

# **Disaster coverage**

## **A mediaman's perspective**

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The Week

### **Disasters-types**

- Natural: flood, earthquake, tsunami, famine, epidemic
- Man-made: Rail/air accident, terror strike, epidemic, war....

## **Disasters-types**

- Flash strikes: flood, earthquake, tsunami, accidents, terror strike, epidemic (plague etc.)
- Slow strikes: famines, some epidemics (malaria)

## **Disaster-types**

- Urban
- Rural

## **Which gets more media attn.?**

- Flash strikes
- Urban disasters
- WHY?
- Flash strikes - is news of the day
- Urban disasters - more people affected directly or indirectly

## **An oft-heard complaint**

- Media ignores slow strikes - like famine
- Reason: News is essentially event-based. An event has to have a definite starting point
- Counter-point: Media covered farmer suicides extensively, forcing state to act
- Not just in Vidarbha, but Karnataka, AP, Kerala - look at regional media coverage also

## **Is scale of coverage dictated by body count?**

- Partly yes, but not always
- A plane accident gets more coverage than a rail accident
- Killing of 1 scientist in IISc got as much coverage as bombs that killed 60 in Delhi

## **Gaps in disaster management**

- News goes online within seconds
- Official response takes its time
- So first reports will be negative - official neglect, mismanagement etc.
- As official response improves, coverage also gets positive; e.g.: tsunami, Kashmir quake

## **What does media want?**

- Information - quick & authentic
  - Affected people - quick with complaints
  - Officials - slow with response
  - Relief agencies - varies
  - Experts - scientists etc. -varies

## **Case study-tsunami**

- Well-managed- warships and planes launched with relief material within minutes
- By evening, S&T, defence, home ministers briefing media with facts, figures, backed by experts

## **Case study-Kashmir quake**

- Army, IAF quick to react
- Media follows
- Positive coverage
- Blame on state govt. agencies - inefficient

## **Case study-Kashmir contd...**

- A complaint heard: More stories on cross-LoC politics
- Reason: Country, readers had the security question uppermost in their mind
- Yes, Indian media gave extensive & positive coverage of relief work thanks to transparency of armed forces also

## **Case study-Mumbai-Guj floods**

- Mumbai got extensive national coverage
- Reason: Affects country at large
- Gujarat floods: Extensively covered by regional media

## **Cyclones/flash floods**

- Less coverage in recent years
- Reason: Less of human suffering now.
- State/institutions better equipped to manage them (early warning, quick evacuation etc.)
- So it is a good sign that they don't grab headlines as they used to

## **Plague/dengue**

- Took time for offl agencies to react
- Was there scare-mongering by media?
- Yes. But a bit of that needed to keep officials on their toes

## **Do we forget after interest wanes?**

- Yes. We have to
- Reason: News always changes
- Other events overtake
- Can't be tsunami bulletins

## **But, because we forget...**

- State/NGOs shouldn't
- Relief work shouldn't be media-driven

## **Non-reporting roles of media**

- Raise public consciousness
- Raise public awareness-preventive (esp in epidemics)
- Raise funds
- Help relief

## **What we did**

- Latur quake: Rebuilt a village
- Kutchh quake: Rebuilt a village
- Tsunami - Rebuilt coastal villages

## **Changes in media coverage noted over years**

- Earlier relief only by armed forces
- Now civil society also
- Better awareness --- no more tattered clothes donated
- Improved preparedness among authorities
- Improved state response
- Less of scary reporting
- Citizen journalism

**THANK  
YOU**