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## UNIT 26 MEDIA

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### 26.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you will be able to understand and discuss the following:

- What is Media?  
The importance and role of Media in a disaster situation;
- The types of Media and how to make the right kind of choice between different Media available; and
- How the facts are reported by Media during and after a disaster situation?

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### 26.1 INTRODUCTION

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Media is usually defined as impersonal means of communication by which written, visual or auditory or sometimes a combination of such messages are transmitted directly to the audiences". In simpler terms, the word media denotes the means of communication with large number of people spread over communities, cities or countries through written or printed word or sound and voice or visual images or a combination of these.

By the definition itself, we understand that media is an organised means of reaching large number of people, quickly, timely effectively and efficiently. There are two main characteristics of media,

- i) It can reach millions of people in short time; even instantaneously.
- ii) Audio media transcends the limits of illiteracy and the visual media can be effective in a multilingual society as well.
- iii) It is cost effective and generally user-friendly.
- iv) Generally, media provide one way communication i.e. to the receiving people.

Television, radio, newspaper, magazines, audio and video as well as movies are examples of media. These are very useful in the multilingual traditional and largely illiterate society in India.

**Types of Media :** Media may be of various kind; but in disaster management, following types of media are important:

- i) **Print Media** - Print Media (newspapers etc.) have made tremendous progress in India since 1780, when the first Indian newspaper 'The Bengal Gazette' appeared. After Independence, the mass media assumed great significance. As per official records, more than 25000 different newspapers, magazines and bulletins are being published from various states in the country in various languages.

ii) **Broadcast Media** - They comprise radio and television. Messages are transmitted by these media through satellite and received by viewers and listeners at distant places of the country very quickly. Radio and T.V. reach more number of people than print media. In disaster warning and creating awareness, broadcast media are most effective especially a large multilingual country like India with low level of literacy. Broadcast media are sometimes termed as Electronic Media although the latter term would include audio video cassettes.

iii) **Display Media** - This comprises the following:

- a) Hoardings or Billboards or illuminated signs which can be displayed at busy public places like bus stands, railway stations, parks, etc.
- b) Wall paintings and posters on common places including railway stations, airports providing specific awareness.
- c) Small panels on lamp posts or inside or outside buses, railway compartments, taxis etc.
- d) Banners
- e) Window displays
- f) Sky balloons in trade fairs
- g) Small handbills, leaflets.
- h) Exhibitions and Fairs where special pavilions may be arranged to deal with the theme of disaster management.

**Check Your Progress 1**

**Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answers.  
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Define Media and mention its two characteristics.

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2) Name various types of Media generally used?

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## **26.2 IMPORTANCE AND ROLE OF MEDIA**

Media has a very important role in disaster management. In this context, it performs major functions mentioned below:

- i) Surveillance of the environment, which means collection and distribution of information concerning events in the climate/environment. A number of climatic information is potentially related to the natural disasters, which can be communicated regularly and more frequently at the time of disaster.  
  
The best example is cyclone, Media can play a very important role in dissemination of information such as formation of depression on the sea, its movement towards the coast, areas likely to be affected, etc.
- ii) Disaster Awareness Education to the masses can be given by media. Today we have about 50% illiterate people in India but most of them do have access to radio or television.
- iii) Long term preparedness and mitigation strategies can be explained effectively to the masses through various media.
- iv) Media help in policy formulation by conducting public debate or surveys or polls.

### **Why Media Covers Disaster News?**

This is because disasters are unusual, sudden events which cause enormous loss of lives and property. It brings many dramatic and traumatic stories. It depends on how the news is delivered by the journalists. Most of the time they try to find fault in providing relief to the victims and highlighting the impact on affected community. Sometimes these news encourage international fundraising and create more public sympathy for the affected people. The amount, depth and period of coverage will depend on the scale and frequency of the disaster, the speed with which the information can be obtained, and the amount of interest in the public on the subject. The media have a strong impact on the perception of and response to disasters. Thus role of media in a disaster is multipurpose and can be broadly classified in three categories:

- a) Informative
- b) Suggestive
- c) Analytical

### **26.2.1 Informative Role**

Media can play informative role in all the three situations:

- i) Pre-disaster
- ii) At the time of disaster; and
- iii) Post-disaster

In Pre-disaster situation, knowledge of disaster vulnerability of the community is very important. In monsoon season, rainfall predictions, water level in different rivers, water flow rate, possible breach of embankment etc. are the pieces of information extremely useful for the people living in the highly vulnerable areas. Media can highlight some of the important mitigation measures, which community should take up in the vulnerable zones of a natural disaster.

Similarly, some of the success stories of water-shed management in drought mitigation, can be useful in other drought affected areas of the country. Himalayan region is highly vulnerable to a number of natural disasters (viz. Earthquake, Landslides, Flash Floods, Avalanches etc.). A concept of Environmental protection, ecological balance and sustainable development in this region will certainly help in disaster reduction in the region. Awareness in this regard can be generated by media only through informative reporting.

At the time of disaster, accurate information should be the first aim of a journalist. It needs cooperation between local officials and media. Most of the time the local officials are unable or unwilling to give information, because of sensitivity or security reasons or the news is still unconfirmed. In such cases journalist should depend on reliable sources/agencies working in relief/or unbiased local community so that right information may reach the people and other national and international agencies. However, the media has to ensure balanced reporting so as to avoid unnecessary panic and rumours.

In post-disaster situation, informative role of the media is to provide correct information about the continuing impacts of the disaster and the actual needs of the affected people so that the rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes can be tailored accordingly. The media helps to keep a check on various agencies which undertake rehabilitation programmes.

### **26.2.2 Suggestive Role**

In a disaster situation, there could be many mitigation measures available. Sometimes it is difficult to find out the most suitable option for the specific disaster. For example, Flood is a very common natural disaster. There are many states which are prone to this disaster like Assam, U.P. Bihar, and West Bengal. In this context, media has a significant role in providing suitable suggestions for political attention and public understanding for most acceptable options. Similarly, media has a role in checking activities which might aggravate the adverse impacts of disasters.

In the process of rehabilitation and reconstruction, media can be used to muster expert opinion and solutions, e.g.

- models of houses
- suitable building material
- suitable topography for building new houses
- Do's and Don't in the construction work.

Similar suggestions can be provided in the retrofitting of weaker structures and houses in the earthquake vulnerable areas.

### **26.2.3 Analytical Role**

The most critical role of media is analytical. This approach can be applied in analysis of

- disaster preparedness
- disaster mitigation
- disaster relief
- disaster rehabilitation

There are preparedness plans for each disaster. After the disaster, the effectiveness of plan and lessons learnt from the disaster should be analysed in a constructive way. It will certainly improve the plan for future use. Similarly, if there are different mitigation approaches used by Government and non-Governmental Organisations, the media can highlight both and strive to evolve a balance of approach. This type of success stories can be replicated in other parts of the country in similar situations.

The analytical role of media is specially helpful in rehabilitation and reconstruction work after landslide or earthquake disaster. The Latur earthquake rehabilitation of more than 50 villages is a good example of this kind. The media can give views of various role players about the success or failure of their programme so that it can be a lesson for the authorities and the mistakes committed once are not repeated in similar circumstances.

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### 26.3 FACTUAL AND ETHICAL REPORTING

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Sincere journalists try to give accurate facts and figures. They try to get quick access to the disaster area and the affected people and follow all norms and ethics or faithful reporting without fear or favour. Others might be interested in "news" or "stories", and might concentrate on failures only. Such reportage might produce a saleable copy but most of the time it does not yield productive results.

Newspapers reporting of a disaster is very interesting. Suppose, there is an earthquake which has killed a few hundred or few thousand persons. It will be a front page news. Or a cyclone killing thousand persons will get front page coverage. On the second day, the news will be on the third or fourth page, about the rehabilitation work and response from various sections of the society. If there is a VIP visit in the area, news may again come on the front page on the third/fourth day of disaster. After that generally there is no follow up. There are no expert analyses.

Media has great responsibility particularly in disaster situations. The ethical part is equally significant in reporting a disaster. In a riot situation or community violence, how to give correct news in a way that it does not hurt sentiments of any section of the society is very important.

#### Check Your Progress 2

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answers.  
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) How media can be informative in disaster situation?

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2) What are major functions that media perform in disaster management?

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3) Explain the analytical role of media in any disaster situation?

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## 26.4 LET US SUM UP

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The term "Media" has been explained highlighting the characteristics. Types of media have been described and their major functions in the context of disaster management have been discussed. The importance and role of media at various stages of disaster management have been brought out. Finally, the need for factual and ethical reporting of disaster situations has been emphasized.

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## 26.5 KEY WORDS

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<b>Audience</b>	refers to the people who see or hear or read the messages in the media.
<b>Auditory</b> :	pertaining to the sense of hearing.
<b>Campaign</b> :	refers to a planned programme of communication using media during a specified period.
<b>Surveillance</b> :	close watch
<b>Circulation</b> :	number of copies of a newspapers or magazines sold per day or per month.
<b>Coverage</b> :	number of persons from target audience that see, hear or read the message
<b>Transcends</b>	rises above
<b>VIP</b> :	Very Important Person
<b>Million</b>	Ten lakh or a thousand thousand

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## 26.6 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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The Educational Use of Mass Media, 1981, *World Bank Staff Working Paper No. 491*, World Bank Publications.

*World Disaster Report*, 1993, International Federation of Red Cross and Crescent Societies, Geneva.

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## 26.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

1) Your answer should include the following points:

- Media are the means of communicating with a large number of people through printed word, or voice or visual images or a combination of these.

Characteristics of media are:

- d) Message can reach millions of people quickly.
- e) Even illiterate people can benefit from radio and TV; and
- f) Media provide only one way communication to the receiving people.

2) Your answer should include:

- Print Media, Broadcast Media; and Display Media,

### Check Your Progress 2

1) Your answer should include the following points:

- By highlighting the successful mitigation measures and the earlier success stories of pre-disaster measures.
- By providing accurate and unbiased news coverage during disaster situations.
- By highlighting the continuing long term impacts in the post-disaster situation and the needs of the affected people,

2) Your answer should include the following points:

- Surveillance of the environment
- Disaster awareness education
- Informing the public about strategies for long term preparedness and mitigation against disasters.
- Help in policy formulation through public debates, surveys or polls.

3) Your answer should include the following points:

- Analytical role of media is very important because it enables through testing the effectiveness of a disaster management plan and makes it possible to undertake the necessary review and revision of the existing plans.
- The analytical role of media is equally applicable to all stages of a disaster management plan such as the preparedness, mitigation, rescue, relief and rehabilitation.
- The analysis by the media should be unbiased and constructive.