UNIT- 6: HEALTH & ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning objectives
6.2 Introduction
6.3 Health Communication
6.4 Environmental Communication
    6.4.1 Meaning and Definition
    6.4.2 Areas of Environmental Communication
6.5 Let us Sum up
6.6 Further Reading
6.7 Answers to Check Your Progress
6.8 Possible Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to

- explain the concept of health communication
- discuss the definition of health communication
- elucidate the need and significance of health communication
- explain the concept of environmental communication

6.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will concentrate on the concept of Health Communication. The need and significance of health communication will also be described here. By health communication we generally mean the use of communication strategies for enlightening the masses about the issues of health. Therefore health communication is a broad term that embraces various aspects and types of communication channels that addresses the health concerns in relation to individuals and the public at large. The following sections of the unit deal with the important aspects of health communication with an added emphasis of strengething it as an invaluable tool of health management.

6.3 HEALTH COMMUNICATION

There are numerous definitions of health communication. The National Cancer Institute and the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention use the following definition:

'The study and use of communication strategies to inform and influence individual and community decisions that enhance health is known as health communication. Successful health communication programs involve more than the production of messages and materials. They use research-based strategies to shape the products and determine the channels that deliver them to the right intended audiences.'

Health communication is a key strategy to inform the public about health concerns and to maintain important health issues on the public agenda. The use of the mass and multi media and other technological innovations to disseminate useful health information to the public increases the awareness of specific aspects of individual and collective health as well as the importance of health in development.

For individuals, effective health communication can help raise the awareness of health risks and solutions provide the motivation and skills needed to reduce these risks, help them find support from other people in similar situations, and affect or reinforce attitudes. Health communication also can increase the demand for appropriate health services and decrease the demand for inappropriate health services. It can make available information to assist in making complex choices, such as selecting health plans, care providers, and treatments. For the community, health communication can be used to influence the public agenda, advocate for policies and programs, promote positive changes in the socioeconomic and physical environments, improve the delivery of public health and health care services, and to encourage social norms that benefit health and quality of life.

Health communication encompasses several areas including edutainment or enter-education, health journalism, interpersonal communication, media advocacy, organizational communication, risk communication, social communication and social marketing. It can take many forms from mass and multi media communications to traditional and culture-specific

communication such as story telling, puppet shows and songs. It may take the form of discreet health messages to be incorporated into existing media for communication such as soap operas.

In the book *'Making Health Communication Programs Work',* the US Department of Health & Human Services says that understanding what health communication can and cannot do is critical to communicating successfully. Health communication is one tool for promoting or improving health. Changes in health care services, technology, regulations, and policy are also often necessary to address a health problem adequately.

In this context let us discuss below what communication alone can achieve, what it can do in combination with other strategies and what it cannot do:

- ***Communication alone can:***
  - Increase the intended audience's knowledge and awareness of a health issue, problem, or solution
  - Influence perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes that may change social norms
  - Lead to prompt action
  - Demonstrate or illustrate healthy skills
  - Reinforce knowledge, attitudes, or behaviour
  - Show the benefit of behaviour change
  - Advocate a position on a health issue or policy
  - Increase demand or support for health services
  - Refute myths and misconceptions
  - Strengthen organizational relationships
- ***Communication combined with other strategies can:***
  - Cause sustained change in which an individual adopts and maintains a new health behaviour or an organization adopts and maintains a new policy direction
  - Overcome barriers/systemic problems, such as insufficient access to care
- ***Communication cannot:***
  - Compensate for inadequate health care or access to health care services

- Produce sustained change in complex health behaviours without the support of a larger program for change, including components addressing health care services, technology, and changes in regulations and policy
- Be equally effective in addressing all issues or relaying all messages ;
  - because the topic or suggested behaviour change may be complex,
  - because the intended audience may have preconceptions about the topic or message sender, or
  - because the topic may be controversial.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: Define health communication.

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6.3.1 Guidelines for effective Health Communication

Certain attributes can make health communication campaigns more effective. The following are some guidelines for effective health communication campaign. These are adopted from the University of Kansas Community Toolbox, Community Workstation. The learners are advised to go through these guidelines and try to associate with a hospital or NRHM and apply these guidelines.

- ***Define the communication campaign goal effectively:***
  - Identify the larger goal
  - Determine which part of the larger goal could be met by a communication campaign
  - Describe the specific objectives of the campaign; integrate these into a campaign plan

- ***Define the intended audience effectively:***
  - Identify the group to whom you want to communicate your message
  - Consider identifying subgroups to which you could tailor your message
  - Learn as much as possible about the intended audience; add information about beliefs, current actions, and social and physical environment to demographic information
- ***Create messages effectively:***
  - Brainstorm messages that fit with the communication campaign goal and the intended audience(s)
  - Identify channels and sources that are considered credible and influential by the intended audience(s)
  - Consider the best times to reach the audience(s) and prepare messages accordingly
  - Select a few messages and plan to pre-test them
- ***Pre-test and revise messages and materials effectively:***
  - Select pretesting methods that fit the campaign's budget and timeline
  - Pre-test the messages and materials with the people who share the attributes of the intended audience(s)
  - Select the time to revise messages and materials based upon pretesting findings
- ***Implement the campaign effectively:***
  - Follow the plans you have developed at the beginning of the campaign
  - Communicate with partners and the media as and when necessary to ensure that the campaign runs smoothly
  - Begin evaluating the campaign plan and processes as soon as the campaign is implemented

6.4 ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION

Already we have discussed the issue of health communication. In the science communication discipline, environmental communication is an

important area of discussion. You know that now the all the people in the world are taking environmental issues with due seriousness. Various meetings, conferences, etc are being organised nationally and internationally. The 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference, commonly known as the Copenhagen Summit, was held at the Bella Center in Copenhagen, Denmark, between 7 December and 18 December. The conference included the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 5th Meeting of the Parties (COP/MOP 5) to the Kyoto Protocol. So, environmental communication has become an important part of the science communication discipline.

6.4.1 Meaning and Definition

Environmental communication, popularly known as EnvCom refers to the study and practice of how individuals, institutions, societies, and cultures craft, distribute, receive, understand, and use messages about the environment and human interactions with the environment. This includes a wide range of possible interactions, from interpersonal communication to virtual communities, participatory decision making, and environmental media coverage. Environmental communication as an academic field emerged from interdisciplinary work involving communication, environmental studies, environmental science, risk analysis and management, sociology, and political ecology.

The Development Assistance Committee's Working Party on Development Cooperation and Environment established an Interest Group on Environmental Communication in 1997 to work on the issues of environmental communication. According to this committee, Environmental Communication is the planned and strategic use of communication processes and media products to support effective policy making, public participation and project implementation geared towards environmental sustainability. Embedded in a well-defined communication strategy, EnvCom makes efficient use of methods, instruments and techniques which are well established in development communication, adult education, social marketing, agricultural extension, public relations, non-formal training and other fields.



Robert Cox : is Professor of Communication Studies and the Curriculum Ecology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His principal research and teaching areas are environmental communication, rhetorical theory, and critical study of the discourse of social movements.

In his book *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*, Robert Cox provides a more formal definition that situates environmental communication as a form of symbolic action. In Cox's words, Environmental Communication is "the pragmatic and constitutive vehicle for our understanding of the environment as well as our relationships to the natural world; it is the symbolic medium that we use in constructing environmental problems and negotiating society's different responses to them." By word 'pragmatic' Cox means the instrumental function of educating, alerting, persuading, mobilizing, solving, etc. By the word 'constitutive' he means the creative function of helping to shape our perceptions of nature, environmental issues and ourselves.

While writing the meaning of the environmental communication for the Environmental Communication Network, Mark Meisner simply defines that environmental communication is communication about environmental affairs. As with other forms of communication, environmental communication is both an activity/phenomenon and a field of study that, not surprisingly, studies the activity/phenomenon.

He says that as an activity/phenomenon, environmental communication is all of the diverse forms of interpersonal, group, public, organizational, and mass communication that make up the social discussion/debate about environmental issues and problems, and our relationship to non-human nature. Loosely speaking, we can refer to that discussion/debate about environmental issues and problems as "environmental discourse." And, we can refer to the even broader social discussion about Nature as the discourse of Nature. Environmental communication manifests as the discourse of Nature and its subset, the environmental discourse. As a field of study, environmental communication is a diverse synthesis of communication and environmental theory that examines the role, techniques, and influence of communication in environmental affairs.

Environmental communication is a type of symbolic action that serves two functions. These functions are pragmatic and constitutive. Environmental communication is pragmatic because it helps individuals and organizations to accomplish goals and literally do things through communication. Examples of this include educating, alerting, persuading and collaborating.

Environmental communication is constitutive because it helps to shape people's understandings of environmental issues, themselves, and Nature; it shapes the meanings we hold of these things. Examples of this include values, attitudes, and ideologies vis-à-vis Nature and environmental issues and problems.

6.4.2 Areas of Environmental Communication

In the book *'Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere',* Robert Cox mentioned that the field of environmental communication is composed of seven major areas of study and practice. These are:

1. Environmental rhetoric and discourse
2. Media and environmental journalism
3. Public participation in environmental decision making
4. Social marketing and Advocacy campaigns
5. Environmental collaboration and conflict resolution
6. Risk communication
7. Representations of Nature in popular culture and green marketing

These seven are the main areas of study in the field of environmental communication as opined by Prof. Cox. Dietz and Stern state that as found in a study of the National Research Council, founded that "when done well, public participation improves the quality and legitimacy of a decision …. Can lead to better results in terms of environmental quality". Therefore, while popularising the environmental issues public participation helps in formulating good decisions.

Social marketing can be applied to promote merit goods, or to make a society avoid demerit goods and thus it promotes society's well being as a whole. For example, this may include asking people not to smoke in public areas, asking them to use seat belts, or prompting them to observe speed limits. Prof. Cox says that scholars have used a range of approaches in the study of public education and advocacy campaigns. It is a rapidly growing area of study. Public education and advocacy campaign attempt to change the public behaviour to achieve an environmental goal.



Mark Meisner: He is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Environmental Studies at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF) in Syracuse.He Coordinate our Environmental Studies undergraduate program in Environmental Communication, Culture & Writing, and our Environmental Science graduate area in Environmental Communication and Participatory Processes.

Another important area is environmental journalism. Environmental journalism is the collection, verification, production, distribution and exhibition of information regarding current events, trends, issues and people that are associated with the non-human world with which humans necessarily interact. To be an environmental journalist, one must have an understanding of scientific language and practice, knowledge of historical environmental events, the ability to keep abreast environmental policy decisions and the work of environmental organizations, a general understanding of current environmental concerns, and the ability to communicate that information to the public in such a way that it can be easily understood, despite its complexity. Environmental Journalism focuses on the ways in which the news, advertising, commercial programmes and internet sites portray nature and environmental problems. It is also a study of the effect of the media on public attitude.

6.4.3 Some important environmental issues

Here is a list of environmental issues which relate to the anthropogenic effects on natural environment. Learners can study these issues and write on them in newspapers and magazines in a lucid manner inorder to enable the lay readers to understand these issues.

- **Anoxic waters** — Anoxic event • Hypoxia • Ocean deoxygenation • Dead zone
- **Carbon Credit**
- **Climate change** — Global warming • Global dimming • Fossil fuels • Sea level rise • Greenhouse gas • Ocean acidification • Shutdown of thermohaline circulation
- **Conservation** — Species extinction • Pollinator decline • Coral bleaching • Holocene extinction • Invasive species • Poaching • Endangered species
- **Energy** — Energy conservation • Renewable energy • Efficient energy use • Renewable energy commercialization
- **Environmental degradation** — Eutrophication • Habitat destruction • Invasive species

- **Environmental health** — Air quality • Asthma • Electromagnetic fields • Electromagnetic radiation and health • Indoor air quality • Lead poisoning • Sick Building Syndrome
- **Genetic engineering** — Genetic pollution • Genetically modified food controversies
- Global Warming
- **Intensive farming** — Overgrazing • Irrigation • Monoculture • Environmental effects of meat production • Slash and burn • Pesticide drift • Plasticulture
- **Land degradation** — Land pollution • Desertification
- **Soil** — Soil conservation • Soil erosion • Soil contamination • Soil salination
- **Land use** — Urban sprawl • Habitat fragmentation • Habitat destruction
- **Nanotechnology** — Nanotoxicology • Nanopollution
- **Nuclear issues** — Nuclear fallout • Nuclear meltdown • Nuclear power • Nuclear weapons • Nuclear and radiation accidents • Nuclear safety • High-level radioactive waste management.
- **Overpopulation** — Burial • Water crisis • Overpopulation in companion animals • Tragedy of the commons
- **Ozone depletion** — CFC
- **Pollution** — Light pollution • Noise pollution • Visual pollution • Nonpoint source pollution • Point source pollution
- **Water pollution** — Acid rain • Eutrophication • Marine pollution • Ocean dumping • Oil spills • Thermal pollution • Urban runoff • Water crisis • Marine debris • Ocean acidification • Ship pollution •Wastewater • Fish kill • Algal bloom • Mercury in fish
- **Air pollution** — Smog • Tropospheric ozone • Indoor air quality • Volatile organic compound • Particulate matter • Sulphur oxide
- **Reservoirs** — Environmental impacts of reservoirs
- **Resource depletion** — Exploitation of natural resources • Overdrafting
- **Consumerism** — Consumer capitalism • Planned obsolescence • Over-consumption

- **Fishing** — Blast fishing • Bottom trawling • Cyanide fishing • Ghost nets • Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing • Overfishing • Shark finning • Whaling
- **Logging** — Clearcutting • Deforestation • Illegal logging
- **Mining** — Acid mine drainage • Mountaintop removal mining • Slurry impoundments
- **Toxins** — Chlorofluorocarbons • DDT • Endocrine disruptors • Dioxin • Toxic heavy metals • Herbicides • Pesticides • Toxic waste • PCB • Bioaccumulation • Biomagnifications
- **Waste** — E-waste • Litter • Waste disposal incidents • Marine debris • Medical waste • Landfill • Leachate • Recycling • Incineration • Great Pacific Garbage Patch



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.2: Fill up the blanks:

(a) Robert Cox wrote the book .....

(b) Environmental communication is communication about environmental affairs is defined by .....



6.5 LET US SUM UP

Health communication and environmental communication are the principal areas of study in this unit. The national Cancer Institute and Centre for Disease Control defines health communication as a strategy for informing and influencing the individual and the community decisions for promoting interest for health. For individuals health communication creates awareness for health risks and for the community. It may be used for influencing public agenda. In this context the guidelines for effective health communication have been given in detail. The unit also discusses environmental Communication popularly known as EnvCom which enables individuals, institution and the society to understand and use messages about environment.



6.6 FURTHER READING

- **Wilson, Anthony (1999). Handbook of Science Communication. London :** IOP Publishing Limited.



6.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q. No. 1: The study and use of communication strategies to inform and influence individual and community decisions that enhance health is known as health communication.

Ans to Q. No. 2:

(a) Robert Cox

(b) Mark Meisner



6.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q.1: Define health communication and its relative importance in the society

Q.2: What is environmental communication? What are the areas where it is useful?

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