

# Use of Social Media for Environmental Advocacy: A Study of Recent Movements in India

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## ABSTRACT

Environmental communication and advocacy by civil society organizations has become crucial to address climate change and the multitude of ecological crisis the world is facing. This study does a qualitative analysis of the use of social media, especially Facebook, during two recent environmental movements in India, namely – The Rally for Rivers and Cauvery Calling. These interrelated initiatives were launched by Isha Foundation, a Faith-Based Organization in India in 2017 and 2019 respectively, to generate awareness about desertification, river depletion, and associated crisis in the subcontinent; mobilize public opinion; and advocate for policy shifts at the structural level that would facilitate direct on-ground adoption and transition to organic and tree-based agriculture on farmlands along river banks. Diagnostic, Prognostic, and Motivational framing that highlight causes and impact, propose solutions, raise a call-to-action, and aim to build trust and efficacy were observed. Economy-Ecology ‘win-win’ framing was found to be the core of the rhetoric. Facebook was used as a discursive space to challenge and demobilize antagonistic claims or framing about the movements and the organization. Text, pictures, images, diagrams, graphics, and videos were used extensively to inform and engage. Posts were designed to direct traffic towards various websites, blogs, news articles, YouTube videos, X- handles, and other online platforms containing content of significance to the two campaigns.

**Keywords:** Environmental communication, civil society organization, framing, climate change, social media, Facebook.

## INTRODUCTION

“The world is reaching the tipping point beyond which climate change may become irreversible. If this happens, we risk denying present and future generations the right to a healthy and sustainable planet – the whole of humanity stands to lose.”

Kofi Annan, Former Secretary-General of UN

“Climate change is the single greatest threat to a sustainable future but, at the same time, addressing the climate challenge presents a golden opportunity to promote prosperity, security and a brighter future for all.”

Ban Ki-Moon, Former Secretary-General of UN

### Communicating for the environment

The way human society has evolved since the industrialization of Europe has determined the macro paradigms – economic, cultural, and socio-political. Exploitative industrial practices, unchecked pollution, and an anthropocentric philosophical orientation that eulogizes modernity and otherizes Nature as something inferior, to be controlled by man – has taken a toll. We, as a species, have pushed the Earth into a phase called the

Anthropocene. It is an era when issues like global warming, climate change, biodiversity loss, desertification, river depletion, drought, food shortage etc. have become topics of everyday discussion, debate and analysis. The negative aspects of human-made impacts on the environment and health of all species and the biosphere are staring at us. Therefore, the need to create global conversations around environmental issues has become the need of the hour.

The Working Party on Development Cooperation and Environment (WPDCE, 1999, p.8) defines environmental communication as “the strategic use of communication processes and media products to support effective policy-making, public participation and project implementation geared towards environmental sustainability”. What we speak about, and how we speak about an issue determines the fate of the world. As founding environmental communication scholars Cantrill and Oravec (1996) observed, the “environment we experience and affect is largely a product of how we come to talk about the world”. Since the environment has very little voice of its own, the onus of fixing the environmental crisis rests upon the shoulders of actors who are willing to organize large scale movements in favour of sustainability and bio-centric values. But environmental communication is not simply “talk” about environmental issues. A more complete definition takes into account the roles of language, visual images, protests, music, or even scientific reports as different forms of symbolic action (Pezzullo & Cox, 2017). According to Habermas (1974), every time a private concern becomes a public issue as groups of people come together and converse – a slice of public sphere is produced. In public meetings, newspaper editorials, blogs, speeches at rallies, street festivals, and various other occasions in which we engage others in conversation or debate, the public sphere emerges as a potential sphere of influence, where important agenda are set, terms negotiated, and goals are pursued.

Digital media has emerged as a discursive space to engage and create conversations around important environmental issues; especially by civil society organizations. NGOs are adopting new media platforms like blogs, websites, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, X (Twitter) etc. to reach their goals. “Social media can provide platforms to share information faster and to larger audiences than ever before” (Pezzullo & Cox, 2017, p.251); they “alert, amplify, and engage” (p.254). Environmental NGOs or any other civil society organization that wants to advocate for the environment often uses digital media for – building group identity, member recruitment, public education, and as part of long-term advocacy campaigns to amplify their voices in local and global public spheres and marshal “public will in support of campaign goals” (p.262). Advocacy is the “act of communicating in support of a specific cause, policy, idea, or set of values” (p. 221). Environmental advocacy campaign is a form of advocacy. Two broad forms of advocacy are advocacy and critical rhetoric. They can function in complementary ways as well. “Critical rhetoric is the questioning or criticism of a policy, societal value, or ideology. Such rhetoric may also articulate an alternate policy, vision, or ideology” (p. 223).

Since environmental communication is both pragmatic and constitutive, the study of the way messages are framed while communicating for an initiative also becomes significant. Social movements not only frame the world in which they are acting, but they also frame social problems (Snow et al, 1986). The way a problem is framed plays a crucial role in shaping public policy (Snow et al, 1986; Snow and Benford, 1992). Snow and Benford argued that movement organizers use framing “to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (1988, p. 198). They proposed three core collective action frames, namely – Diagnostic, Prognostic and Motivational. A diagnostic frame is intended as a “a diagnosis of some event or aspect of social life as problematic and in need of alteration” (p. 199). The prognostic frame highlights “a proposed solution to the diagnosed problem that specifies what needs to be done” (p. 199). This frame propounds strategies to solve a problem. Finally, the motivational frame is “a call to arms” that tries to engage and encourage people to participate in a collective action (p. 199). In their study of 289 global climate non-profit’s Facebook content, Vu et al. (2020) found that diagnostic is the most popular of the three protest frames. Climate change is mostly discussed in terms of impact, action, and efficacy – the study findings suggest that action is used most frequently while efficacy is least common. Efficacy is an individual’s perception that a problem can be addressed and that they can participate in actions needed to solve the problem (Feldman & Hart, 2016). NGOs from developed countries tended to discuss actions more than those from developing countries.

Curiously, efficacy or hope appeals are important drivers in motivating people to take actions on climate change (Chadwick, 2015; Ojala, 2012). Thus Vu et al. (2020) suggest that increasing the use of efficacy in

strategic messages may help foster actions and engagement with the campaigns these global climate NGOs are orchestrating. Recent studies have found that message framing on climate change can exert significant effects on audience support for policies (Bolsen et al., 2019) or motivate people to take actions (Bain et al., 2016). Bostrom et al. (2019) recorded both direct and indirect positive relationship between participants' stronger government and collective response efficacy beliefs and personal self-efficacy beliefs and their support for reducing the risks of climate change. Feldman and Hart (2016) found that messages emphasizing the internal, external, or response efficacy of political actions to address climate change exert greater influence on participants' hope and fear. Additionally, exposure to efficacy information indirectly boosts participation via hope. Messages of hopelessness, depression, apathy (Bieniek-Tobasco et al. 2019), and fearfulness (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009) are associated with lower levels of efficacy to act on climate change. Witte and Allen (2000) found that strong fear appeals with high-efficacy messages result in more significant behaviour change than strong appeals with low-efficacy messages. Emphasis on urgency has also been found to be important (Moser & Dilling, 2004; Nisbet, 2009)

## Background of the study

This study explores the environmental communication practices of Isha Foundation, which is a Faith-based Organization (a form of civil society organization) in India, through an analysis of two campaigns – Rally for Rivers and Cauvery Calling. The ecological initiatives by the said organization goes back to 1998 when as per its website, the UN made a prediction that Tamil Nadu would face significant desertification by 2025. Isha Foundation, under the leadership of Jaggi Vasudev (Sadhguru) started mobilizing citizens with an aim to increase the green cover of the state. It began with a volunteer-driven plantation drive on Velliangiri mountain range that surrounds its headquarters in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. Later it launched Project Green Hands (PGH) on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2004, which was a pan-Tamil Nadu movement that aimed to increase its green cover, restore soil health, and manage natural resources appropriately. PGH was based on community involvement and large-scale volunteer participation – included volunteer and extension agent recruitment and training (mobilization); establishing volunteer nurseries for growing saplings; awareness and community mobilization drives, media engagement; advocacy with government representatives, corporates; developing partnership with local government bodies and NGOs etc. While experimenting with various models of mass tree plantation, by 2008, the organization had arrived at a model of agroforestry that has later become the core of its environmental actions and initiatives.

By 2011 it was planting trees under three modes – Trees for All; Trees for Life; and the Green School Movement; besides promoting organic agricultural practices under the Isha Agro Movement (also called Thaaaimann Kaakkum Vivasayam or TKV later). The Trees for Life program was the tree-based agriculture promotion model that was mentioned earlier. As Isha Foundation realized the effectiveness of the said model in bridging the gap between economy and ecology, it started efforts to scale it up. It was in this context that the campaigns significant to this study were launched. Rally for Rivers (RfR) was launched on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2017 to raise awareness about river depletion in India and mobilize public opinion in favour of policy shifts that recognized adoption of tree-based agriculture as an organic solution to the problem of drying rivers and dying soil. Cauvery Calling was launched in 2019 as a follow-up on-ground pilot that would demonstrate the efficacy of the model promoted by RfR. It used awareness and mass mobilization drives; lobbied for crucial policy changes; and urged citizens to contribute monetarily by donating saplings to be planted on farm lands across the Cauvery basin (in districts of both Tamil Nadu and Karnataka). It aims to enable 5.2 million farmers to plant 2.42 billion trees in the Cauvery basin in a span of 12 years. Both these campaigns had a multi-modal communication network; including extensive on-ground and online channels and elements.

## METHODOLOGY

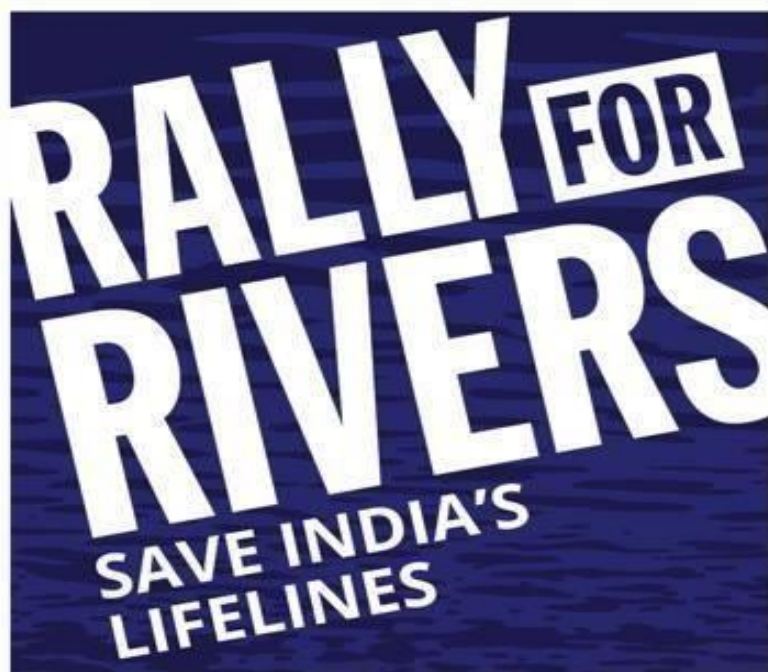
This study has explored the use of social media during the above-mentioned campaigns, with special emphasis on Facebook (Rally for Rivers – Cauvery Calling, n.d.). It has also shed light on the use of other platforms like WhatsApp groups. A qualitative narrative analysis of conveniently and purposively sampled secondary data from the Facebook page dedicated to the two related campaigns has been done to understand and represent both the constitutive and pragmatic aspects of its strategic communication which includes framing practices; information, awareness, engagement, and efficacy building strategies. Posts analysed belong to a timeline

between 2017 when the Rally for Rivers was launched, and 2024, when the updates related to Cauvery Calling were shifted to a separate Facebook page named 'Conscious Planet' after a global movement called 'Conscious Planet: Save Soil' was launched by Isha Foundation in 2022. A thorough literature review has been done to contextualize the study and its findings as presented in the introduction section.

### analysis of facebook content

#### Awareness building: Constituting a critical rhetoric

The Rally for Rivers program was launched on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2017 and the Facebook posts began from 7<sup>th</sup> July 2017. It began with the unveiling of the campaign message and poster which read "Rally for Rivers: Save India's Lifelines."



(Poster stating message; 7 July 2017)

The posts on Facebook tried to inform people about the problem, its proposed solution, and how people could participate and become part of the solution. Very early on, an article link shared on Facebook on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2017 framed the agenda as - "Saving India's Lifeline – Why Rivers Need Trees." It made the message clear – the campaign was about saving the rivers of India by working on a plan towards mass tree plantation projects. The issues were diagnosed; causes and impact were discussed as follows (Sadhguru, 2017):

Our rivers have been depleted dramatically in a matter of a few decades. Indus and Ganga are now among the ten most endangered rivers on the planet. Kaveri is maybe forty percent of what it used to be when I was a young boy... Rivers and streams have gone dry. The groundwater levels have fallen drastically in recent years. Drinking water has become scarce in many places... When the land was covered by rain forest, the precipitation gathered in the streams and rivers, and they were in full flow. In order to feed the rivers, the soil around them needs to be wet. Today, the whole land is ploughed. Without sufficient amount of shade and constant replenishment through organic material such as leaves and animal droppings, the top layer of the soil leaches out and turns to sand over a period of time. Trees are gone; animals are slaughtered – there is no replenishment of the soil... We are destroying the soil and the water resources at such a rate that in another fifteen to twenty years' time, we will not be able to feed these people and quench their thirst anymore

Here three central points are addressed: lack of trees; lack of soil organic content; depleting soil moisture and resultant soil erosion and desertification. It has also emphasized the crisis that rivers are in. Next, the blog proposes a solution or a prognostic framing:

Still, there are substantial measures we can take to enhance the flow of the river and the economic activity around it at the same time. The simplest and most effective approach is to increase the tree coverage around the water bodies. But a large part of India is farmed land, which we cannot convert to forest. The solution is to shift from soil-depleting crops to tree-based agriculture. For that to happen, we need to create the necessary awareness and induce policy changes... It takes a national policy that includes all major rivers and their tributaries to bring about substantial change in the country... The simplest solution is to create green cover around the rivers. I would suggest one kilometre on either side of all the major rivers; half a kilometre for all the tributaries. We need a policy which establishes that where there is government land around water bodies, forests will be created; where there is private land, horticultural crops will be planted... We need to come up with a comprehensive plan that is profitable for the people who live on the riverbanks. You cannot expect a poor farmer to save the planet when he is struggling to make a living. Tree crops have to be economically more attractive than soil-depleting crops.

The post clearly frames the campaign as an attempt to bring about an agroecological shift in order to save the rivers of India. The prognosis is clear – tree-based agriculture has to be made economically viable for farmers in India for safeguarding the nation's ecological health; right national policies have to be framed for the same; this in turn will need large-scale public opinion mobilization, and therefore awareness building efforts. The blog post also shares the call to action and a road map:

We have to make everyone in the country aware that there is an express need for action to save the rivers. We are planning to hold a rally through sixteen states. The tentative route will start from Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu, go up to Uttarakhand, and end in Delhi. In each of the sixteen state capitals that we come to; we will hold major events to make a strong pitch for saving our rivers

The content also makes its position clear as 'not' a movement that supports engineering-based solutions like river linking:

The river interlinking project that some people advocate may work in a temperate climate, but not in a tropical region with high temperatures and seasonal rain. It would be super-expensive and detrimental for the rivers and the organic activity around them. Just because a certain amount of money has already been invested into it does not mean we have to continue the same.

This oppositional framing with respect to mechanistic solutions to river revitalization is also emphasized in other posts:

The rivers in this nation are essentially forest fed. Even a Himalayan River like Ganga is only ten percent glacier fed; the rest is from the land and the forest. People want emergency solutions and are trying to move the policy-makers to try to connect the rivers and deliver water to more areas of land. That is going to be even more disastrous. (Rivers in India: Problems and Solutions (blog: <https://isha.sadhguru.org/en/wisdom/article/depletion-indias-rivers-problems-solutions>); 3 Aug, 2017; link is provided on Facebook as well.)

The above-mentioned 2<sup>nd</sup> post also emphasizes an efficacy-centric approach – one that offers a solution:

Simply inspiring people to take action is not sufficient. Only if we offer profitable solutions can we convince people to save our rivers... For private land, let farmers go for horticulture and tree-based farming. The governments can provide education, and subsidize these efforts for three to five years, and help develop a whole new system of high-quality organic horticulture. Farmers will not mind giving up their regular crops, nor will they be coerced to migrate to cities for other work because their land will still continue to yield a living – even better than what they had before.

The crisis, both in terms of the advantages of timely action and the consequences of inaction have been represented through images which also carry the call-to-action message:



(8 July 2017, Facebook)



(“Situation will become worse if the current situation continues”; 8 July 2017; Facebook)

Various posts in the run up to the main events and the pragmatic on-ground actions kept emphasizing the seriousness of the situation through data and visual representation. One read, “Today we have 75% less water per person than in 1947. By 2030 we will have only 50% of the water for our survival. #RallyForRivers before it's too late.” The crisis framing is accompanied by hope and a stress on different shades of efficacy – self, response, collective, and government: “Possible through your participation and urgent government action.” Another similar visual expressed how one day people might end up begging for the few last drops of water left if urgent action is not taken immediately.

By 2030 we will have only **50%** of the water we need for our survival

25% of India is turning into a desert

Today we have **75% less water** per person than in 1947

**A SIMPLE SOLUTION** | Possible Through Your Participation & Urgent Government Action

**1KM WIDE tree cover on river sides**

**FORESTS in Govt. Land**

**FRUIT TREES in Private Land**

**GIVE A MISSED CALL TO 80009 80009**

**JOIN THE CAMPAIGN** Show your support for a policy to save our rivers.

Sadhguru himself will drive from Kanyakumari to Himalayas to create awareness.

03 Sep - Coimbatore  
04 Sep - Kanyakumari  
05 Sep - Thiruvananthapuram  
06 Sep - Madurai  
07 Sep - Tiruchirappalli  
08 Sep - Mysuru  
09 Sep - Bengaluru  
10 Sep - Chennai  
13 Sep - Amravati  
14 Sep - Hyderabad  
17 Sep - Mumbai  
20 Sep - Ahmedabad  
23 Sep - Indore  
24 Sep - Bhopal  
26 Sep - Lucknow  
28 Sep - Jaipur  
01 Oct - Haridwar  
02 Oct - Delhi

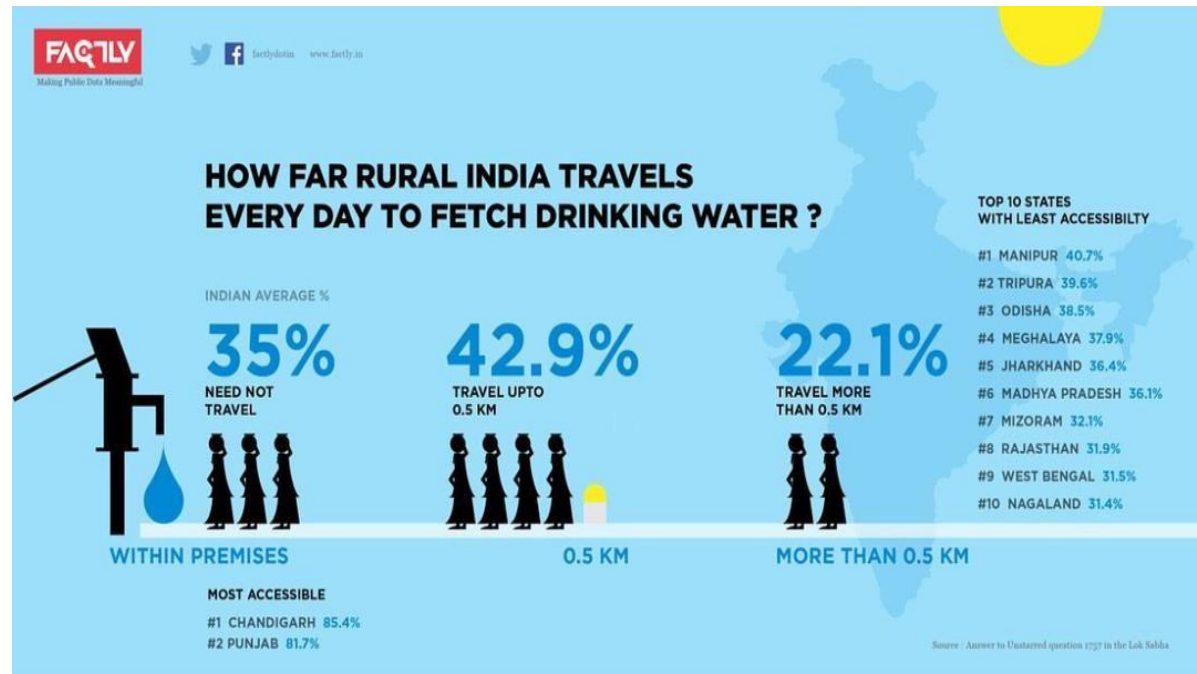
(11 July 2017; Facebook)

By 2030 we will have only **50%** of the water we need for our survival

**#RallyForRivers**

(17 July 2017; Facebook)

Certain posts framed it as a humanitarian crisis that made the life of rural women worse. It read, “How far rural India travels every day to fetch drinking water?”; “We can no longer turn a blind eye as we stand on the threshold of the gravest crisis of our times.”



(11 July 2017; Facebook)

Posts also were framed in terms of crisis to the future generation to appeal to altruistic value orientations. Visual images used elements of shock and awe. These posts in general are accompanied by the call to action. For example, one post read, “Today it's them. With rivers drying at alarming rate... tomorrow it can be our children. Give Missed Call at 8000980009 #SaveRivers #RallyForRivers.” Another proclaimed, “Enough harm has been done to our rivers. Situation is only getting worse. #RallyForRivers”; and was accompanied by a visual that creatively depicted the water stress on an Indian map as presented below.



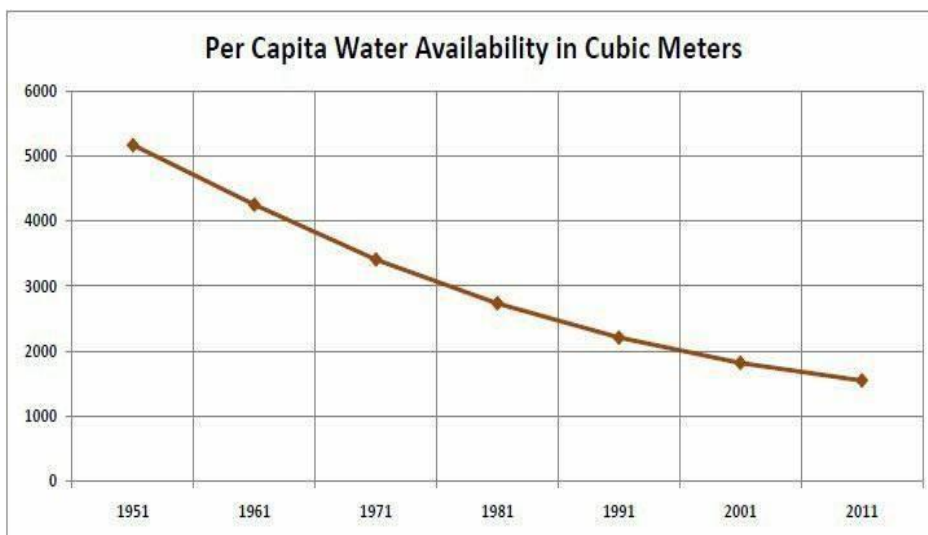
(11 July 2017; Facebook)



(13 July 2017; Facebook)

Graphical representation of the crisis was also used as shown below:

If we do not act now, we might not get another chance. #RallyForRivers



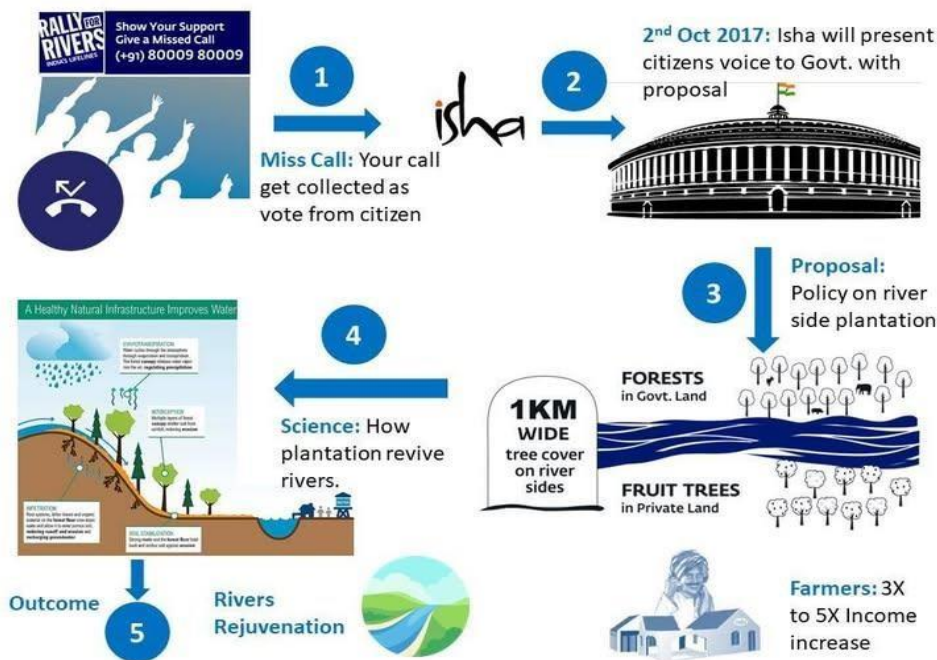
(16 July 2017; Facebook)

Motivational or collective action framing were also used, as one post proclaims, “Let’s join hands and save our rivers!”



(19 July 2017; Facebook)

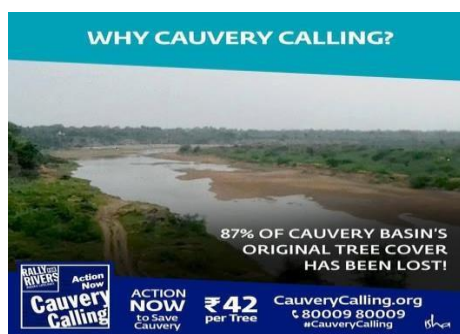
Objective of the advocacy efforts and the benefits of tree-based agriculture have been represented visually:



(Post reads: This is how your missed call will help in saving the rivers. Give missed call on 80009-80009; 28 July 2017)

Cauvery Calling was launched in July 2019 and was framed as “a first of its kind campaign, setting the standard for how India’s rivers – the country’s lifelines – can be revitalized”; it aimed at supporting farmers in the Cauvery basin to shift to agroforestry by planting 242 crore trees in farmlands across various districts of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The solution was projected as a “marriage of ecology and economy.” Similar to the rhetoric generated during the Rally for Rivers, it too used posts to problematize the case of a dying river. A post read:

87% of Cauvery basin’s original tree cover has been lost and the soil is no longer replenished. It no longer absorbs water and suffers erosion instead. The soil no longer feeds Cauvery. To plant trees, visit <http://isha.co/cauvery-calling-fb>



(5 August 2019)

As the call to action in this case was not just engagement in some way, but specifically about donating for planting saplings on farmlands in the Cauvery basin, Facebook was used to clear the air with posts like:

Rs 42 doesn't seem to go far these days. But what if Rs 42 is the difference between a free-flowing river and a dry one. What if Rs 42 is the difference between a rich soil and a desolate land. What if Rs 42 is the difference between a life of wellbeing for a farmer and a life of despair. Rs 42 per tree is all you need to support a farmer to plant trees in his land and contribute to saving Cauvery. #FREEINDIAofWaterCrisis; Plant trees at CauveryCalling.org

(11 August 2019)

Ecology-Economy framing has been the dominant narrative and core proposal highlighted, especially during Cauvery Calling. A post on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2022 states: “The main idea behind the Cauvery Calling movement is to enable farmers to adopt tree-based agriculture – a simple, scalable, and replicable farming practice. Tree-based agriculture not only helps heal our severely wounded ecology, but also boosts the income of the farmer, and in turn the nation's GDP.” Use of contrasting images to stress on this ‘win-win’ situation can be observed as shown below:



(28 July 2022)

### Celebrity and consensus

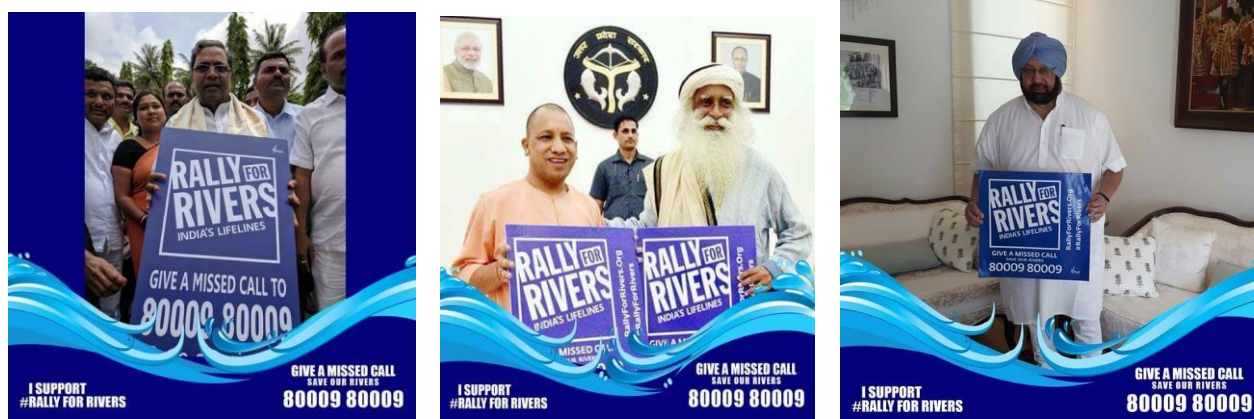
Celebrity-centric marketing approach was used as a strategy for enhancing motivation. Besides, it can be observed that the campaign wants to project itself as a ‘Consensus’ based movement and not a ‘Conflict’ oriented one. Various posts highlight that the campaign cuts across political party lines or the boundaries of religion or any other orientation. It clearly mentions on its website, “This is not a protest. This is not an agitation. This is a campaign to raise awareness that our rivers are depleting. Everyone who consumes water must Rally for Rivers.” Some such posts are given below:



(Venkatesh Prasad, cricketer; 22 July 2017)



(Kamal Haasan, actor; 31 August 2019)



(Chief Ministers of various Indian states from diverse political backgrounds are shown supporting the Rally)



(Dr. Imam Umer Ahmed Ilyasi, Chief Imam, All India Imam Organisation is shown extending support to Rally for Rivers on a Facebook post dated 8 July 2017; another post on 30 July 2017 emphasizes that the campaign cuts across faith systems)

## Social media engagement

Many posts were used to engage the supporters of the movement on social media platforms – they appealed to use ready-made digital poster designs as cover pics; get Rally for Rivers frame for profile pictures; informed the followers of efforts by other supporters etc. to enhance motivation.



(Provided to be used as a cover pic to show support)

## RALLYforRIVERS

Save India's Lifelines


Use the #RallyforRivers frame and support the cause

Pledge your support with a missed call to (+91) 800009 80009



**How to Add the Frame**  
On Facebook > Edit profile pic > Add Frame > Search for 'RallyforRiver'

## HUMANS FOR RIVERS



He is Rallying for Rivers. Not only did he put up the poster in his auto but also said he will distribute it to other auto drivers across.

**JOIN THE MOVEMENT**

Creative ways of engagement were also used: a post on 13 August 2017 gave the following challenge: “It would be difficult to find rivers in India in 2030, let’s see how many you can find in this puzzle. First person to comment with names of 7 rivers hidden in this puzzle will win a Rally for Rivers t-shirt”; another on 18 August 2017 initiated a meme game.

### DAY 1 : Find the names of the rivers hidden in the below puzzle

E Z A V G W X Q K M U L E H J  
D I N E M B F O S V T Y O L V  
L J T Y J T A T T A R Y G D R  
T I F A A Y J D M O E V W F R  
P M V J C Y Z V A H X B A A V  
X G I U O B U G V M S B R N X  
J A R T U P A M H A R B A H T  
E B A N V H K M B I G A J S H  
N I V E A W C A O R S M N I K  
N T A M T L R N C E K K I R N  
C M D G W M J F H V L H Y K T  
M O O B A A U Y N A D U P C D  
O G G T H N H F X K E C X V S  
R E I F J U G H W N E P G G R  
S V C R E S L A O G F E Z G U

Word arrangement: → ← ↶ ↷ ↸ ↹

# 9

## baj gaye bhai!

First person to comment with the 7 correct names will win a Rally For Rivers t-shirt

### Day 6:

Imagine you are in 2040 and there is no water left.

## Make a meme for this situation and comment below

First person to comment all the correct names will win a Rally For Rivers t-shirt.

# 9

## baj gaye kya?

Other novel social media engagement tactics included a 2-minute ‘Rivers of India’ video making competition. It read:

Participate by making a short 2-minute movie on the theme "Rivers of India" and get a chance to win cash prizes worth 5 lakhs and opportunity to work with eminent directors like Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra , Shekhar Kapoor and Prahalad Kakkar

To upload your video and detailed information visit [rallyforrivers.org/online-video-submission/](https://rallyforrivers.org/online-video-submission/)

Last date of submission: Sep 10, 2017 (18 August 2017; Facebook)

### Volunteer mobilization

Facebook was extensively used to raise call to action and for volunteer mobilization both during the Rally for Rivers and Cauvery Calling. Some of the content is provided below:

Become a volunteer, Join the Rally for Rivers Army sign up at <https://goo.gl/forms/brnMjzuZ8EfnngzB2> #RallyForRivers

**YOU  
CAN  
MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE**

*#RallyForRivers*

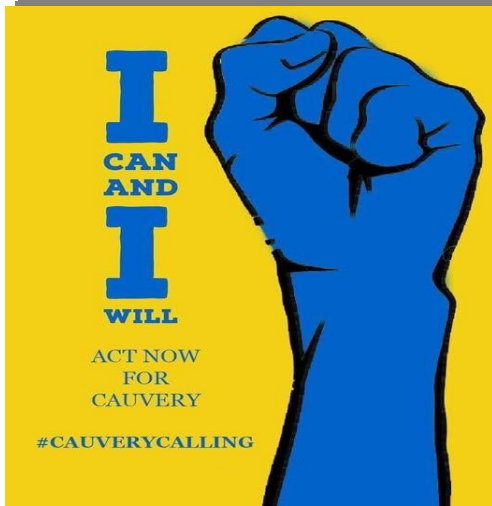
(30 August 2017; Facebook)

Become a volunteer, #RallyForRivers Army sign up at <https://goo.gl/forms/brnMjzuZ8EfngzB2>



(31 August 2017; Facebook)

Movements like Cauvery Calling come rare in the history of a nation. We invite you to join this historic movement and be part of the #CauveryCalling army. Register now by clicking on this link : <https://forms.gle/m9V7Jma7k4y6QWVA8>



(28 August 2019)

### Keeping posted

As the rally was flagged off on 3 September, Facebook posts constantly updated latest information about the programs related to it. It gave detailed information about the places, dates, timing, and venue for followers and supporters to plan ahead. Some examples are given below:



(4 September 2017)

Chennaites, Get ready. Rally reaches Chennai, coming Sunday, Sep 10.

Join Sadhguru and other eminent leaders and artists for "#RallyForRivers" public event at Sep 10, 6 PM in YMCA Grounds, Nandanam, Chennai.

All are welcome. For online registration [bit.ly/sep10event](http://bit.ly/sep10event) or Call 83000 11000. Entry free.

Rivers need you. Join us!

(4 September 2017)

Cauvery Calling was launched on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2019. The use of Facebook and other social media sites followed a similar pattern as found during the Rally for Rivers campaign. Updates regarding the Rally were also periodically posted on Facebook to keep the followers and supporters in loop and enhance both trust and engagement. Posts dated 1 August 2019 to 3 August 2019 read:

162 million people supported Rally for Rivers, a campaign to revitalize our rivers - India's lifelines. Find out what happened after your missed call...

Visit <http://isha.co/cauvery-calling-fb> for more details.



Updates of all on-ground efforts were provided via Facebook. Link to a blog was shared on 10 August 2019 that explained how 28 trucks and hundreds of volunteers had spread across various districts of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu as part of a large scale Farmers' Outreach Campaign on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2019. It also carried the picture of the awareness spreading truck as shown below:



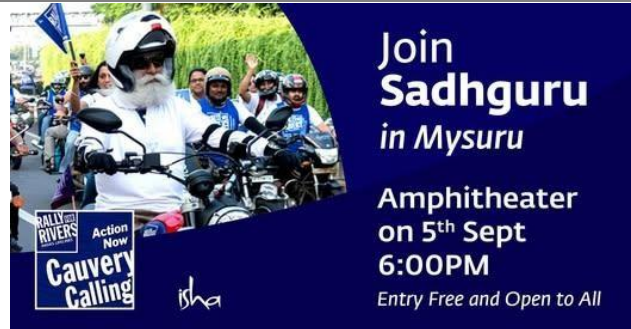
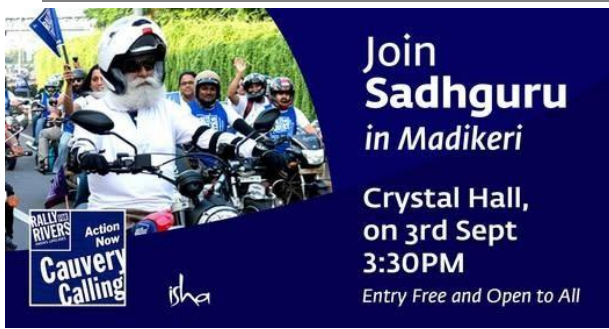
Followup on the said outreach was provided on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2019. The post stated:

The dedication & relentless efforts of #CauveryCalling volunteers to bring one third of Cauvery Basin land under tree cover is commendable. May their commitment to end the vicious cycle of flood & drought in Cauvery region find fruition.

Cauvery Calling volunteers are going to thousands of villages across the Cauvery basin to spread awareness about agroforestry and how it benefits farmers.



As the bike rally for Cauvery Calling was to begin on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2019, schedule of events was posted on Facebook from time to time.



As was done during the Rally for Rivers campaign, support for Cauvery Calling by renowned personalities, including politicians was shared. For example:

The Honourable CM of Karnataka, Shri B.S. Yediyurappa, extends his full support for Cauvery Calling as Sadhguru addresses an enthused Bengaluru crowd. (8 September 2019)



Sadhguru with Ralph Gonsalves Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Shri Prakash Javadekar, Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, today at UNCCD COP 14 India in Delhi.



(10 September 2019)

Big announcement: OP Raveendranath, MP, Theni has pledged to donate 1 crore saplings in one year!  
#CauveryCalling #FREEINDIAofWaterCrisis

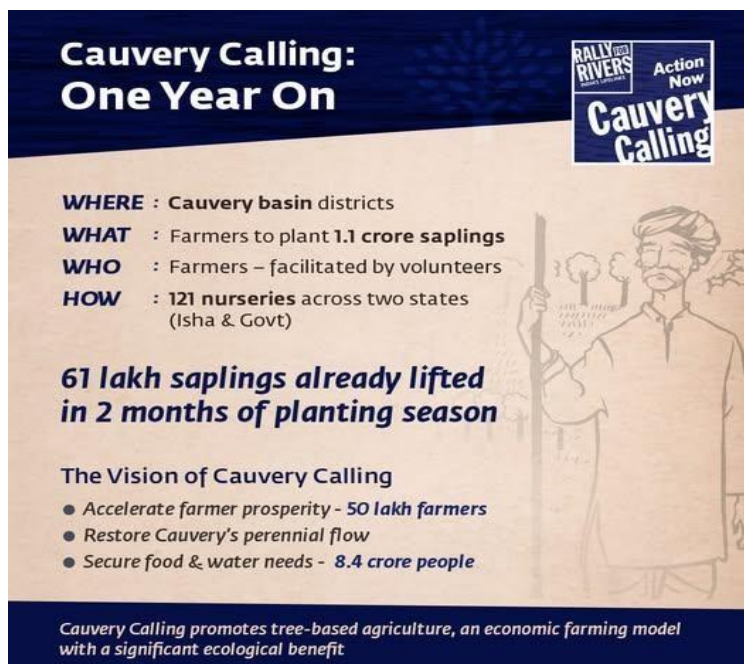


(13 September 2019)

Regular updates were provided about ground efforts that portrayed how the project was shaping up in real time. Information ranged from how saplings were growing in various Isha nurseries, to how various farmer training and outreach sessions were being conducted, to several success stories that gave a sense of hope and confidence about both the movement's response efficacy and collective efficacy. A blog link posted on 16 August 2020 informed how:

Even as the motorbike rally traced the course of the Cauvery, simultaneously a massive farmer outreach program was carried out in August and September 2019; our volunteers reached out to about 2,70,000 farmers in 7,000 villages in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu... In the following months, from December 2019 to February 2020, this was followed up with a series of ground level awareness and training programs... Cauvery Calling hosted its first-ever tree-based agriculture training in Karnataka on 14th Feb in Mysuru. Over 250 farmers turned up and had the chance to have their questions answered by eminent Forest officials and expert farmers such as Kavitha Umashankar Mishra" (Cauvery Calling, 2020a).

Graphics were used to inform supporters of the number of saplings planted by farmers:



## Efficacy enhancement

Facebook was used as a medium to share important videos about shifting to agroforestry. It ranged from sapling selection, irrigation, and crop planning tips, to method of preparing organic fertilizers and insecticides. Some posts are cited below:

When you pour Jeevamrutham into your land and it will multiply soil microorganisms 100,000 times more. Regular use of Jeevamrutham improves soil fertility, and boosts sapling growth. Learn how to make Jeevamrutham from the experts of Cauvery Calling (contains a detailed video in vernacular with subtitles in English)

(22 January 2021)

Read all about how Sampath Kumar from Netgodu village, Hassan district, overcame borer insects and saved his Mahogany saplings with a little help from the Cauvery Calling team.

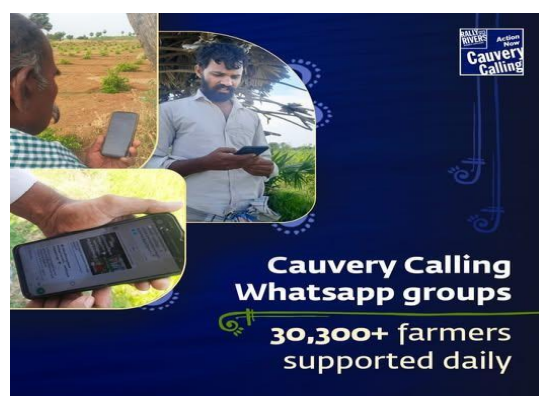
#CauveryCalling is supporting over 42,000 farmers daily via WhatsApp groups in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu to help them transition to tree-based agriculture. #SaveSoil #farmers



(3 March 2024)

The above post also sheds light on the adoption of WhatsApp and other digital media platforms by farmers to engage with the Cauvery Calling ground effort.

The Facebook page also informs how Cauvery Calling team supports farmers in the two states to transition to tree-based agriculture via WhatsApp groups. They contain model farmer videos, event updates, timber selection tips, and planting methods based on soil type, depth, salinity, etc.



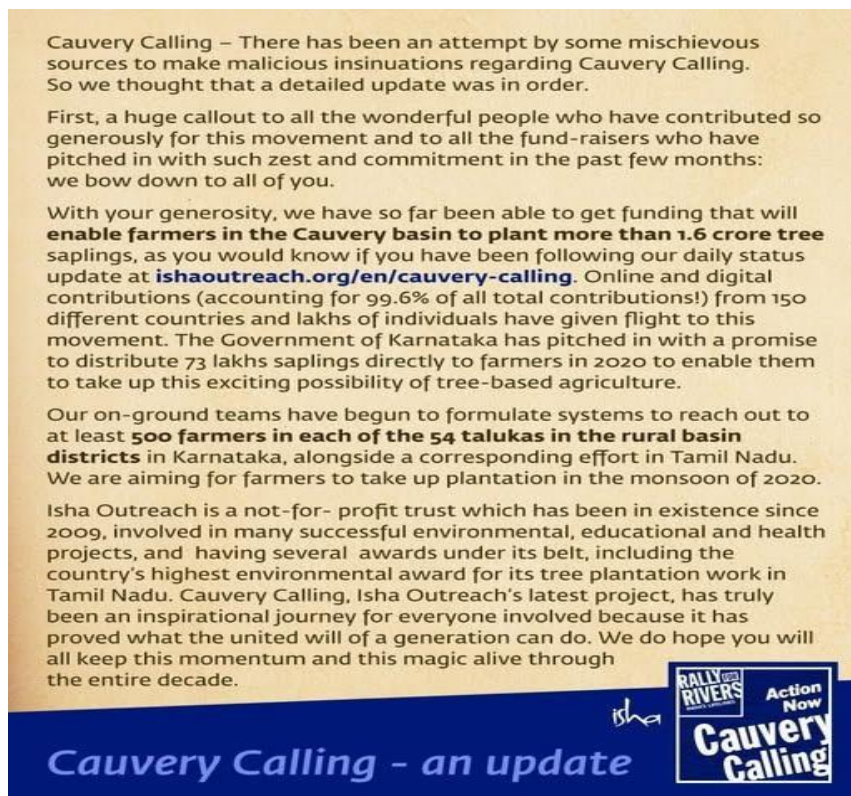
(22 August 2023)

As per its Annual report (2023-2024), more than 170 WhatsApp groups are operating to provide consultation, training, and advice to about 44,000 farmers daily. The Tamil Nadu based groups have a membership of 29,874; while the Karnataka based WhatsApp groups have 14,288 members. As of 2023, there were about 4,20,000 farmer subscribers on social media (Tamil Nadu) and 1,30,000 (Karnataka). It also informed that 195

new farmer-focused videos (predominantly in Tamil and Kannada) were produced during the year with 4.2M views on YouTube; 13.2M reach on Instagram and Facebook (8 million in Tamil Nadu and 5.5 million in Karnataka); 7,50,000 content interactions on Facebook and Instagram.

## Challenging antagonistic framing

Facebook was used as space where any information regarding its environmental advocacy efforts that were considered misrepresentation by the organization were challenged in an attempt to demobilize antagonistic frames. For example, a post tried to counter certain “attempts by mischievous sources to make malicious insinuations regarding Cauvery Calling” by giving updates about the program as shown below.



Cauvery Calling – There has been an attempt by some mischievous sources to make malicious insinuations regarding Cauvery Calling. So we thought that a detailed update was in order.

First, a huge callout to all the wonderful people who have contributed so generously for this movement and to all the fund-raisers who have pitched in with such zest and commitment in the past few months: we bow down to all of you.

With your generosity, we have so far been able to get funding that will **enable farmers in the Cauvery basin to plant more than 1.6 crore tree saplings**, as you would know if you have been following our daily status update at [ishaoutreach.org/en/cauvery-calling](http://ishaoutreach.org/en/cauvery-calling). Online and digital contributions (accounting for 99.6% of all total contributions!) from 150 different countries and lakhs of individuals have given flight to this movement. The Government of Karnataka has pitched in with a promise to distribute 73 lakhs saplings directly to farmers in 2020 to enable them to take up this exciting possibility of tree-based agriculture.

Our on-ground teams have begun to formulate systems to reach out to at least **500 farmers in each of the 54 talukas in the rural basin districts** in Karnataka, alongside a corresponding effort in Tamil Nadu. We are aiming for farmers to take up plantation in the monsoon of 2020.

Isha Outreach is a not-for-profit trust which has been in existence since 2009, involved in many successful environmental, educational and health projects, and having several awards under its belt, including the country's highest environmental award for its tree plantation work in Tamil Nadu. Cauvery Calling, Isha Outreach's latest project, has truly been an inspirational journey for everyone involved because it has proved what the united will of a generation can do. We do hope you will all keep this momentum and this magic alive through the entire decade.

**Cauvery Calling - an update**

**RALLY FOR RIVERS Action Now Cauvery Calling**

(7 January 2020)

Again, on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2020, a Facebook post provided a link to a blog that challenged various allegations levelled against the Cauvery Calling campaign (Cauvery Calling, 2020 b). It read, “In a recent piece in The Hindu, the writer bandies opinion based on some threadbare research of the #CauveryCalling Movement. We take great exception to this kind of irresponsible ‘journalism’, which would rather raise a canard out of two ounces of research and truckloads of speculation than see how they can make a real difference to some dire and urgent problems of our times.” The blog presented the allegation in bold red font as ‘Allegation 1’, ‘Allegation 2’ etc. and countered the claims with its own perspective and information. With respect to the charge that “the foundation is silent about the varieties of tree it aims to plant”, the post argued, “Since the inception of Rally for Rivers and the offspring Cauvery Calling, it has been clarified that we will be promoting native species that are both ecologically and economically beneficial. The exact list of species has been communicated openly to our primary stakeholders, the farmers, via social media, telephone calls, brochures, booklets, etc. during our outreach. Obviously, this piece of communication is crucial for any farmer who wishes to adopt tree-based agriculture. In all, across the basin states of both Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, we are promoting more than 80 species of trees. Therefore, it is not a lack of clarity about the tree species on part of project teams, but laxity on the part of the writer, who chooses to dabble in superficial criticism without any effort towards familiarising herself with the work being done on the ground and its impact on the stakeholders.”

Similarly, navigating through around five different allegations, the article concluded: “...we would like to state our disappointment with a piece that is so badly researched that it cannot make a distinction between

afforestation projects and a project based on tree-based agriculture. In this thinly veiled attempt to discredit the project, the author goes so far as to sweepingly say, “Simply planting trees does nothing”. By all means, let us not only plant trees. Let us, as Cauvery Calling has undertaken to do, educate our farmers on ecologically sustainable land and water use. Let us understand the various bottlenecks and strive to change policy in that direction. Let us bring multiple stakeholders from UN bodies and governments and farmer groups together to work on solutions. Let us raise Human Consciousness so that every human being who is currently the source of the problem (whether pollution or sand mining) can start to realise that he needs to be a part of the solution. Let us do all these things. At Isha we are working day and night, 7 days of the week, 365 days of the year without a break to make this happen.”

Another post on 12 December 2021 read, “No Land Encroachment, Intrusion into Elephant Corridor by Isha Yoga Centre: TN Govt's Reply on RTI”. It posted a link to the news article that revealed: “No illegal occupation was done by ‘Sadhguru’ Jaggi Vasudev’s Isha Yoga Centre in the hilly parts of Coimbatore, according to a reply by the Tamil Nadu government’s Public Officer on an RTI application which claimed encroachment of forest land and intrusion into elephant corridors by the centre... The RTI reply has also revealed that there is no notified elephant corridor in the Coimbatore Forest Division, where the Isha Yoga Centre is located” (“No Land Encroachment, Intrusion into Elephant Corridor by Isha Yoga Centre,” 2021).

## DISCUSSION

The review of relevant literature has shown that certain studies have come to a conclusion that NGOs in developing nations mostly communicate about environmental issues in terms of their causes and impact, and to some extent about the action needed. Efficacy was found to be least common, even in case of developed countries. In case of Isha Foundation’s environmental communication efforts on Facebook however, a stress on efficacy enhancement can be observed. The organization has not only framed its communication efforts diagnostically, that is, in terms of problematizing an issue by discussing its causes and impact; and prognostically, that is, in terms of available solutions; but also, motivationally - by strategically creating campaigns that would ensure direct on-ground action, participation, and induce a spirit of belongingness to a cause. Many Facebook posts very early on during the first campaign for river revitalization in 2017 were found to draw from Project Green Hands success stories to build a sense of response efficacy amongst lay followers - a feeling that the said policy of tree-based agriculture could actually be a solution to a plethora of environmental threats like soil degradation, river and ground water depletion, biodiversity loss, and climate change.

Support from influential personalities across political, religious, cultural, bureaucratic, scientific, and other social spheres were constantly projected to instil confidence amongst both the supporters and persuadable. Another aspect was follow-up information; updates about tie-ups with either government or other reputed environmental organizations, policy shift successes, recognition, awards, and so forth were provided. Information about on-ground efforts like farmer training sessions, model farm visits, webinars, mass awareness drives etc, were all posted from time-to-time to keep the core base of followers and persuadable groups in loop. As per information available on its website, widespread use of various social media platforms, including WhatsApp groups to address the needs of farmers has been done. Many such hands-on demonstration videos were found on Facebook as well. Facebook was also used to counter antagonistic frames, claims, and allegations that were considered misrepresentation of the campaigns and the institution’s environmental and moral values. Besides text; pictures, images, diagrams, graphics, and videos were used extensively to inform and engage. Posts were designed to direct traffic towards various websites, blogs, news articles, YouTube videos, X- handles, and other online platforms containing content of significance to the two campaigns. To conclude, it can be observed that Facebook has been used to design content to enhance engagement and efficacy, besides informing, educating, and mobilizing.

## Scope For Future Research

This study has qualitatively analysed the Facebook page of two related environmental campaigns launched in India in recent times, besides providing a summary of social media use by the organization. Future research can delve deeper into the use of other platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, X, YouTube etc. Studies could also

explore framing to a greater depth. Significance of influencer-driven environmental communication is also a research area that deserves further research.

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