

Whatever the weather

Media attitudes to reporting climate change



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Cover:
Villagers returning with relief aid through heavy rains. Monsoon rains caused flooding in 40 of Bangladesh's 64 districts, displacing up to 30 million people and killing several hundred.
GMB AKASH/PANOS PICTURES

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Climate change and the media

1



YOLA MONAKHOV/PANOS PICTURES

The media play an important role in stimulating discussion in developing countries. Yet journalists asked by Panos say that the media have a poor understanding of the climate change debate and express little interest in it.

Public discussion of the policies and issues involved is urgently needed. This means those engaged in climate change issues must give journalists what they need for a good story.

Developing countries need to debate the options available to them for addressing climate change. Important decisions include whether to make the most of projects on offer under the Kyoto Protocol, how to adapt to the effects of climate change, how to deal with climate-related disasters, and whether to play a role in reducing emissions at home. Yet the Panos survey found that there is little knowledge among journalists about these important choices and they are rarely discussed. The dramatic impacts of extreme weather events, for example, rarely feature in relation to climate change and the topic remains low on editors' story sheets.

The project set out to establish existing perceptions of climate change among local journalists and to share these with policy-makers. Both need to learn each other's language so that the media actively participate in communicating ways to build local inclusion, empowerment and ownership – all essential processes for the lasting success of climate change projects.

Interviews conducted with journalists and media professionals in Honduras, Jamaica, Sri Lanka and Zambia give insights into the attitudes of journalists and the status of the media in these countries.

Based on the survey's findings, recommendations are made for steps that could be taken to improve the involvement of the media in the climate change debate.

Each of the target countries has experienced unusually severe climatic conditions in recent years, often with life-changing consequences. Nearly all the interviewees gave examples from their own experience to support their belief that climate change is actually happening.

'People have had to move into the cities because their homes were destroyed in the rural areas.'

Honduran journalist

'There was a rhyme that we used to recite in school: "September remember, October, it's all over". Meaning, by October the storms or hurricanes were all over. Now, there are hurricanes in October.'

Jamaican journalist

Global policy on climate change

The United Nations (UN) Framework Convention on Climate Change is the main international forum for defining the problem of climate change and finding solutions. Its scientific arm, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, brings together experts from around the world to focus minds on the problem.

The Kyoto Protocol was negotiated under the convention mainly to prevent climate change from getting worse by limiting greenhouse gas emissions. It also includes limited measures of support for those countries hardest hit by the effects of climate change to adapt to its effects.

Under the Kyoto Protocol, those rich countries that have contributed most to greenhouse gas emissions are responsible for making most emissions cuts. Allocating the burden of responsibility based on volume of emissions and ability to pay for reductions resulted in the formation of the 'annex one' set of countries, which have binding commitments to reduce emissions.

However, the Kyoto Protocol's 'flexible mechanisms' have included developing countries by extending the scope of emissions reductions beyond the boundaries of the annex one countries.

For example, the clean development mechanism (CDM) allows annex one countries to fund projects in the South that are supposed to store carbon. These provide a cheaper way for rich countries to cut their carbon emissions, rather than making more costly reductions at home. This market-based approach of carbon trading is a core principle of the Kyoto Protocol.

Development policies driven by the domestic agendas of rich countries sit at odds with development best practice, which recognises the central role of the poor in developing effective and sustainable development. So, rather than policy solutions being led from the top and prescribed to developing countries, the demand for projects should come from the poor to fulfil real needs rather than those identified by rich countries.

There is a growing realisation that the policy debate on climate change has been running parallel to core development discussions, causing a mismatch in policy approaches. Better integration is required. Development planning has not always factored in the actual increasing impacts of climate change. Concerns are growing that there will be difficulty meeting targets such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) because of this oversight.

Conversely, some projects under the CDM, such as Plantar in Brazil, have been criticised by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Carbon Trade Watch for being so focused on carbon emissions that they have been blind to local realities, particularly the development needs articulated by local people in the project area.

A convergence of two streams of discourse and practice is needed so that climate change projects integrate social realities through local participation. Enabling the sustainable development aspirations of the poor in an atmosphere of accelerating climate change presents enormous challenges. It involves a wide range of stakeholders with different competencies and from varying backgrounds. Communications between them and the inclusion of the media specifically play an essential part in accelerating and facilitating this process.

There needs to be an expansion of the limited existing opportunities for local people to participate fully in formation of policy, especially at the national level. The media can encourage greater public participation in debates that shape policy. The extent to which they play this role depends on stories being accessible and interesting, and civil society can help with this.

Carbon trading standards

The European Union (EU) emissions trading system, which came into effect in January 2005, commits thousands of European companies to reducing emissions in line with national targets, or opting to earn cheaper certified emissions-reduction credits by funding projects in developing countries. This dramatic increase in companies seeking projects, which has caused rises in the market cost of carbon, creates a demand beyond the limited number of projects currently in the CDM.

In 2005, changes were made to speed up the CDM to enable a greater flow of project approvals. Projects may now be bundled together for assessment rather than being judged on their individual merits.

Already there is a growing call for stronger project standards than the Kyoto Protocol provides. These changes are in danger of removing project assessment from the local context and overlooking the concerns of people in the area.

Cash-strapped Southern governments, though ultimately responsible for project approval according to sustainable development criteria, could find market forces and foreign investment opportunities increasingly at odds with robust project regulation. Relaxation of standards by some countries could create a race to the bottom, as countries compete for foreign investment, filling the CDM pipeline.

There is a growing realisation that, for climate adaptation and mitigation measures to be effective, people living in climate-vulnerable regions need to be made central to these development processes. Bodies such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recognise that the poor constitute the most climate-vulnerable people and are often the least able to adapt, and so need to be engaged and supported in the process of adaptive change.

Many poor people are currently surviving at the margins of society by cultivating hostile environments like deserts and mountains. The knowledge they have of living in adverse conditions may provide vital lessons in how to adapt to the escalating effects of climate change. Equally, their already precarious existences could become untenable as conditions worsen.

There is a danger, however, of focusing too specifically on the effects of climate change. The experiences of the poor show that coping with these effects cannot be separated from the other day-to-day challenges of living in poverty.

Planning that anticipates future climate change scenarios and supports climate-vulnerable people requires the mainstreaming of participation and adaptation into development frameworks and strategies at all levels. For this to happen on a widespread scale, there is a need for communication between different stakeholders, at local and national levels within countries, and at the international level.

To enable this communication, the media can and should play an important role. But first we should understand the levels of awareness, obstacles to reporting and the needs of journalists and media professionals. Only then will policies that require wide inclusion to be understood and accepted stand any chance of success.

The survey

This Panos survey interviewed 47 journalists from Honduras, Jamaica, Sri Lanka and Zambia, in person and by telephone. The selection process tried to ensure an even spread between print, radio and television (TV).

Each interviewee was asked the same set of 35 questions, about themselves, their perceptions and opinions about climate change, the effectiveness of policy measures, the attitude of the media to the issue, obstacles to reporting on climate change, and steps that would make reporting climate change issues easier and more effective.

The journalists' own suggestions as to how the media can become more accurate and engaged in reporting on climate change issues are presented here as findings. They contain observations about the journalists' attitudes and perceptions about climate change knowledge and debates. Just as there are differences of opinion in scientific circles, there is a diversity of opinions in the media. Informed journalists display a good grasp of climate change issues, while others appear confused or have inaccurate perceptions of the issues. Based on these findings, Panos has developed a set of recommendations for the benefit of policy-makers across the board. These are by no means exhaustive but it is hoped they will provide food for thought and a spark for discussion.

Key findings

Is climate change an actual phenomenon? Virtually all interviewees answered 'yes' to this question and many cited examples from their work and experiences to back up their view.

Causes and effects: specialist environment journalists described causes and effects well, but others were vague and confused, especially about the causes of climate change. As well as greenhouse gas emissions from industry and vehicles, other causes or effects cited included deforestation, ozone depletion, chemical pollution, acid rain and even the Asian tsunami. Greed, over-consumption and infrastructure development were given as other factors.

Adaptation: except for Zambia, few of the journalists interviewed could think of local examples where people were already adapting to climate change. Of those who gave examples, not all adaptation was regarded as positive. Several journalists described a process of migration to the cities due to widespread climate damage in rural areas. Some mentioned changing habits to combat temperature rises, like using air conditioning. A few highlighted the activities of groups engaged in renewable energy projects or recycling schemes. Zambian journalists mentioned a variety of examples of farming practices, such as irrigation and seed saving, along with fuel use change and tree planting projects.

Coping: asked if people could cope with climate change, answers were generally negative, citing poverty and lack of awareness and resources as the main reasons. Zambian journalists were more positive, but said that it would be difficult, requiring a major education drive.

Personal habits: many had considered their personal role in contributing to climate change and, although most had not changed their habits, others had taken action, including travelling less and by different means, exercising consumer choice and using fewer resources such as paper or charcoal. Individual compunction to take action here appears to transcend country boundaries.

The Kyoto Protocol and development issues: most of those who knew about it said that the Kyoto Protocol provided a way forward but was constrained by lack of consensus, and so was probably not enough in itself. There was consensus that developing countries needed to 'do their bit', even though this would affect development. Technology was widely regarded as having a key role to play, as part of a package of measures of prevention and adaptation. Some, however, cautioned that technology was also a major cause.

Access to information and images: journalists lacked access to timely, accurate, clear and understandable information on climate change, and some criticised scientists, NGOs and institutions for using excessive jargon. Suggestions for improving access to information included translating vital information into other languages. In addition, journalists lacked access to images that visually demonstrated the impact of climate change on people's lives.

Access to the mainstream press: journalists believed that mainstream media editors did not prioritise the coverage of climate change. Instead, issues such as crime, poverty and violence attracted media attention, primarily because these issues 'sell' and so are preferred by editors and advertisers. Several interviewees complained that editors sometimes downplayed issues that could compromise advertisers' interests.

Financial resources for environmental journalism: journalists lacked financial resources to dedicate more time towards covering climate change issues. Funds were needed to support alternative, 'green' media initiatives as well as staff members with the capacity to report on environmental issues. With few funds available for reporting on issues around the country, many journalists have had to rely on other information sources such as the Internet.

Capacity-building activities: journalists need training and education programmes on climate change. Suggestions included capacity-building workshops and training sessions that involve experts on climate change, conferences where journalists could share and exchange information and ideas, and exchanges between Northern and Southern journalists. Some suggested the formation of journalist networks, though one had also left such a network because he claimed it was ineffective.

Recommendations

- There should be constant interaction between the people who have the information, the media and those affected by climate change to create awareness of the issues.
- The media should be encouraged by all stakeholders to play a key role in the climate change debate.
- Scientists and policy-makers must break down the jargon used in relation to climate change issues.
- Policy-makers should make financial resources available for training programmes for journalists, including editors, to raise their awareness and understanding of the issues around climate change and the importance of their role in furthering the debate.
- Policy-makers should invest in public media initiatives such as multi-stakeholder dialogues, which would provide space and resources for journalists who want to cover key environmental themes.
- Information sources, such as websites, need to be reliable and accessible. Important information should be made available in a variety of languages.
- An online image bank would enable journalists to download and use images in stories on climate change. This would help combat low literacy levels in some countries.
- There should be a deliberate effort on the part of the media to present people-centred climate change stories to make the issues real to the public and build understanding of the need to be involved in the debate.

Case studies

2



Hurricane Mitch killed thousands of people and made many more homeless. It had a long-term impact on the economy and people's livelihoods.

SEAN SPRAGUE/PANOS PICTURES

Honduras

| People | Economy | Environmental agreements |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Population: 7.1 million¹ ■ Life expectancy: 67.8 years² ■ Literacy rate: 80%³ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita US\$1,001⁴ ■ Population living below US\$2 per day: 44%⁵ | Convention on Biodiversity, Climate Change, Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Tropical Timber 1983, 1994, Wetlands |

Introduction

Honduras is ranked the fourth poorest country in Latin America, with nearly two-thirds of its population living in poverty. Its national economy is highly dependent on earnings from export crops such as bananas, coffee and beef. The country receives high levels of foreign aid and lending, primarily from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

The main environmental problems in Honduras include: deforestation from logging and burning for agricultural purposes; land degradation due to improper land use practices; mining (recent mining concessions allow transnational corporations to exploit mineral reserves); and air and soil pollution. In 1998, Honduras experienced the devastation of Hurricane Mitch, which killed approximately 11,000 people and caused US\$5bn in damage, a sum equivalent to the nation's gross national product (GNP). Honduras received international assistance for reconstruction and recovery, especially from the United States.

Journalists who were interviewed reported that changes in climate are occurring in Honduras. They note that it is now hard to distinguish between the two main seasons, winter and summer. Tegucigalpa, the capital city, used to have an agreeable and warm climate, but now reaches hot, sometimes unbearable, temperatures. Lack of rainfall, including drought, has resulted in the loss of crops.

1 *World Bank Country Report, 2004*

2 *United Nations Human Development Report, 2005*

3, 4, 5 *United Nations Human Development Report, 2003*

Overview of the Honduran media**Major newspapers**

Diario La Tribuna
Diario El Heraldo
 FIDES
Hondudiario
Diario Tiempo
Honduras This Week
 (English language)

Television

VICA Television
Noticiero Mi Nacion
Hable como Hable
Habriendo Brecha
Hondured
Hoy Mismo
Canal 48
Telenoticias TN5

Radio

Radio Catolica
Radio America
Radio La Catracha
Radio Sonora
HRN – La Voz de Honduras
Radio Globo

Coverage of environmental issues in the media

According to the journalists interviewed, environmental issues in general, and issues related to climate change in particular, are not a priority in the mainstream media. Nevertheless, there are a number of initiatives in the media that aim to raise public awareness of urgent environmental problems. There are four main radio programmes: Radio Sonora, the second largest radio station in Honduras, has a weekly programme called 'I Love You Green', which is funded by the Ministry of Environment; Radio America has a programme called 'Eco Radio' that goes out every weekday; HRN – The Voice of Honduras has a weekly programme for children called 'Ecological Adventures'. A weekly programme called 'Ecology 2000' is headed by Dolores Valenzuela, director of Amitigra, an NGO.

In print, *La Tribuna* has a daily column, 'Eco-Commentaries', edited by environmental journalist Ramon Nuila. There are no TV programmes exclusively focused on the environment.

Climate change coverage

All of the journalists interviewed reported that the level of media coverage locally and nationally on climate change is very low in Honduras. The national media do not see climate change as a priority issue, in comparison to what they view as more pressing problems, such as corruption or political scandals. When articles, radio or TV programmes do highlight the issue of climate change, it is as part of existing initiatives set up by environmental journalists.

Most journalists also felt that the general public are not interested in the issue of climate change. In the words of one environmental journalist, 'It is a boring issue for the public. I can't write every week about climate change, people will be bored.' The exception was a radio announcer who said, 'People are concerned about climate change. While they do not necessarily use the term "climate change", they know that something is happening, they know that the climate is changing, that there are more hurricanes, the water sources are drying up, that the forests are dying. They feel it, and there is more interest.'

Most coverage that does exist on climate change and that reaches the Honduran public comes from international sources, such as CNN (in Spanish) and International Cable. All the journalists noted a marked difference between international coverage and local language coverage. They believe that climate change is a priority issue for the international media, but not for the national media. Three journalists said that the quality of national coverage is good. The rest (11) believed that the quality is poor. Most said that this is due to Honduran journalists' lack of access to information.

Coverage of specific issues

When journalists were asked about which environmental issues they wrote or spoke about, as well as the issues which made it into the Honduran press, they answered in order of priority: 1 international conventions, 2 deforestation, 3 hurricanes/natural disasters, 4 industry, 5 transport, 6 floods, 7 rising sea-levels. Environmental journalists said they try to follow and report on major conventions, such as the Kyoto Protocol or the G8 meetings. They recognise the political relevance of these conventions, and believe they are of interest to the general public.

The next issue mentioned was deforestation, and especially shifting agriculture, which is widespread. After this came hurricanes and industry. Hurricane stories were written in relation to Hurricane Rita, Katrina, and the rebuilding after Hurricane Mitch. With industry, journalists criticised what they termed the bad practices of big business, such as the lack of political will to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Obstacles to attracting media interest

Journalists identified two main obstacles to attracting their editors' interest on climate change. First, the majority of journalists felt that they lack quality information on climate change, particularly since most of the information is in English. One noted that even the existing information in English is not expertly informed, but often slanted to support the political position of rich governments.

Second, the national media is controlled by business interests that have no interest in climate change issues. According to one radio director, climate change was not a 'sellable' issue. As a result, the mainstream media do not give environmental journalists space to publish articles on this issue. One said, 'I would love to leave behind my work on political and economic issues and work only on nature issues... but the press does not give me the opportunity. So I do extra projects, like the programme on Sunday ['Ecological Adventures']. A freelance journalist noted that media owners do not want to criticise industry, so they avoid reporting on the issue.

Two of the journalists interviewed felt that the main obstacle is the lack of initiative, concern or interest on the part of journalists themselves.

Media sources

The main sources for information on climate change include: the government, in particular, the Secretary for Natural Resources and the Environment; the Internet; NGOs (in particular, Rainforest Alliance and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF)); *Tierra America*, a web-based magazine developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); international news agencies; and local experts.

Jamaica

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| <p>People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Population: 2.7 million⁶ ■ Life expectancy: 75.6 years⁷ ■ Literacy rate: 87.9%⁸ | <p>Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ GDP per capita US\$4,100⁹ | <p>Environmental agreements</p> <p>Convention on Biological Diversity, Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Marine Life Conservation, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Wetlands</p> |
|---|--|---|

Introduction

Jamaica is the largest of the English-speaking islands of the West Indies. The national economy is highly dependent on export crops, tourism and the mining industry. The primary export crops include bananas, citrus fruit and sugar cane, most of them grown on large plantations. The mining industry's primary exports are bauxite and aluminium.

Overview of the Jamaican media

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Major newspapers</p> <p><i>Jamaica Gleaner</i> <i>The Jamaica Observer</i> <i>The Daily Star</i> <i>The Herald</i> <i>The North Coast Times</i> <i>The Voice</i></p> | <p>Television</p> <p><i>Television Jamaica</i> <i>CVM TV</i></p> | <p>Radio</p> <p><i>Radio Mona</i> <i>Gleaner Power</i> <i>Love 101</i> <i>Hot 102</i> <i>Radio Jamaica</i></p> |
|---|--|---|

Coverage of environmental issues in the media

According to all 11 Jamaican journalists interviewed, there are no newspaper columns or radio or TV programmes that focus specifically on the environment. The *Jamaica Gleaner* had a regular environment column up until 2004.

Interviewees said that the *Jamaica Gleaner*, the *Herald*, and the *Jamaica Observer* had included some coverage of climate change at some point. Radio stations that had aired programmes on climate change include Radio Mona, Love 101 and Hot 102. The two main TV stations – TV Jamaica and CVM TV – have given some coverage to the issue of climate change.

Jamaican journalists rated the level of coverage of climate change issues in local and national media as low. Issues such as crime, poverty and violence are given higher priority. Those stories on climate change that do appear come from international news services and agencies. In the words of a staff writer for the *Jamaica Observer*, 'We mainly pick up international stories [on climate change]. Occasionally a journalist will do a story [on climate change], but we have more pressing issues. It is not a priority for the general public and the government.' The director of a nationwide news network said journalists 'don't have the resources of rich countries and we are busy trying to cover issues of crime and poverty'.

Most of the journalists said that there has been little to no coverage of the Kyoto Protocol. When the issue of climate change is covered, journalists felt that the quality of reporting is good. According to a freelance journalist, the quality is fair to good, 'but there is no impact because of the lack of quantity'.

Coverage of specific issues

According to the journalists interviewed, the most common issue covered relating to climate change is hurricanes. Hurricane Wilma did considerable damage to Jamaica, and it experienced 21 storms and two hurricanes in 2004/5.

Other topics to receive attention were international conventions (such as the Kyoto Protocol and G8 meetings) and deforestation. Other issues mentioned as having been covered but to a lesser degree were garbage disposal, the melting of arctic ice, ozone layer depletion and air pollution.

Obstacles to attracting media interest

Journalists identified two main obstacles to attracting media interest on climate change. First, they do not have access to quality information on climate change. Second, there is a lack of political will on the part of the media to invest in reporting on climate change issues and as a result, journalists are not encouraged to report on them. According to a reporter for the *Jamaica Gleaner*, there is 'no incentive for journalists to write about environmental issues'.

Two of the journalists interviewed felt that it is possible to attract media interest on climate change. In the words of one radio announcer, 'you just have to find ways to interest readers'.

Media sources

Journalists said that the Internet is their primary source of information on climate change. In terms of sources that reflect expert opinion, university libraries and academics were cited, particularly the University of the West Indies. Four of the 11 people interviewed said government agencies are their main source of information, in particular, the National Meteorological Office, the National Environment Protection Agency, the National Planning Agency and the National Solid Waste Management Agency. The Caribbean Environmental Reporters Network (CERN) provides a forum for journalists to share information. It works closely with Panos 'Island Beat', a multilingual radio and print service.



The impact of hurricanes is covered in the Jamaican media because the devastating effects are felt by everyone. Other climate change issues have less exposure.

MARK FRENCH/PANOS PICTURES

Sri Lanka

People

- Population: 19.4 million¹⁰
- Life expectancy: 73.17 years¹¹
- Literacy rate: 92.3%¹²

Economy

- GDP per capita US\$4,000¹³

Environmental agreements

Convention on Biological Diversity, Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change, Desertification, Endangered Species, Environmental Modification, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Wetlands¹⁴

Introduction

Sri Lanka ranks as one of the highest countries in the region on the UN Development Index of poverty indicators. The national economy is dependent on exports of clothing and processed agricultural goods such as tea, rubber, coconuts and spices. Politically, Sri Lanka is marked by ethnic and political tensions between the country's two main ethnic groups – the Tamils and the Sinhalese. It is estimated that more than 60,000 people were killed in the civil war that started in the 1980s.



The media in Sri Lanka are actively involved in reporting environmental issues. Rising ocean levels and temperatures are affecting local livelihoods such as fishing.

JEREMY HORNER/PANOS PICTURES

Overview of the Sri Lankan media

Sri Lanka's media houses are divided between state and private operators offering services in the three major languages, English, Sinhala and Tamil. There are more than 30 daily or weekend newspapers.

Major newspapers

The Daily Mirror (private, English daily)
The Sunday Observer (state-owned, English weekly)
The Sunday Times
The Sunday Leader
The Island (private, English daily)
Dinamina (state-owned, Sinhala daily)
Lankadeepa (private, Sinhala daily)
Lakbima (private, Sinhala daily)
Uthayan (private, Tamil daily)
Virakesari (private, Tamil daily)

Television

Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (state-owned; operates two channels – *Rupavahini* and *Channel Eye*)
Independent Television Network (state-owned)
MBC Networks (private), which operates *MTV*, *Sirasa TV* (Sinhala) and *Shakti TV* (Tamil)
ETV (private)
Dynavision (private)
Swarnavahini (private)

Radio

Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (state-owned, English, Sinhala and Tamil)
TNL Radio (private, English)
Yes FM (private, English)
Sirasa FM (private, Sinhala)
Sinhala Raja FM (private, Sinhala)
Sinhala Sooriyan FM (private)
Shakthi FM (private, Tamil)

¹⁰ *United Nations Human Development Report, 2005*

^{11, 12} *The World Factbook, 2005*

¹³ *Library of Congress Country Studies, 2004*

¹⁴ *The World Factbook, 2005*

Coverage of environmental issues in the media

Sri Lanka has a vibrant media community doing interesting and valuable work on the environment. It is also host to media organisations with a regional focus and a goal of building public interest on environment and development issues.

The Sri Lanka Environmental Journalists' Forum was established in 1987. This is a network of Sri Lankan media professionals concerned with environmental themes. In addition, the network co-ordinates a variety of activities to support environmental journalists such as training workshops about environmental reporting, publishing newsletters, producing documentary films and publishing handbooks.

The level of coverage of climate change varies across the wide variety of media outlets that exist in Sri Lanka. While many journalists, including those active in the Sri Lanka Environmental Journalists' Forum, frequently cover environmental issues, the majority of media outlets prioritise political and social issues rather than the environment.

Coverage of specific issues

National coverage on the environment in Sri Lanka focuses on 'green' issues (biodiversity, protected areas, etc.) and 'brown' issues (industrialisation, air and water pollution, and land degradation). Many issues related to climate change are covered – such as hurricanes, droughts, flooding and deforestation – but the direct link to climate change is often not made. Other themes, such as globalisation, human rights, aid, trade and social justice, are not well covered within the debate on the environment.

The Kyoto Protocol is covered primarily by the English-language newspapers, while the national press ignore it. Interviewees also mentioned that the Small Island States Summit on Climate Change was covered.

Obstacles to attracting media interest

According to the journalists interviewed, the main obstacle to attracting media interest on climate change is the lack of understanding of the issue. According to a *Daily Mirror* journalist, 'science education is not in schools', and therefore people do not have a base for understanding environmental problems. Media houses do not have sufficient understanding of climate change to be interested in contracting investigative journalism. Journalists themselves also lack understanding of the issue of climate change. According to one interviewee, 'some journalists who take an interest are hopelessly confused between ozone depletion and climate change, thinking the former causes the latter!' The lack of understanding is connected to the lack of information, particularly accurate, expert information on environmental trends.

A second obstacle identified in the interviews is the lack of financial resources directed towards environmental journalism. Media outlets invest financial resources into reporting on political and business issues. Those who report on climate change are often connected to NGOs or the UN Environment Programme.

Media sources

Journalists named international news agencies (BBC and Reuters), science magazines (*New Scientist*, *Down to Earth* and *Discover*), and NGOs as the main sources of information on climate change issues. Environmental NGOs hold workshops for journalists, updating them on the latest environmental trends.

Zambia

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Population: 10.5 million¹⁵ ■ Life expectancy: 36.5 years¹⁶ ■ Literacy rate: 80.6%¹⁷ | <p>Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ GDP per capita US\$450¹⁸ | <p>Environmental agreements</p> <p>Kyoto Protocol, Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention on Climate Change, Endangered Species, Wetlands, Hazardous Wastes, Desertification, Ozone Protection, Law of the Sea</p> |
|---|---|---|

Introduction

Zambia lies towards the bottom of the UN Development Index of poverty indicators. Years of drought have had a negative impact on the agricultural sector, in which 85 per cent of people work. Copper mining accounts for most of the country's foreign exchange earnings. Zambia is a multiparty republic; the ruling party is currently the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD).

Overview of the Zambian media

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| <p>Major newspapers</p> <p><i>Times of Zambia</i> <i>The Post</i> <i>Zambia Daily Mail</i> <i>The Lukanga newspaper</i> <i>Weekly Angel</i> <i>Weekly Guardian</i> <i>Monitor and Digest</i></p> | <p>Television</p> <p><i>Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation TV</i> <i>Muvi TV</i> <i>TVN</i></p> | <p>Radio</p> <p><i>Radio Phoenix</i> <i>Radio Maria</i> <i>ZNBC Radio I</i> <i>Radio Ichengelo</i> <i>ZNBC Radio II</i> <i>Radio</i> <i>ZNBC Radio IV</i> <i>Mosi-Otunya</i> <i>Choice FM</i> <i>Radio Chikuni</i> <i>Q-FM</i> <i>Sky FM</i> <i>Radio Yatsani</i> <i>Radio Mazabuka</i> <i>Five FM</i> <i>Radio Lyambai</i> <i>Hot FM</i> <i>Radio Mano</i> <i>Christian Voice</i> <i>Radio Oblate</i> <i>Breeze FM</i></p> |
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Media coverage of environmental issues and climate change

Overall, the interviews with Zambian journalists established that there is generally very little coverage of climate change issues in the Zambian media. It was noted that, despite the frequent droughts over southern Africa, governments of the region are still slow to highlight climate change and its effects on development. On the other hand, the level of interest in climate change has risen among groups in some sectors, especially those involved in agriculture, but at a very slow rate. Interest is generally limited to specific professional circles and interest groups. It was noted that ordinary people are mostly interested to know about the changes in the weather patterns as regards to their immediate activities, not necessarily about long-term trends.

The stories on climate change that do get into the media in Zambia were identified to be hard news stories or press statements. Hard news stories are usually based on political or official pronouncements, or the official opening of some event. On the other hand, stories about drought and floods have been reported but are rarely linked to climate change. There have been stories about the prevalence of water-borne diseases resulting from floods, and about food insecurity as a consequence of drought, but these are not directly linked to the issue of climate change. Journalists rarely try to marry an international news event with local climate change patterns.

15, 16
The World Bank, 2005

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The World Factbook, 2005

18
The World Bank, 2005

The *Zambia Daily Mail* was recognised as carrying the most stories about climate change, because it carries a permanent weekly column on the environment. *The Post* newspaper, Zambia National Broadcasting Company (ZNBC) radio and TV also carry stories on climate change on an ad hoc basis. *The Green Times* used to carry stories about climate change, but had a very limited circulation.

The findings from the snap survey also suggest that the general standards of reporting on issues relating to climate change are very low. Zambian reporters and editors have very little knowledge about the subject and as a result, few stories are carried in the newspapers, on radio or on TV. Limited access to information by reporters was also highlighted. The little reportage that appears barely scratches the surface and lacks in-depth analysis of what climate change is, what its effects are, and available strategies to cope with them.

Only two of the 14 respondents knew about the existence of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Network of Climate Journalists, including the Zambian chapter at local level. One felt that knowledge of the network has not spread because it has not achieved any tangible results. The other network cited is the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), which mainly focuses on environmental issues.



Heavy rainfall after long periods of drought can have disastrous results, yet the link between this and climate change is rarely made in the Zambian media. TRYGVE BØLSTAD/PANOS PICTURES

Coverage of specific issues

Two respondents noted that the national perspective of climate change has been narrowed down to the drought and famine that have affected the southern African region, including Zambia.

All interviewees said there has been very little if any coverage of the Kyoto Protocol in the Zambian press. This was attributed to lack of in-depth knowledge or understanding of climate change issues on the part of journalists and editors, and lack of specialised training for reporters. It was mentioned that, for example, the national broadcaster (ZNBC) does not even have a copy of the Kyoto Protocol. The protocol is mostly covered by the Northern press. As a result, the local media has not yet localised the implications of the effects and impacts of the Kyoto Protocol for the general Zambian population.

Obstacles to attracting media interest

Obstacles that were cited as a hindrance to coverage of climate change issues in Zambia include:

- lack of in-depth knowledge or understanding of climate change issues by journalists and editors
- lack of interest from or motivation by journalists
- lack of specialised training for reporters
- limited access to information for reporters
- reporters consider climate change and environmental issues to be boring
- scientists fail to simplify the language of climate change to enable everyone to understand their findings; journalists do not understand the jargon of climate change.

All respondents felt that the quality of reporting on the issue of climate change is very poor in Zambia and only 'scratches the surface of the subject', due to reporters' and editors' poor understanding of the issues. Reporters were perceived to be poorly equipped to handle the concepts and terminology involved in discussions on climate change and to interpret them appropriately for the public.

Media sources

Respondents said the main sources of information for climate change stories are: local sources, including national scientists and NGOs; government departments, like the Zambia Meteorological Department; international news services; the Internet; and UN reports. While local scientists and institutions were identified as sources of information, interviewees said these sources tended to dwell on current events, with little extrapolation to climate change and its effects.

Most journalists rarely consult science magazines for stories. Some international news magazines, like *Time* magazine, are used as a reference for climate stories.

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