

When Charities Do Journalism: Online Voice For The Poor?

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Can NGO's do journalism? Isn't that the job of independent professionals? In this guest-blog, Polis Intern Esha Chhabra looks at a new campaigning film from Oxfam that seeks to go beyond charity marketing.

Gabura, an island off the coast of Bangladesh, was ravaged by cyclone Aila this May. Rising sea waters are to blame.

Thus, this winter, when heads of state and representatives convene to redesign our environmental policies, it's critical that they hear the voices of those most affected by climate change. Barbara Stocking, president of Oxfam, alluded to this in *The Guardian*:

"It is the people in poorer communities whose voices are all too often drowned out in the drumbeat of reports, debates and summits."



To avoid this, Oxfam has produced a short interactive [online documentary](#) that captures the moments leading up to the storm. Through extraordinary footage, the documentary chronicles the life of rural Bangladeshi farmers and the plight of the storm on their livelihoods- their farms flooded, their harvest ruined, their homes drenched and destroyed. It's an effort to indirectly democratize the discussion on climate change.

Yet, the decision to use a documentary, and a journalistic one, demonstrates the emergence of a new media, free of definition and boundaries. Plus, it's been released in collaboration with *The Guardian*— an established source of print journalism. Here is the blurring of professional lines- development, NGOs, policy, and journalism. Oxfam, a non-governmental, is relying on the mass appeal and power of journalism to advocate to policymakers. The tools are the same; the approach, though, is innovative.

Oxfam's even set up an email on their website that allows you to write to the policymakers, urging them to watch the film. Hence, media meets policy.

This stands as another example of how words and images still carry weight. It's simply a matter of how we use them.

This article by Polis Intern Esha Chhabra

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Watch the short film on *The Guardian*: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/interactive/2009/nov/06/oxfam-bangladesh-cyclone-aila>

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