

Business and Media Need to Turn Up The Heat on Global Warming

Erratic weather patterns, long droughts and flash floods, melting glaciers and rising waters have all compelled even the eco-sceptics to accept a simple reality: it's better to be safe than sorry. It's the reason why we insure our homes, our cars, our lives and all things precious. The world over, more and more people are talking about it. Voters are making it an election issue in country after country. Al Gore has even made it fashionable. As an issue facing the human race, Global Warming is finally getting the traction it has needed.

But Indonesia lags far behind, both in terms of awareness as well as action. Reports of manmade disasters, industrial effluents polluting the waters, flagrant violations of civic sense by industry big and small have all become passe. The annual forest fires and the consequent haze aren't even considered news anymore, because they've become part of the recurring annual calendar. Like every other developing nation, the urge to push the economy ahead drown the voices of concern expressed by activists and academics. The commercial sector enjoys almost unbridled freedoms, with captains of industry permitting damage to local ecologies inflicted by accident or design.

If market forces are the prime drivers of change, then the commercial advantages of environmental responsibility need to be preached to company directors, entrepreneurs and the public at large. Media has a vital role to play in spreading the word to people, across all levels of society. Only when there is an adequate level of awareness can voluntary self-regulation work in tandem with the incorporation of new laws to protect the environment. Faced with similar concerns, local governments in India have begun instituting new-age laws, driving them through the democratic processes of that country. The visible signs of environmental degradation have finally inspired the leadership in China to understand that galloping economic progress will stall if reckless damage to the environment continues unabated.

In Indonesia, the court of public opinion is deeply divided. The real reason for inadequate action is the lack of pressure from the public at large as politicians are usually happy to let sleeping tigers lie. That's because there is a woeful lack of understanding. A representative sample of 1800 respondents from across the country were recently asked if they considered "global warning a serious threat". The country was divided, almost equally. Projected to represent the population, that translates to 68 million people agreeing with the statement, 8 million disagreeing and an alarming 64 million Indonesians saying they "don't know". There is good reason to believe that they "don't know" because they are unaware of this global concern.

When asked "have we tried to reduce pollution", the country was again split in half. That means that about 69 million people nurse the blissful belief that enough is being done already to combat the threat. Read another way, the issue is a non-issue for a large section of society.

The special poll was conducted in conjunction with Roy Morgan Single Source, the country's largest syndicated survey with over 27,000 Indonesian respondents annually, projected to reflect 90% of the population over the age of 14. The results are updated every 90 days.

PT. Roy Morgan Research, Wisma 46, Kota BNI, 17th Floor, Jl. Jend.Sudirman Kav. 1 Jakarta 10220

Tel: (021) 572 2021 or 572 7529 Fax: (021) 572 4864

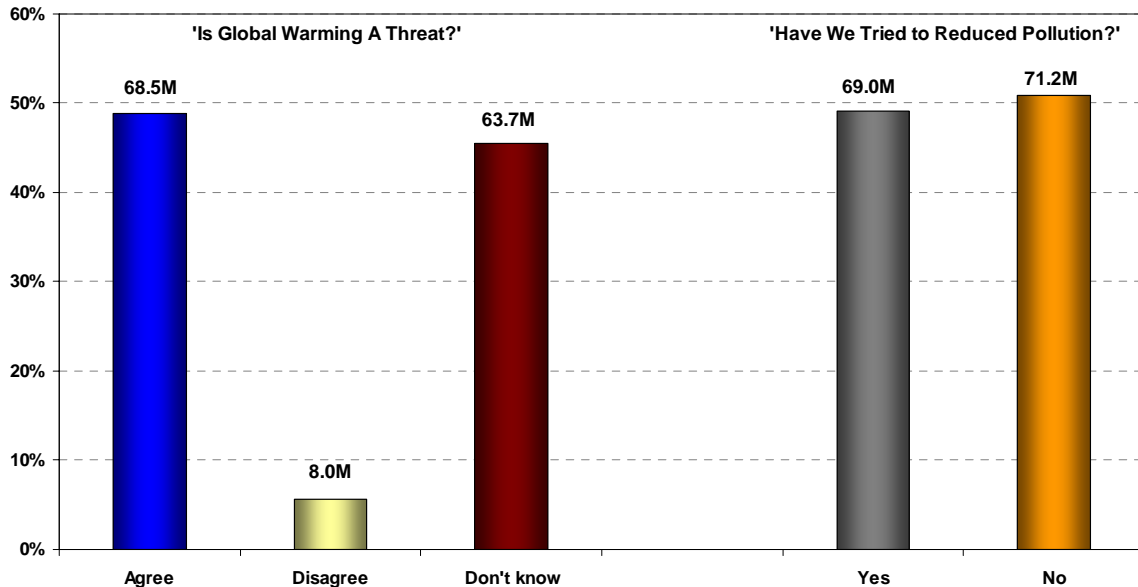
411 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000, G.P.O. Box 2282U, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia

Tel: (03) 9629 6888 Fax: (03) 9629 1250 (03) 9224 5387 Email: melbourne@roymorgan.com

Website: www.roymorgan.com

Offices also in: Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Canberra, London, Auckland and USA

Indonesians on Environmental Issues



Though there are no significant differences in opinion, women appear marginally to be less aware of the issues than men in both urban and rural Indonesia. In keeping with distribution of population, that lack of awareness and understanding is represented most of all by the inhabitants of Java. Similarly, and perhaps more disappointing, is the fact that young people in the age group 14-24 constitute 30 per cent of the population who believe that enough is being done to reduce pollution.

The task of education is not the sole responsibility of teachers in the schools and universities. With almost every Indonesian watching television everyday, with newspapers and magazines capable of influencing those who can influence others, the global message is obviously not getting enough attention from the national media. If business leaders remain devoted to the single-minded pursuit of profit at any cost, there will soon come a time when the price of disrespect to Mother Nature could become counter-productive. Spreading the word has now become the responsibility of all concerned, via media and on the shop-floor.

Global Warming is no longer an issue for ponderous debate, it is a call for urgent action. The plight of people inhabiting low-lying islands with rising waters, dotted around the Indian and Pacific oceans, have so far fallen on deaf ears. Economic self-preservation is perhaps a more convincing reason for nations, businesses and peoples to get their acts together.

The writer can be contacted at Debnath.Guharoy@roymorgan.com