

**Parallel Session 11. PCST network: an added value for science comm.
training?**

**DEVELOPING SCIENCE WRITERS AND SCIENCE JOURNALISTS
IN INDIAN LANGUAGES : A CASE STUDY**

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Abstract

Developmental changes emerge within specific economic, social and ideological contexts and in turn reshape thinking and working of institutions as well as individuals. Science communication using mass media can play an important role in making people aware of these developments. It requires a large number of trained science writers/ journalists especially in vernaculars. Incidentally, India has 18 well-developed regional languages. An innovative countrywide training programme has been devised and introduced to develop trained science writers/ journalists. The aim is to develop as many science writers/ journalists as possible to meet present and future challenges. This paper discusses and analyses various experiences learnt, methodologies applied, impacts achieved, and responses received, while implementing the programme.

Key Words: Training, science writing/ journalism, vernacular media.

Introduction

According to a study, science coverage in mass media in India is around 3%, which is abysmally low. We intend to increase it up to a level of 10-15%. It has been rather difficult to find enough science writers, especially in vernaculars, who can generate quality material in desired forms for media. We have observed that even in rural and far-flung areas, there are persons who have a natural bent of mind and talent to develop into and to write good stories, plays, poems and scripts. Yet the demand for appropriate science writers remains unfilled. To fill this gap, it is felt necessary to identify and encourage these writers and provide them some orientation and training to develop in them skills for science writing.

The Basic Idea and Concept

The basic idea and concept behind this programme is to :

- (a) Bring together the writer, illustrator, scientist and medium at local level and provide them some orientation and training.
- (b) Bring budding science writers and illustrators together with experienced and established ones for close interaction; to expose the former to intelligent and constructive criticism of their writings by the latter, as also to issues of importance to both science writers as well as their readership.
- (c) Expose experienced writers and illustrators in fields like arts, economics, politics, etc., to science communication.
- (d) Develop basic science writing, science reporting and science illustration skills through actual practice and exercises.

Objectives

The main objectives of the programme are as follows :

- (a) To increase science coverage in mass media.
- (b) To encourage reporting on scientific achievements of the country.
- (c) To train science writers for different media.
- (d) To investigate local scientific/ technical problems through science journalism to find solutions.
- (e) To develop skilled science writers/ journalists/ illustrators for undertaking various activities in science communication.

Methodology

Under this programme, 3-5 days' training-cum-orientation workshops of 'local writers and journalists' are organized at district level and they are exposed to various techniques of science writing and reporting. The participants are science activists and enthusiasts, whether students of science at higher level or not. The idea is to develop grass root science writers/ journalists who can eventually write on 'local issues' of scientific importance with help of 'locally available resources' for 'local level mass media'. The work plan for development of science writers is divided into three phases.

Observations and Results

A questionnaire survey of a select group of participants of this programme was conducted to obtain information on aspects like number of people writing on science and the type of writing they are engaged in, etc. Some of the observations and results derived from survey are summarised here :

- (a) Several groups devoted to science coverage are emerging at local level.
- (b) Several such writers are emerging, who can effectively write for folk forms, like skits, plays, songs, fiction, stories, etc.
- (c) A number of popular science books are coming out including these scripts.
- (d) The programme enables local writers to project local scientific/ technical problems instead of imposing foreign fed information in media.
- (e) The local audience is able to get more indigenous S&T information relevant to their daily life through media.
- (f) As a sequel and follow up to these workshops, a few workshops on specialized topics are also organized.
- (g) The programme has been able to trigger a chain reaction at all levels to develop skilled science writers for specific needs.
- (h) At some places, neo science writers have formed Science Writers' Associations as part of Indian Science Writers' Association.
- (i) A countrywide science media network is being developed as an offshoot to this programme.
- (j) So far, over 200+ such workshops have been organized and over 10000 trainees were trained. Our target is to have similar activities in all 500+ districts.

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