

# “CLIMATE CHANGE COVERAGE BY THE VIETNAMESE MEDIA: FOUR-YEAR TRENDS 2006 - 2009”

## Executive Summary

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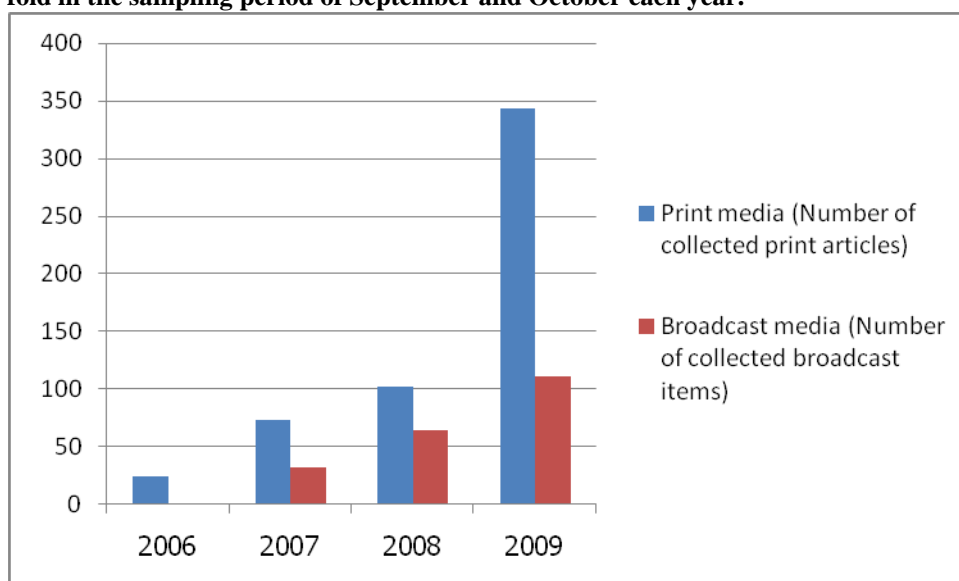
This four-year (2006-2009) study of climate change coverage by the Vietnamese media has been carried out by a research team of the Institute of Health, Environment and Development in Hanoi, Vietnam in collaboration with the Vietnam Forum of Environmental Journalists (VFEJ) and Internews’ Earth Journalism Network (EJN), and funded by the V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation and the Germeshausen Foundation.

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Climate change stories in Vietnamese media have increased more than tenfold since 2006 and three fold during the last year alone. Print and broadcast materials were collected over the two-month period of September and October in 2009, just as they were in 2006-2008. Five major newspapers were selected for media content analysis, and broadcast materials were collected from the Voice of Vietnam radio network. The major newspapers were Nhan Dan (“People”), Lao Dong (“Labor”), Tuoi Tre (“Youth”), Hanoi Moi (“New Hanoi”) and Dong Nai (from Ho Chi Minh City).

Altogether, the researchers found that the number of print stories on climate change in the five newspapers increased from 24 to 102 between 2006 and 2008 and to 343 in 2009.

**Figure 1** The number of climate change stories in both print and broadcast media has increased by many fold in the sampling period of September and October each year.



Although the results do not cover the entire Vietnamese media landscape due to limited sampling and time period, they suggest a rapid increase in climate change stories as a broader trend. In our sample group, the numbers indicate, for instance, that each newspaper printed an average of more than one story per day compared to 10 climate change stories per month in 2008, and to 2-3 per month in 2006.

The increase in the number of stories can be attributed to a more active Vietnamese Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, a huge amount of accessible information at the global level, and the increase in environmental journalism capacity by VEFJ which was revitalized in 2007. Media leaders have found that climate change issues can attract more audience are also more supportive for environmental journalism.

**Table 1 Number of collected print articles and collected broadcast item**

Year	Print media (Number of collected print articles)	Broadcast media (Number of collected broadcast items)
2006	24	N/A
2007	73	32
2008	102	65
2009	343	111

### ***Story Producers***

Local reporters are producing more of the stories in both print and broadcast media while fewer broadcast stories are coming from wire services and fewer print stories are coming from foreign journalists. The trend suggests that local reporters have become more active in seeking stories for their products. Foreign reports come from various international print outlets (Time, some Chinese and Russian journals and newspapers), while broadcast media is used from broadcasters (such as CNN, NBK, BBC, TV5) who are working in Vietnam. Wire agencies such as AP, AFP, DPA and Xinhua are also sources for foreign media in Vietnam, particularly for the Vietnam Press Agency (Viet Nam Thong Tan Xa).

**Table 2 Story producers for print media**

Story producers	Year			
	2008		2009	
	Number	%	Number	%
Local reporters	66	64.71	293	85.4
Foreign reporters	33	32.35	30	8.7
Wire services	3	2.94	20	5.8
Total	102	100.00	343	100

**Table 3 Table 12. Story producers for broadcast media**

Story producers	Year			
	2008		2009	
	Number	%	Number	%
Local reporters	19	29.23	101	91.0
Foreign reporters	0	0	6	5.4
Wire services	46	70.77	4	3.6
Total	65	100.00	111	100

The difference between “foreign reporters” and “wire services” is that foreign reporters consist of stories authored by named reporters while wire services consist of news from media organs and institutions

### ***Geographical Focus of the Stories: Weak at the national level***

Most of the stories collected tend to be locally focused (sub-national level). In print, 69 percent were local stories in 2009 up from 57 percent the previous year. In broadcast, local stories take up 69 percent of the total down from 77 percent in 2008. The strongest increase in broadcast media came from regional level stories up from 3 to 21 percent. In both types of media, national level coverage is the weakest geographical focus. It is observed that national level climate change policies have not attracted a great deal of attention from the media.

**Table 4 Geographical focus of print media**

Geographical focus	Year			
	2008		2009	
	Number	%	Number	%
Local	58	56.86	237	69.1
National	25	24.51	7	2.0
Regional	6	5.88	73	21.3
Global	13	12.75	26	7.6
Total	102	100.00	343	100

**Table 5 Geographical focus of broadcast media**

Geographical focus	Year			
	2008		2009	
	Number	%	Number	%
Local	50	76.92	77	69.4
National	11	16.92	3	2.7
Regional	2	3.08	23	20.7
Global	2	3.08	8	7.2
Total	65	100.00	111	100

### ***Sources for Climate Change Stories***

Government officials are the most numerous sources for climate change stories. In print they contribute to 44 percent of the stories compared to 29 percent the previous year, and in broadcast 43 percent down from 58 percent in 2008.

Local people and scientists, however, are among the least used sources in Vietnamese media. In print media, local people’s voice are represented in three percent of the stories down from 19 and in broadcast stories five percent, down from 26 percent the previous year. For scientists, their contribution in print media is down to 7 percent from 21 percent in 2008 and similarly in broadcast media, 3 percent from 9 percent the year prior. Part of the reason for their low contribution as sources may be that journalists do not contact local people and scientists directly. Instead, they often get their stories from various provincial departments of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment/

The sources classified in this study (Table 6 and Table 7) are not totally exclusive of one another. However, our researchers use their best judgment according to the following guidelines:

- Government officials are those working in Government agencies such as in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, and various provincial departments of Natural Resources and Environment.
- Scientists are those currently working on research and teaching in various research and teaching institutions. There are some government officials who are involved in research and teaching (in general only those who have the title of professor and associate professor and those who have doctoral degrees)
- It should be noted that scientists and local people often send information to the ministry and provincial departments of Natural Resources and Environment, from which in turn journalists get their information.
- International experts are expatriates working in various international NGOs in Vietnam.
- “Others” include teachers visiting schools, travelers, business people, etc who provide information.

**Table 6 Sources of stories for print media**

Sources	Year			
	2008		2009	
	Number	%	Number	%
Gov. officials	30	29.41	150	43.7
NGOs	8	7.84	40	11.7
Scientists	21	20.59	24	7.0
Local people	19	18.63	9	2.6
International experts	7	6.86	95	27.7
Others	17	16.67	25	7.3
Total	102	100.00	343	100

**Table 7 Sources of stories for broadcast media**

Sources	Year			
	2008		2009	
	Number	%	Number	%
Gov. officials	38	58.46	48	43.2
NGOs	3	4.62	31	27.9
Scientists	6	9.23	3	2.7
Local people	17	26.15	6	5.4
International experts	0	0	16	14.4
Others	1	1.54	7	6.3
Total	65	100.00	111	100

***Topics of coverage: weak on the treaty progress and stronger on adaptation issues***

About one third of the climate change stories are about mitigation measures, with the year-on-year trend stabilizing in print stories and decreasing in broadcast stories. However, the most visible change is that there is more interest in adaptation stories, in percentage terms the number has doubled to 42 percent in print and 29 percent in broadcast. This increase in adaptation interests reflects the reality of typhoons, cyclones, floods and droughts, in Vietnam.

It is observed that the general sentiment of the Vietnam people is that there is a limited option in their capacity for increasing mitigation, however, a more realistic and possible course of

action is to adaptation to the situation. There is a slight difference in the treatment of vulnerability stories and adaptation stories in this study topic classification (Table 8 and Table 9). Generally, adaptation stories address concerns about how to face disaster and vulnerability stories raise concerns about vulnerable group and their possible hardship.

Coverage of climate change treaty progress remains weak. In print stories they accounted for 5-6 percent in 2008 and 2009 and in broadcast media 6 and 4 percent. Our researchers observed that public is interested in the climate treaty and politics and in sequestration stories which are about government taking control of land and factories for capturing carbon.

**Table 8 Topics of the stories for print media**

Topics	Year			
	2008		2009	
	Number	%	Number	%
Mitigation	34	33.33	115	33.5
Vulnerability*	37	36.27	57	16.6
Impact/ Adaptation	21	20.59	145	42.3
Sequestration	4	3.92	9	2.6
Politics/ Treaty talk	6	5.88	16	4.6
Total	102	99.99	343	100

*\*Stories about vulnerable groups of people and possible hardship*

**Table 9 Topics of the stories for broadcast media**

Topics	Year			
	2008		2009	
	Number	%	Number	%
Mitigation	31	47.69	38	34.2
Vulnerability	22	33.85	32	28.8
Impact/ Adaptation	8	12.31	32	28.8
Sequestration			5	4.5
Politics/ Treaty talk	4	6.15	4	3.6
Total	65	100.00	111	100

### ***Subjects linked to climate change***

Poverty alleviation and waste management received the most attention as issues linked to climate change in 2009. Nearly a quarter of the stories collected this year related climate change to poverty issues, while a little over 17 percent linked to waste management. Population came in third at 10 percent and biodiversity at about nine percent.

Poverty and climate change as well as waste and climate change are becoming hot issues in the Vietnamese media. The number of families becoming poor as a consequence of typhoons, cyclones, floods and droughts raises concern about immediate and long term effects of climate change. Industrial development without appropriate management of waste is seriously affecting people's lives. . It raises concerns about human behavior and climate change

### ***Favorable Media Policy and Editorial landscape***

Eight government officials were interviewed: five from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE), two from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MoCT) and one from the provincial (Hanoi city) service of the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry,

using a semi semi-structured questionnaire. The results suggest a favorable climate for producing climate change stories. Policy makers want journalists to convey their messages to the public and they view journalists as key actors in the dissemination of climate change information to the public.

Interviews reveal also what and how Government responds to climate change through the answers of its representatives from MoNRE and from MoCT.

Ten chief editors from various print and broadcast media participated in interviews with semi-structured questionnaires. We found that chief editors are well informed about climate change and they understand the journalists' difficulties in covering the issue and are willing to support journalists in their work accordingly.

What are their perceptions of the difficulties facing the journalists? They believe that their journalists should have the collaboration of scientists in reporting on climate change, particularly for the interpretation of the immediate consequences of natural disasters and the long term effects of climate change. Without close collaboration with scientists, they fear that their journalists will exaggerate the minor issues while forgetting the main messages of climate change. There is not yet a good mechanism for improving this collaboration.

## COMMENTS

Climate change coverage by the Vietnamese media has steadily improved from 2006 to 2009. The number of print articles and broadcast items collected in two months from 5 selected newspapers and a broadcast channel has roughly doubled each year. Print articles triples between 2007 and 2008.

The reason for this improvement could be attributed to:

- Journalists acquiring more knowledge on climate change, more skills for writing on issues of climate change and more enthusiasm in reporting on climate change as observed from interviews and focus groups with journalists.
- The environment in which journalists work has become more favorable for covering climate change issues, due to the favorable attitudes of national and institutional policy makers, as observed in the documentary analysis and interviews of policy makers.
- It is the researchers' view that scientists are more cooperative and willing to share scientific information with journalists, as observed from interviews and focus groups with scientists, but the fact is that this collaboration is still low.

In the opinion of scientists in our focus groups, misunderstanding of climate change issues and over-enthusiasm on the part of journalists could make them exaggerate climate change problems in their reporting. Scientists fear that journalists seek to please the curiosity of their readers while neglecting to communicate key scientific messages to the public. A solution to this possible mistake could be solved by closer cooperation between scientists and journalists.