts now towards the fight against malnutrition. This is where the media can contribute significantly swaying the wind towards effective policy regulations in the health and nutrition sector. One of the challenges, however that remains, is the steady flow of genuine information true to the needs of both the media and the audience. An inspection of how much space should be catered to health and nutrition in the news could be one of the first among the many steps, which will increase the involvement of the media and help them become *change agents* in the truest sense. In addition, a regularity needs to be followed in publishing articles on health and nutrition in regional newspapers too along with a synergetic effort between journalists covering health topics and experts in the field of diet and nutrition to avoid passing of inaccurate information to the readers. The media consequently has to be seen as an important partner in the development paradigm, with its own views and agenda, rather than a delivery mechanism for scientific messages.



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