# Social Media Campaigns for the Development of Sri Lanka after the Ditwah Cyclone

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**Abstract:**

The Ditwah Cyclone had created severe social, economic, and infrastructure damage to the people of Sri Lanka, mostly targeting vulnerable coastal and rural areas. During the post-cyclone situation, appropriate communication is required for reconstruction and sustainable development activities to take place successfully. This article discusses the application of social media campaigns to facilitate development activities in the cyclone-hit nation of Sri Lanka during and after the Ditwah Cyclone. It also emphasizes how social media platforms have been used for disaster management activities as well as promoting sustainable development activities through appropriate social media marketing strategies based on disaster communication and social media theory.

**Keywords:** Social media, disaster communication, development communication, Sri Lanka, Ditwah Cyclone

## 1. Introduction:

A country like Sri Lanka is greatly at risk of climate-related natural disasters like cyclones, flooding, and landslides. A major impact of the Ditwah Cyclone was observed in the destruction of infrastructure, livelihood sources, agriculture, and houses, which hampered development in the long run. However, there was a need for development communications following a natural disaster instead of focusing exclusively on the initial response during emergencies. Social media sites such as Facebook, X (Twitter), YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp have proven to be very useful for development communications following natural disasters like cyclones (Kapucu, 2012).

## 2. Social Media and Post-Disaster Development:

Social media is an important part of not only emergency response but also the development process, too. Development communication, according to UNDP (2019), is more concerned with participation, empowerment, and sustainable development. Social media facilitates bidirectional communication, where the needs of the community can be expressed, while development efforts can be organized by concerned bodies, NGOs, and donors (Houston et al., 2015).

After the Ditwah Cyclone, social media tools assisted in shifting communication and

development priorities from relief to long term development objectives of reconstructing houses and developing early warning systems.

## 3. Objectives of Social Media Campaigns after the Ditwah Cyclone:

The social media campaigns that were run after the Ditwah Cyclone focused on a number of developmental needs, such as:

1. Raising Awareness – Educating people about the reconstruction activities and threats to health and climate resilience.
2. Mobilizing Resources – Encouraging donations, volunteerism, and international
3. Community Engagement - Giving communities that are affected a voice in planning for development.
4. Transparency and Accountability – Progress reports related to reconstruction efforts.
5. Calling for Sustainable Development – Promoting Sustainable Infrastructure and Environmental Protection.

Such objectives are based upon the principles of participatory development communication (Servaes, 2008).

## 4. Key Strategies Used in Social Media Campaigns:

### 4.1 Storytelling and Visual Content:

Photos, videos, and stories of survivors were shared to make the effects and recovery efforts of the cyclone relatable. Visual communication practices were effective in engaging the public on development initiatives (Liu, Fraustino, & Jin, 2016).

### 4.2 Hashtag:

The use of hashtags such as #RebuildSriLanka, #PostDitwahRecovery, and #ResilientSriLanka enabled the coordination of the discussion on social media to create awareness on the various aspects of development. The use of hashtags in social activism has been proven to improve social

### 4.3 Collaboration between Government and NGOs:

The government agencies, disaster management bodies, non-governmental agencies, as well as social agencies, utilized social media to coordinate the rebuilding programs, as well as share the verified information (World Health Organization, 2020).

### 4.4 Community-Led Digital:

The needs of the affected citizens were shared through feedback, experiences of unmet needs, and locally suggested solutions through social media. The bottom-up method of communication helped in the development of inclusivity and the uplift of marginalized communities (Servaes, 2008).

## 5. Impact on Sri Lanka's Development:

Social media efforts that ensued after the Ditwah Cyclone played a positive role in the development of Sri Lanka in various ways. They enhanced fund raising initiatives aimed at rebuilding houses and livelihoods, increased disaster-resistant building techniques awareness, and fostered climate change adaptation policy debates. Additionally, social media endeavors enhanced community cohesion and building resilience in a positive manner (Kapucu and Garayev, 2011).

Nevertheless, issues like digital divides, disinformation, and imbalances in access to technology mitigated the impact of some of the campaigns, especially in the rural areas.

## 6. Challenges and Limitations:

Although it is very effective, development communication through social media has its challenges. These include limited access to internet services and the development of unverified information that may hamper the efforts undertaken in the campaign. Social media should be combined with traditional media like radio and dialogue sessions (UNESCO, 2018).

## 7. Conclusion:

Social media campaigns have been very important in contributing to the post-Cyclone Ditwah development in Sri Lanka. Social media can be very useful in development communication if well organized. In fact, future disaster recovery in Sri Lanka should include social media in their plans for recovery following a disaster.

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