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## INTERNET COVERAGE OF LIMA CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE WITH REFERENCE TO WOMEN

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**Abstract:** Climate change is a serious global environmental issue and it affects millions of people worldwide. India is one of the countries in Asia most vulnerable to climate change. Poor and marginalized groups are worst affected by climate change; even within these groups women are ‘the other of the other’ and they are the worst sufferers of climate vagaries. In developing countries, women are responsible for food and water supply required for the family. They are affected by impacts of climate change such as drought, floods, extreme weather events, reduced food and water. If women need to play a vital role in climate change adaptation and mitigation actions, they must involve in all decision-making processes regarding climate change actions. The media plays an agenda setting role which focuses attention on a few public issues. Some news stories are emphasized by media and some are not. The last United Nations Climate Change Conference happened in Lima, Peru in December 2014. The media – be it newspaper, radio, television or the internet – covered the news stories prior, during and after the conference. The aim of this study is to examine the online media coverage of the climate change conference with reference to women. The study analyzed the stories and visuals that appeared in the internet during the timeframe of the Lima conference, focusing on the climate change impacts vis-à-vis women both within and outside India. The online contents include newspapers, television, web portals and individual postings.

**Keywords:** Women, Climate Change, Media, Internet, Lima, UNFCC, Representation

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**Introduction:** Climate change is a serious global environmental issue and it affects millions of people worldwide. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is an international body that assesses the global climate change conditions. People living in low-lying coastal zones and flood plains are probably most at risk from climate change impacts in Asia. Half of Asia's urban population lives in these areas. Compounding the risk for coastal communities, Asia has more than 90% of the global population exposed to tropical cyclones [1]. India is one of the countries in Asia most vulnerable to climate change.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an international treaty involved in the climate change negotiations and the conference of the Parties (COP). The UNFCCC conference has been happening every year since 1995 to assess the progress in dealing with climate change. Most countries are parties to the UNFCCC. The last COP was held at Lima December 1 to 12, 2014. The objective of the UNFCCC is to limit the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs) due to anthropogenic activities and also to limit the global mean temperature to below 2°C.

Men and women are affected in different ways by the impacts of climate change because of the social and cultural roles played by them differently in the community. In developing countries, women are affected by the impacts of climate change such as drought, floods and other extreme weather events. They are responsible for food and water supply required for the family. So to play a vital role in climate change adaptation and mitigation actions, it is required that climate policies must address the

realities of women's needs. They must involve in all decision-making processes regarding climate change actions.

**AIM:** The aim of this study is to examine internet coverage of the Lima climate change conference with reference to women.

**Objectives:**

- To examine the news articles that appeared online during Lima climate change conference
- To identify the representation of women in the social media during climate change conference.

**Role of Internet in Climate Change:** The role of the mass media in shaping public understanding of environmental issues has been well documented in recent years [2]. The media framing regarding climate change issues involves choosing coverage of certain events over others, setting the tone and language of communication and allotting space/time to the issue. These choices will in turn score the news as an issue of prime importance or one that is not to be given much notice [3]. The media influences in shaping public perceptions of weather and climate related topics. Media representations are links between people's daily realities and experiences, and the ways in which these are discussed at a distance among science, policy and public actors [4].

In India the use of the internet has increased and the boon of mobile applications made it easy to access information at our own time and space. The broadcast communication from one-to-many shifted to interactive many-to-many webs of communications [5]. The virtual communities on the web are not only a space for exchange of information,

but also for constructing experiences through computer-mediated interactions and social representations in action 'on' and 'by' the internet [6]. Climate change articles are being shared through emails, web portals, tweets, Facebook communications, YouTube clips and blog posts. Blogging on climate change represents a positive development for public understanding [7]. Brumfiel mentioned that blogs have become a more prominent source for stories, and a greater influence on public discourse. The new media offers a platform for people to shape the public agenda. As technologies continue to develop at an increasing rate, communicators need to better understand and employ new media and modes of communicating to listen better, engage public imagination, and communicate risk more effectively with diverse stakeholders [9]. The new media or ICT related research has found its way into the most prestigious, core or mainstream journals in communication research [10].

**Women and Climate change:** Women are poorly represented on national governments and international bodies, they are frequently prominent among those who suffer the ill-effects of climate change or practices that intensify climate change [11]. As much as 90% of those who died in the 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh were women and children. This was largely as a result of their lack of education in disaster preparedness, and religious-cultural practices which isolated women and men [12].

The women have "the power to make a major difference" [13]. The empowerment of women will be an important factor in dealing with the climate challenge [14]. Women's activists have demanded to increase the participation of women in the formal decision-making process [15]. The gender issues needed to become part of the agenda at the climate change conference. Even with a certain level of international recognition of the issue, women still lack an entry point to share their knowledge and play a productive role in addressing environmental issues [16]. Robinson said that Gender equality must be a key part of a new global climate change deal.

**Women at Lima Climate Change Conference:** Many NGO organizations participated in COP 20 in Lima. Women and Gender Constituency (WGC) and Women's Caucus members took part at the Lima climate negotiations. All India Women's Conference (AIWC) is one of the members of the WGC was given observer status and participated in the conference. 'Gender Day' was organized on December 9 during the Lima conference with the aim of raising awareness of the importance of gender considerations and celebrating women's climate action. It intended to bring the issues of inequality of women at the conference and bringing their knowledge on the discussions. There were activities focused on the

inter-linkages between gender equality and climate change. A women delegate Ms. Robinson mentioned "Women's leadership is going to make a significant difference in climate resilience, climate action and renewable energy." The Lima conference agreed a work programme on gender to advance gender balance and to promote gender sensitivity in developing and implementing climate policy [17]. Women Delegates Fund (WDF) hosted two day training for women delegates; over 17 delegates from across 12 countries joined the workshop [18]. According to the Women Gender Constituency (WGC), gender equality and human rights, including women's human rights, should be central to the new climate agreement, and all climate policies and actions.

**Theoretical framework:** The social representation theory describes that for people in groups to talk with one another, they need a system of common understanding. According to Moscovici (1973), "systems of values, ideas and practices with a two-fold function; first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and to master it; secondly, to enable communication to take place amongst members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history".

The theory of social representations can give valuable contributions to media research. It offers a new theory-based approach for studying how the media and citizens socially represent societal and political issues [19].

**Analysis and Discussion:** The study explored the stories and visuals that appeared online during the timeframe of the Lima conference 2014, focusing on the climate change impacts vis-à-vis women both within and outside India. The online contents include newspapers, web portals and individual postings. The new media covered the stories prior, during and after the conference. International and national online newspapers, magazines, web portals and blogs covered the Gender Day news item. It was observed that members from developed countries and indigenous communities represented more in the conference. Women's representation is higher in countries that enjoy a higher level of development and a high degree of political gender quality [20]. The conference had 36% of women delegates which shows the gender imbalance in the participation. A low level of women's participation feeds into a lack of female representation around climate decision-making. Clearly women are not only under-represented, but they are also not legitimately represented [14]. While progress has been made in terms of women's representation on delegations the same is not true for

women's representation on boards and bodies of the UNFCCC [21]. The UNFCCC highlighted the role of women is key to the response to climate change, and it needs to be strengthened.

Women delegates participated in a Women Delegates Fund (WDF) training workshop and they were empowered to represent their countries for the first time. It shows that new women delegates' represented in the conference to create a presence of female participation at the UNFCCC. On behalf of WGC, AIWC members Usha Nair and Kalyani Raj took part in the conference. Usha Nair said, "We are frustrated with the slow pace of negotiations here in Lima. Millions already face the fury of climate change. Immediate action needs to be taken for the sake of the Earth and future generations." Kalyani Raj said that low carbon technologies can play a role in adaptation and mitigation action only if they are safe and nuclear free which take into account the rights and needs of women and men. Marina Parvin, from the Indigenous Mundas community in Bangladesh and representing the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), said, "It pains me that when I go back, I will tell my people that wealthy governments just talked about which lands will be lost, communities displaced, cultures destroyed and which lives are less important." These responses made by the women at the conference show their frustration and failure of the Lima outcome with respect to women and climate crisis.

A few articles were published in the online English newspapers regarding the gender and climate change

at Lima. The English newspaper *The Hindu* highlighted the opposition of Saudi Arabia in gender equality and climate action. The study found that the online newspaper coverage in the national dailies on gender and climate change actions was less in number.

**Conclusion:** The new media has given opportunity for women to represent themselves. It offers multiple outlets to share information regarding climate change. It has been observed that there are many web portals and blogs created by women in climate change and gender discussions. Lima climate change conference news articles were discussed in all those portals and blogs. Many women have raised voices regarding gender equality, and decision making in the climate policies and actions. It has also been observed that many such debates and comments were shared by the women of western community but comparatively less in developing nations. It shows the imbalance of women's representation between developed and developing nations in climate actions. Though women from developing nations such as India, Nepal, and Bangladesh took part in the conference, the outreach is less. It was found that the women's participation in the conference was low and it showed the lack of female representation in climate decision making.

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