
UNIT 2: REPORTING ENVIRONMENT

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

A natural environment is basic to all creative activity. However, the current rate at which the natural resources are being consumed is unsustainable. The problems of pollution, degradation of natural environment, climate change, ozone layer depletion, sustainable food production and loss of biodiversity have put responsibility on each one of us to preserve and protect our environment. Forests, coastal regions, wetlands and eco-fragile zones are being over exploited for the ever-increasing demands of the human population.

As environmental concerns grow and become more serious, there is a strong need for a well-informed citizenry to express our concerns about environment and become proactive in conserving it. Environmental reporting has a

major role to play in this scenario. Journalists, especially those covering environment hope to make people aware about their relationship with the world they live in.

In this unit, we shall discuss the evolution, growth and features of environmental reporting. The techniques of environmental reporting, the sources and the challenges involved will be explained. The unit will also look at risk communication which is an unalienable part of environmental communication and how to do and investigative stories on environment. Finally, some major themes in environmental reporting will also be discussed.

2.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After working through this unit, you should be able to:

- describe the relationship between environment, sustainability and mass media;
- discuss risk communication;
- explain the basics of investigative environmental reporting;
- analyse some major environmental problems; and
- acquire skills in environmental reporting.

2.2 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENVIRONMENT AND MEDIA

When we talk of sustainable development, we also mean progressing in such a way that our natural environment remains safe and no damage is done to it either consciously or unconsciously. Environment is intricately linked with sustainable development. The concept of sustainable development was evolved in relation to conservation of natural environment. According to Brundtland Report, ‘Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs’. The report also says that sustainable development must not endanger the natural systems that support life on earth such as the water, the soils and the living beings. (p.69). This also means judicious use of natural resources (both renewable and non-renewable), so that future generations are able to use them. Hence sustainable development demands that we must not endanger the natural systems such as soil, forests, water and other living-beings, which support life on this earth, so that natural balance doesn’t get disturbed.

Media plays a pivotal role in shaping our attitudes towards environment and also providing a platform to debate as to what kind of development we want, thus creating a discourse on and about sustainable development. Mass media facilitates and creates environmental discourse through environmental reporting. Hence, the role of media professionals becomes significant. Environment reporters are important source of disseminating information about the environment to the general public and their reportage becomes a key information source for policy makers and the government, while addressing environmental concerns.

One way of making a meaningful contribution towards preserving nature and natural habitat is to pursue a career in environmental journalism. Environmental journalism includes researching, verifying, writing and publishing news stories or features about any aspect of environment for media audiences. Frome (1998) describes *Environmental Journalism* as “writing with a purpose, designed to present the public with sound, accurate data as the basis of informed participation in the process of decision making on environmental issues”. Journalists investigate and report environmental problems and report on policy disputes related to environment (Nelkin, 1995).

Most often, environmental issues are recognised as a problem only after they get covered and highlighted by journalists in the media. Environmental reporters impress upon the link between food, energy, climate, living systems and the ecosystem, to work towards a sustainable and resilient society. The role of environmental reporters is to report with verifiable data, the challenges, issues and problems of environmental, without compromising on the element of news in their stories.

2.2.2 Evolution of Environmental Reporting

Environmental reporting assumed importance after environmentalism became a subject of dominant public discourse. Much of the credit for the emergence of Environmentalism as a dominant discourse goes to Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* (1962) on harmful effects of pesticide use. After the book was published, some newspapers started 'environmental-beat' who began to cover issues such as pollution, smog, nuclear accidents, oil-spills and loss of animal and plant species on this earth. Other incidents which necessitated the reporting on environmental issues include the Bhopal gas tragedy in 1984, Ozone hole discovery in 1985, nuclear accident in Chernobyl (Ukraine) in 1986, and the Earth Summit which took place in 1990s. Thus Environmental news coverage began in 1960s, evolved throughout 1970s and by 1980s became a full-fledged area of reporting. By 1990s environment was established as a specialised beat.

The New York Times created environmental beat in 1969. *Time* magazine started regular sections on environment from 1969. With growing number of environmental journalists, the Society for Environmental Journalists (SEJ) was created in 1990s. The aim of this society is to strengthen and advance public understanding of environmental issues through mass media platforms. Among the earliest centres of environmental journalism, was the Center for Environmental Journalism established in 1992 at the University of Colorado (USA) and then the Knight Center for Environmental Journalism at Michigan State University in 1994. A major turning point in environmental journalism was provided by Al-Gore's 'An Inconvenient Truth', a 2006 documentary on the greenhouse gas emission and climate change impact on the earth.

2.2.3 Special Features of Environmental Reporting

Environmental reporting is a specialised area of journalism, with some unique features and to become an astute environmental reporter one needs some special skills. It demands good background knowledge and the capacity

to grasp technical knowledge and consideration of larger issues such as future implications. Environmental journalism is important and interesting because it leads us into fundamental economic and social considerations of the society. These stories have far reaching impact on society as they have geopolitical implications.

Environmental reporting unlike any other type of reporting concerns general public as well as government. Any minor change in any aspect of environment affects everyone equally. The readers range from young to old, housewives to working women, private to public sector employees and so on so forth. Hence, environmental reporting is universal in its impact as well as reader interest.

Check Your Progress: 1

Note: 1) Use the space given below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1. Match the following:

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| (i) Silent Spring | (a) 1984 |
| (ii) Sustainable Development | (b) Rachel Carson |
| (iii) Bhopal Gas Tragedy | (c) 1985 |
| (iv) Ozone Hole Discovery | (d) Al-Gore |
| (v) An Inconvenient Truth | (e) Brundtland Commission |

2.3 HOW TO REPORT ENVIRONMENT

Reporting environment needs keen interest of reporters in natural surroundings and a knack for noticing even the slightest change in natural environment. Environmental reporting, on one hand has scientific aspects of environmental change and on the other hand it has societal implications. Hence it requires covering both scientific and social aspects and the reporter has to be well versed with both. Some of the themes which have been used by reporters around the world to report on and about environment include: agriculture, air, biodiversity, climate change and global warming, chemicals (e.g. insecticides and pesticides), natural disasters, energy and fuel, wildlife, waste, water pollution, population, natural resources, forests, environmental laws and regulation, industrial accidents (e.g. Three Mile Island, Bhopal Gas Tragedy), environmental politics, nuclear power and radiation.

Good journalism involves reporting which has features such as depth, relevance, human interest, and is a well-knit story with lively and clear language. (Acharya and Noronha, 2010) The same can be applied to environmental journalism. Environmental reporting should be clear and concise, easy to understand and based on sound data and thorough investigation.

2.3.1 Tips for Good Environmental Reporting

- Be original: Write your own stories, and report real incidents or happenings in your surrounding environment rather than copying somebody else's story or style.

- Use a brief but definitive title: The title conveys the subject of the report and thus should convey to the reader the main message of the report/story.
- Be accurate: Don't misinterpret data and findings. Be accurate in what you observe and convey.
- Do necessary homework before going to the field. Prepare in advance. Understand the issue thoroughly.
- Be easy to understand: Translate environmental and technical jargon into simple and easy to understand terminology.
- Find and use diverse sources of information: Talk to more than one person who are directly or indirectly affected by any environmental change or accident. Likewise, take more than one scientific view from experts.
- Fact checking and verification: Investigate records, probe the underlying causes and check their accuracy.
- Be objective and balanced: Distinguish between facts and beliefs on both sides of the issue. Talk to all the stakeholders involved to get a balanced view.
- Reporting of scientific aspects: Report the science and technical side of the story carefully, giving latest statistics (if any). Always speak to two or more experts to cross check facts.
- Provide context and background: Frame the event in a larger context and place the event in proper perspective to others.
- Ask critical questions and analyse the issues properly.
- Make your story interesting and appealing: Make the story interesting by linking its central idea with everyday life of those who live around the scene.
- Look for hidden interests: Be it an investigative report you are writing about or any environmental issue you are deliberating upon.
- Do follow-up stories.

2.3.2 Sources of Environmental News

Environmental news sources vary from a journalist's own observations from one's immediate natural surroundings (which again might range from one's immediate vicinity to the town, region or state) to official and academic reports, research papers published in peer reviewed journals, government agencies, and various online sources such as websites and environment databases.

Based on the kind of source, a news story can be classified into the following two types:

Primary News Reporting: Such news reports are based on actual observations and study of the actual physical environment or any environment-related incident which a reporter comes across such as damage or danger to the natural environment, pollution of land, air or water, unusual

changes in river flows, species loss and presence of unwanted entities such as antibiotics, pesticides and harmful chemicals in the atmosphere.

Secondary Environmental News Reporting: These news stories are based on government reports, official and academic studies, papers published in research journals and other online sources such as websites of various organisations. In India for instance, secondary sources can be the annual reports of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), environmental research papers published in journals.

Some Journals on Environmental Reporting

Current Science

Journal of Environmental Research

Nature Climate Change

Science of the Total Environment Journal

Journal of Environmental Pollution

Journal of Ecology

Global Environmental Change Journal

Annual Review of Environment and Resources

While using secondary sources such as research papers and study reports etc, try to know as to who has funded the research? If any private organisation, agency or company has funded it, check the organisation and its credibility. How rigorous and thorough was the research methodology and what was the sample size. Try to get in touch with lead author of the study or any of the authors and talk to them about their research work.

2.3.3 Writing an Environment News Story

Environment writing like scientific writing should be clear, to the point and accurate without much use of technical terminology. A typical environmental story has an introduction, main body and conclusion. Providing context and background is very important. Like any other news story, most environmental stories are written in inverted pyramid style with a brief introduction, which provides an insight into how important the specific issue is, followed by a description of the problem and main information and facts and in the end background information, context, and other relevant details. Hence, a good environmental news story provides a deeper insight, with beginning, middle and end, succinctly joined together.

While writing a news story the writer should be aware of the scientific aspects of the stories. For example, while writing on the Bhopal Gas tragedy, a reporter should know which type of gas was involved, the general chemistry of that gas, how fatal that gas was, what are scientific ways of managing and handling the gas and also carry opinion and quotes of scientific experts. Journalist needs to place the story in larger political, economic and social context. Wilkins (1987) argues that journalists should place the environmental issue in the larger context of political, social and economic debates in order to encourage discourses that can lead to change. A reporter on environment beat should also differentiate between advocacy and objectivity.

With the rise in environmental concerns, the need for a well-informed public becomes even more pressing. Environmental problems such as soil erosion, cancer clusters, groundwater pollution and loss of biodiversity and wilderness, etc. are not sudden developments and take a long time to manifest. Hence, they pose a challenge to those who cover them - the challenge of reporting such complex concepts with inevitable detailing while at the same time creating a sense of urgency and social responsibility among the readers. Journalists often find it difficult to deal with heavy, scientific or technical jargon. They should strive to understand such technical terms and jargon and then help the audience understand them, rather than putting major focus on political and economic aspects. However, political and economic angle is also necessary, as all of these aspects have their importance and are intertwined.

Environmental issues are unique in their nature, timing and impact. Hence stories based on these are also different from other media stories. As media scholar Anders Hansen (2010) puts it, 'the timescale of most environmental problems is ill-suited for 24-hour cycle of news production. Most environmental problems take a long time to develop and there is uncertainty for years about the causes and wider effects of environmental problems. Hence visualisation for a wider audience of what is happening requires a great deal of communicative work.'

Newsworthiness is another aspect of environmental reporting. Newsworthiness, as you are aware, is the ability of a news story to attract readers. Some of the criteria which determine newsworthiness of a story include prominence, timeliness, proximity, impact and conflict. Environmental news doesn't necessarily follow all these criteria and it is the responsibility of the reporter to make his story interesting as well as urgent which not only informs but also alerts the reader.

In the contemporary world, especially in developing economies like India where progress and development is a priority which has its implications on the environment too, the challenge for journalists is greater in terms of taking a balanced approach to attain the bigger goal of sustainable development.

Check Your Progress: 2

Note: 1) Use the space given below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1. Mention any two secondary sources of environmental news?

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2. Discuss some challenges of environmental reporting?

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2.4 COMMUNICATING RISK IN ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING

This section is devoted to risk communication because it is an unalienable part of environmental communication. Risk communication is a purposeful exchange of information about the existence, nature, form, severity or even acceptability of various types of risks. More specifically, risk communication is about writing and reporting about the risk associated with any aspect of our environment and natural resources to inform the media audience. According to Lang, Fewtrell and Bartam (2001), environmental risk communication includes areas such as:

- Levels of environmental risks
- The significance or meaning of health or environmental risks
- Decisions, actions or policies aimed at managing or controlling health or environmental risks.

From a reporters' point of view, risk communication is about hazard identification, knowing its immediate or long term impact on humans and other living systems. It involves mentioning the relevant environmental laws, treaties and policies, which govern such hazards and subsequently reporting all this in a comprehensive way, with the aim of informing the masses. Risk communication is an inherent part of environmental reporting because environmental issues always have some sort of risk or hazard associated with them. It is a challenging task for journalists to identify such hazards and risks and then report them, while covering relevant national and international laws and policies which govern them. Physical and direct manifestation of risk rarely occurs and it manifests either as a disease or some other change in the environment such as vanishing of a particular species of bird. The reporter therefore, has to thoroughly investigate and study relevant scientific literature to come to a conclusion. It takes thorough investigation combined with a study of the relevant scientific literature to come to a conclusion.

The aim of journalists covering environmental hazards should be to alert people about a particular risk and move them to action. Environmental news stories more often get priority by editors as society places a high value on the communication of safety and environmental risks. Moreover, concern about environmental degradation is at the top of both national and international agenda. Hence, environment reporters have better chances of getting their stories promptly displayed by editors and their news organisations.

2.5 INVESTIGATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM

As a journalist you want to challenge the existing paradigmatic understanding of the world. One way of achieving this is through investigative journalism. UNESCO's manual for investigative reporting titled *Story-Based Inquiry: A manual for investigative journalists* defines Investigative Journalism as a special format of journalism "which involves exposing to the public matters that are concealed- either deliberately by someone in a position of power, or accidentally, behind a chaotic mass of facts and circumstances that obscure understanding. It requires using both secret and open sources and documents." Thus investigative reporting is systematic, in-depth, research

based and original. It involves using both secret and public records and data with a focus on social justice and accountability.

Investigative environmental reporting has spread rapidly around the world to hold accountable the governments and the corporations which sometimes are accused of causing environmental damage to pursue their developmental and growth agenda. Investigative journalists are true watchdogs of society as they often counter the claims of governments and other vested interest organisations.

Useful tips for conducting investigations into environmental issues

- Identify the environmental issue or damage or any practice carried out by humans, governments or companies which is negatively affecting either environment or public health.
- Try to establish causes and linkages by collecting evidence. Talk to all possible sources including experts (if needed).
- Identify the relevant laws, treaties and norms which are being violated.
- Get all sides of the story from sources including politicians, corporations, civil society and affected people.
- Look for environmental standards in peer-reviewed publications, government publications and various United Nation's Agencies, laboratory reports and official communications.
- Interviewing the victims or the vulnerable: Be sensitive when interviewing affected people or victims. Set up an interview through someone they trust and find a suitable place to interview them. If anybody refuses to speak, don't insist.

Check Your Progress: 3

Note: 1) Use the space given below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1. Briefly comment on the relation of risk communication and environmental reporting.

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2. Describe in brief the concept of investigative environmental journalism.

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2.6 MAJOR THEMES IN ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING

In the following section we shall briefly describe some major themes of environmental journalism.

2.6.1 Climate Change and Global Warming

Climate change refers to change in usual weather conditions. Earth is witnessing a change in climatic pattern. The weather is becoming harsher all over the globe. Floods, droughts, fires, heat waves, storms and other such extreme weather conditions are becoming more frequent. Human activities have been identified among major causes of climate change globally.

Greenhouse gases such as Carbon-Dioxide are accumulating in Earth's atmosphere as a result of human activities. Studies have shown that increasing concentrations of CO₂ in the atmosphere due to the burning of fossil fuels has contributed to 75% of the observed 1°C rise in global temperature. This has led to drastic impact on all the living systems on the planet and disruption of human society and human health. Global warming crossed the 1° threshold in 2015, the year which was designated as the warmest year on record globally. According to some estimates if the world continues to burn fossil fuels at the current rate, global warming will rise 2 degrees Celsius by 2036, crossing a threshold that many scientists think would severely impact our food, water, health, energy and economy. Climate change includes not only Earth's increasing average temperature but also the climate effects caused by this increase. Global efforts are being made to keep temperatures from not rising more than two degrees above the pre-industrial average.

Global warming is leading to melting of Arctic ice which is resulting in sea-level increase. Climate change is leading to socio-economic and political ramifications such as food security, climate refugees, coral reef bleaching, and rise in diseases etc.

2.6.2 Pollution: Air, Water and Soil

Pollution is any unwanted change in our environment. Pollution occurs when the natural environment is unable to decompose or destroy an element or chemical without harming or damaging itself. Pollution has been categorised into different types such as air pollution, water pollution and soil pollution. A study done in 2017 by The Lancet Commission on pollution and health revealed that pollution contributed to about 9 million deaths in the world in the year 2015, which is three times more than those caused by AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined. In the same year India, which accounted for 2.51 million deaths (or 28% of all deaths reported worldwide), was ranked No.1 in pollution-related deaths. It is estimated that one in six of all deaths in the world are caused by pollution. Hence, pollution has become a serious issue now for all of us.

Air pollution is emerging as a major threat worldwide. The major factors which cause air pollution are increasing use of fossil fuels by industries and factories, transportation and forest fires. Most of them are human induced and thus can be prevented. Major air pollutants include carbon-monoxide, sulfur dioxide, nitrogenous oxides, chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and particulate matter which are produced by vehicular traffic and industry. The effects of air pollution manifest in human health in the form of respiratory and circulatory diseases such as asthma, allergies, acute cough, persistent irritation of the eyes and cardiovascular diseases. Air pollution also causes ozone layer depletion which increases the chances of various forms of cancers in humans. It also causes acid rains which result in damage to plants, trees and historical monuments. According to the *State of Global Air 2019*

report, air pollution is the fifth leading risk factor for mortality worldwide. The report further says that more people in the world die from air pollution related diseases than from road traffic injuries or malaria. In 2017 alone air pollution is estimated to have contributed about five million deaths globally, approximately one in every 10 deaths.

Water pollution is defined as the contamination of water bodies such as rivers, lakes, groundwater and even oceans, as a result of human activities. The major water pollutants include chemicals (such as chlorine, fertilisers and pesticides), domestic sewage, urban waste, industrial waste, agricultural runoff, plastic etc. This widespread problem of polluted water is becoming another major risk factor for human health. Hence, access to safe drinking water is a challenge before all governments worldwide. According to official estimates of Government of India {Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) Report 2017}, 275 of India's 445 river stretches are highly polluted and hence their water is unfit for human consumption. According to some estimates, about 70 percent of surface water resources in India are polluted. The major factors contributing to water pollution are wastewater from different sources, intensive agriculture, industrial production, infrastructure development and untreated urban runoff.

In rapidly urbanising regions such as India, millions of people use items such as detergents, dishwashing soaps, lotions, cosmetics and creams which ultimately reach water bodies and pollute them. Some of these items find a way to our drinking water. Even pharmaceutical products such as antibiotics, hormones, pain-killers and other similar medicines after getting excreted from human bodies, enter rivers and water bodies and contaminates them.

Soil pollution: It is defined as the presence of toxic chemicals in high concentrations in the soil so that they pose a risk to humans or environment. Soil contamination occurs when hazardous chemicals get released into the soil by spills, seepage and underground leakage. The major soil pollutants include heavy metals, chlorinated hydrocarbons, persistent organic pollutants, insecticides, herbicides and elements such as arsenic, cadmium, lead, and even antibiotics. Concerns about soil contamination are growing in every region and country. Soil pollution most often cannot be directly assessed or perceived with naked eyes, making it a hidden threat to the ecosystem. Soil pollution is said to severely affect and reduce food security by reducing the crop yield.

2.6.3 Biodiversity Loss

Biodiversity simply means variety, abundance and range of living organisms (including all plant and animal species) inhabiting terrestrial and marine environments (e.g. land and sea) of mother earth. According to the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) biodiversity is the sum of all organisms, species and ecosystems on this earth and the genetic variations among them. Biodiversity is on a decreasing trend globally and many precious species of plants and animals have already become extinct or are on the verge of becoming extinct because of global climate change, overexploitation of natural resources, habitat loss and pollution. The loss of biodiversity is another big environmental threat with serious and immediate consequences. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) reveals that 21 percent of all known mammals on the planet

earth, 30 percent of all known amphibians, 12 percent of all known birds, 28 percent of reptiles, 37 percent freshwater fishes and 70 percent of plants are endangered and at high risk of becoming extinct.

India, with 2.4 percent land area, accounts for 7-8 percent of the species of the world and is thus one, among the global biodiversity rich regions. Among the vast number of animal and plant species in the world some are found only in India and nowhere else. Such species are known as endemic species. Of the total living organisms found here, 12.6 percent of mammals, 4.5 percent birds, 45.8 percent reptiles, 55.8 percent amphibians and 33 percent plants are endemic to India. Thus, it is important to save them from getting lost and take necessary steps to conserve them at all costs. The themes which have interested Indian reporters recently include: Intellectual Property Rights related to Indian biological resources, endangered species in India, endemic database etc.

2.6.4 Water Crisis

Water is an essential element supporting life on this earth. One cannot imagine life without the existence of water. The right to Water and Sanitation was also recognised as a basic human right by the United Nations General Assembly in the year 2010. Freshwater resource is finite and scarce, especially in view of its increasing demand globally. It comprises of only 2-3% of the total amount of water on this earth. According to the UN World Water Report 2018, the global demand for water is increasing at a rate of 1% per year and it will continue to grow in future. Global water cycle is getting disrupted due to climate change. Other factors which have led to increased demand for fresh water consumption include rapid urbanisation around the world, increased demand from developing economies and intensified agriculture. Water pollution is another factor which has led to worsening of the situation. Hence, water scarcity is a key challenge before the world community and its mitigation is viewed vital from socioeconomic, environmental and social sustainability point of view.

India also faces an imminent water crisis and it is among the most water stressed countries in the world. According to official estimates India, which accounts for 18 percent of global population, has only 4 percent of world freshwater resources. More than half of India's rivers are highly polluted and thus their water is unsafe for human consumption. According to the United Nations World Water Development Report 2019, two billion people live in countries with high water stress. Even the world water report 'State of the World's Water 2019' released by an international organisation *WaterAid* paints a grim picture. The report says that by 2040, 33 countries including India are likely to face extreme levels of water stress. The report further says that India's groundwater depletion increased by 23 percent between 2000 and 2010. India's water demand is projected to be twice the available supply by the year 2030. A NASA study (*Nature, May 2018*) has revealed that overuse of water resources in India has led to a serious decline in the availability of freshwater in North Indian region. Water crisis is going to deepen further in near future due to urbanisation, climate change, expanding industrialisation and infrastructural projects. This puts an additional responsibility on environmental reporters to report such issues in local as well as global context and work towards finding sustainable solutions.

The problems with water and sanitation in South Asian regions are so complex, serious and ubiquitous that it is imperative on the part of journalists to shed the usual role of passive observers and become active co-producers of water discourse.

2.6.5 Plastic and Micro-plastic Pollution

Plastic pollution is also becoming a serious threat to the integrity of our ecosystem. Plastic which is non-biodegradable and thus long-lasting, is everywhere around us. It is turning out to be among the most prevalent type of debris which is choking our lands, lakes, rivers and polluting the oceans. Annual consumption of plastics in the world touched 381 million tons in the year 2015. According to a UN report some five trillion plastic bags are consumed worldwide each year. Some plastics such as micro-plastics are proving even more dangerous for our ocean and aquatic life as they are ingested by marine organisms. As per some estimates, by the year 2050, 99 percent of sea-birds would have ingested plastic. Microplastics are small plastic pieces which have a size less than five millimeters.

Recent scientific studies have revealed that microplastic pollution levels are in high concentration in rivers around the world. Some plastics are intentionally made to be very small. They are known as microbeads and are used in many health and beauty products such as cosmetics.

2.6.6 E-Waste

Technology is like a double-edged sword, capable of doing and undoing harm to the environment. It is because of the technology introduced by the 18th century industrial revolution that our earth, air and water are polluted and now it is the same technology that is showing the promise of cleaning it up. Developments in technology have resulted in more waste and hazardous chemicals which ultimately enter the environment. The global market of electrical and electronic equipment (EEE) continues to grow exponentially, while at the same time the life span of these products is becoming shorter and shorter. With the result, we generate more waste than before in the name of technological upgradation. New technology replaces the old one as in case of computers, laptops, smartphones, TVs, cameras, LED lamps and air conditioners - the obsolete ones are disposed into environment which builds up huge piles of junk waste.

Electronic waste (also known as e-waste) is now becoming a global threat. E-waste is generally defined as any electronic device that has reached end of its life and hence discarded by the users. There is excess use of electronic gadgets 24x7, which puts lot of pressure on our energy consumption. According to 2019 United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) Report, the world is producing about 50 million tons of electronic and electrical waste (e-waste) each year, which is more than the total weight of all the commercial aeroplanes ever made on this earth. Much of this e-waste pollutes our surroundings or ends up in landfill and only about 20% of it is formally recycled. India alone generates about 2 million metric tons of e-waste every year.

Due to wireless and other such technologies humans are being exposed to radiation and waves leading to silent and yet to be studied health problems. Such developments have already come into the academic discourse around

the world, but they are yet to enter journalistic scrutiny and media coverage. People are generally unaware of the potential health and environmental hazards of e-waste which is not only non-biodegradable but also contains some very toxic elements such as mercury which can lead to diseases such as cancer and can cause neurological disorders. These are emerging threats and journalists should pay attention to this.

Check Your Progress: 4

Note: 1) Use the space given below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1. Match the following:

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|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| (i) Global Warming | (a) Pesticides & Sewage |
| (ii) Water Pollution | (b) Chlorofluorocarbons |
| (iii) Air Pollution | (c) Sulphur-Dioxide |
| (iv) Ozone Layer Depletion | (d) Carbon Dioxide |

1. Describe in brief the water crisis scenario.

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2. What is e-waste?

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2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we started with a discussion on relationship between environment and mass media and how media plays an important role in highlighting environmental issues. We explained the concept and evolution of environmental reporting. We dealt with the process of environmental reporting and outlined main sources of environmental news and the major challenges of reporting environmental issues.

We briefly described risk communication and looked at the role of investigative journalism in environmental reporting. We then moved to major environmental problems facing the world today such as pollution, loss of biodiversity, plastic pollution, and water crisis and discussed their implications. Thus an effort was made to expose you to various facets of environment reporting and how specific environmental issues can be covered and reported in media.

2.8 FURTHER READINGS

Acharya, Keya and Noronha, Frederick N. J. (Editors) (2010), The Green Pen: Environmental Journalism in India and South Asia. Sage Publication

Cox, Robert J. (2012), Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere, Sage Publications

2.9 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress: 1

1. (i) (b); (ii) (e); (iii) (a); (iv) (c);
(v) (d)

Check Your Progress: 2

1. Two secondary sources of environmental news include official government reports (such as that of Government of India) and papers published in peer reviewed journals, especially those related to environmental science.
2. Environmental reporting is a challenging task. Environmental problems take a long time to develop as their manifestation is slow, and there is uncertainty about the causes and wider effects. Environmental news involves technical jargon. The job of a reporter is to decode the language and present it in simple and lucid style.

Check Your Progress: 3

1. Risk and environmental problems have a direct relationship with each other. Whenever and wherever any environmental problem or accident occurs, it directly or indirectly creates a risk either for humans or living system or to natural ecosystem. Hence the goal of reporting environmental hazards is also to alert people to particular risks so that they remain vigilant.
2. Investigative environmental journalism occupies a special place in present day media. It is practised worldwide and has contributed to holding governments and corporations, accountable. It is a format of journalism which involves exposing those environment-related issues to the public which are deliberately concealed or even made obscure by providing facts and figures in a very confused manner, by people in position and power. It requires using both secret and open sources as well as documents.

Check Your Progress: 4

1. (i) (d); (ii) (a); (iii) (c); (iv) (b);
2. Water is an essential element of life on this earth. Fresh water resource is finite and scarce and its demand is increasing day by day. The demand for water is increasing around the world at a rate of 1% per year and is expected to grow more in future. Climate change is disturbing the global water cycle which again is putting pressure on fresh water consumption. Rapid urbanisation and intensive agriculture are the other sectors where demand for water consumption is growing. According to the World Water Report 2018, around 2 billion people in the world lack access to safe drinking water.

3. E-waste is emerging as a serious environmental problem in the world. Millions of tonnes of e-waste is being produced annually. E-waste is defined as any electronic device which is dead and has discarded by the users. Most of the e-waste is non-biodegradable and some even has dangerous chemicals and elements which, besides polluting environment, may cause serious health issues.



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