

GREEN **QUALITY JOURNALISM** **STANDARDS**

Reporting on the environment and the climate in Lao PDR



Photo by Ioana Farcas on Unsplash

***Green Action through Media, Mass Organization
and Civil Society in Laos (GAMCIL)***

A project of the Lao Journalists Association (LJA) and CARE Laos

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Introduction

This guide is designed to equip Lao journalists with the essential skills and knowledge needed to report effectively on environmental and climate issues, which are becoming increasingly critical to the future development of Lao PDR.

Developed for the project “Green Action Through Media, Mass organization and Civil society in Laos (GAMCIL)”, funded by the European Union and implemented by CARE along with the Lao Journalists Association (LJA), the guide is meant to be an easy-to-read, accessible resource that journalists can apply in their day-to-day work. It aims to empower journalists to tell these important stories in a way that resonates with their audiences, helping to raise public awareness and promote positive change.

The goal of this guide is to offer practical, hands-on advice for Lao journalists at all experience levels. It is not per se a source of comprehensive information on climate and environmental science, but points reporters to online resources that offer information and developments in these rapidly changing fields. By honing their skills in environmental and climate journalism, reporters will not only enhance their own reporting but also contribute to a more informed public and better inform policymakers regarding one of the most urgent issues of our time. It is hoped that solid, accurate reporting on green issues will encourage people to consider their own actions regarding the environment and climate and learn ways to adapt to a changing world. Green stories also help inform policymakers when they consider rules and regulations on sustainability, environmental protection and enacting policies to protect vulnerable populations. Whether reporting for radio, TV, print or online media, this guide will help reporters tell inclusive stories – including the voices of underrepresented groups such as women, ethnic groups, and youth – that will be of great importance to the future of Lao PDR and its people.

Chapter 1

Quality Journalism Standards

What is quality journalism?

Quality journalism is a term used to describe news that aims to inform the public on events happening in their area, region and the world that is accurate, fair and well-researched. The goal of quality journalism is to serve the public interest, informing people so that they can act in their own best interests. Quality journalism focuses on truth, transparency and ethics and avoids sensationalism. It also provides context and analysis, helping people understand important issues and make informed decisions for themselves and their communities.

Key aspects of quality journalism:

Accuracy and Truthfulness

- Fact-checking all information before publication.
- Using credible and reliable sources.
- Avoiding the spread of misinformation or exaggeration.
- Correcting errors promptly and transparently.

Fairness and Balance

- Presenting multiple sides of a story or issue.
- Avoiding bias or favoring one perspective over another.
- Giving all stakeholders or affected parties a chance to respond.
- Striving for objectivity in reporting.

Evidence-based Approach

- Conducting investigations and research with reliable sources.
- Cross-checking information from different sources to ensure accuracy.
- Seeking expert opinions and verifiable data.

Transparency

- Disclosing sources of information (where appropriate).
- Explaining the process behind reporting, especially for complex topics.
- Clarifying any potential conflicts of interest.
- Being transparent about corrections or changes to stories.

Ethical Reporting

- Respecting the privacy and dignity of individuals, especially vulnerable and marginalized groups.
- Avoiding harm or exploitation through reporting.
- Following established codes of conduct in journalism (example: Lao Media Law).
- Avoiding plagiarism and crediting all sources of information or inspiration.

Accountability

- Holding institutions, corporations and individuals in power accountable.
- Investigating wrongdoing, corruption or abuses of power.
- Engaging in watchdog journalism that serves the public interest.

Clarity and Accessibility

- Using clear, understandable language.
- Making complex topics understandable to a general audience.
- Explaining clearly the meaning of jargon and technical terms.
- Using visuals or multimedia to improve understanding.

Engagement with the Public

- Reflecting the concerns and interests of the audience.
- Including diverse voices and perspectives, especially from marginalized communities.
- Encouraging feedback from the public.
- Being responsive to audience questions and concerns.

Context and Depth

- Providing background and context.
- Connecting local events to broader regional, national or global trends.
- Anticipating the long-term impacts of stories or issues.

Innovation and Adaptation

- Adapting to new technologies and platforms to reach broader audiences.
- Using multimedia, data visualization and social media to tell stories effectively.
- Embracing new forms of journalism, such as podcasts, videos and collaborations.

Cultural and Gender Sensitivity and Respect

- Respecting cultural differences in reporting.
- Striving for gender equality in reporting.
- Avoiding stereotypes.
- Ensuring accurate and respectful coverage of minority or indigenous groups.

Core Journalism Skills



Photo by Alejandro Escamilla on Unsplash

Journalism is a field that can be as varied as the stories it covers. Different beats or areas of coverage (for example, business, environment, culture, sports) require slightly different sets of skills and knowledge. For example, business reporters need to be able to read a financial report and understand market trends while reporters on the climate beat need to have a basic understanding of the science behind the changing climate.

However, there are key skills that every journalist should have and put into practice in all of their work. Below are a few of them from a large-scale survey conducted with journalists and journalism educators by the Poynter Institute, a leading journalism education institute based in the United States. According to these professionals surveyed, journalists like yourself should be:

- **Be concerned about accuracy:** Being correct is key journalism priority. Journalists should only include information they know to be true to the best of their knowledge. Facts should be double-checked and audiences told where the data came from. If a journalist cannot ensure something's accuracy, it should not be included in the story. A good rule to follow is: "If in doubt, leave it out."
- **Have a sense of curiosity:** Curiosity and an interest in the world drives a journalist's desire to uncover the truth and find issues that have not yet been covered but are important to audiences.
- **Use reliable information and sources:** Quality journalism depends on quality information sources. Therefore, journalists should only use sources they know are reliable (such as published books and encyclopedias, official websites, major news

organizations, known experts, international and local NGOs, etc.). In the digital world, where unlimited information – both good and bad – is at everyone’s fingertips, this is especially important. It is very easy for bad actors to spread disinformation or for people to unwittingly share misinformation. Journalists are concerned with the truth and seek to stop or at least slow the spread of misinformation and disinformation. They are very skeptical of less reliable sources (anonymous social media posts, rumors, etc.) and double-check them thoroughly before using them in their reporting.

- **Write or produce content that clear and understandable:** The goal of the journalist is to inform the public. Therefore, if the public is confused after reading, watching or listening to a story, that goal has not been reached. Journalistic content should be understandable to your media outlet’s target audience. That means you should think about who is reading or watching or listening to your reports. Is it an urban, well-educated group, a rural community, a national audience with different levels of education and knowledge? Think about and use the kind of vocabulary that is appropriate for your audience. Don’t assume knowledge on their part about issues. Explain the background and context of all your stories, even if just in a few sentences.
- **Understand journalistic ethics and law:** Different countries have different laws and standards around journalism. It is important to understand these so that you do not get in trouble with the authorities and possible face legal problems. (More on Lao Media Law below)
- **Have a knowledge of current events:** It is important that journalists remain up to date on what is happening in their region, country and the world. They should regularly read and watch content from other media outlets This enables them to follow developments as situations evolve, see different perspectives and put issues into context to help audiences better understand what is happening and why it is newsworthy.
- **Be able to conduct good interviews:** The ability to ask sources relevant and thoughtful questions – be they experts, policymakers or everyday people – is essential. Journalists should be able to talk to a variety of people, from government ministers to rice farmers.
- **Have good news judgment:** A journalist should be able to decide if a story is newsworthy or not. The usual news factors that journalists consider are the following:
 - Does it affect your audience?
 - Is it new, recent?
 - Is it about someone prominent, famous?
 - Did it happen close to the audience?
 - Does it involve conflict?
 - Is it unusual? Unexpected?
 - Is it interesting, significant, controversial?
 - Are people already talking about it?
 - Does it touch people's emotions?

The more of these news factors that apply to an issue or event, the more newsworthy it is.

- **Make contacts and develop sources:** Journalists depend on sources, and developing sources and networks will give them access to information others might not have – whatever topic you are reporting on. If you have good contacts with business leaders, you can contact them occasionally to see if they have any information about interesting developments in the business world. It would be worth a story. For green reporting, learn who the environmental and climate experts in Lao PDR are so you can reach them for interviews or perhaps just to ask if there is anything new or interesting happening in their fields. That might give you good leads.
- **Tell a story in a way will relate to audiences:** Good storytelling skills are crucial in getting people to actually read, listen to or watch your story. A simple presentation of dry facts is not interesting to most people. Humans like stories, so learning the basics of storytelling is a valuable skill that will make your work come alive, no matter what the topic. In a green story, try to find a good character that can illustrate the main issue of your report, such as a farmer affected by drought, a family whose home was washed away by a flood, etc. That way you make an emotional connection to your audience, and they are more likely to read and remember your story.

Lao Media Law

It is important to understand how national media legislation impacts the work of journalists so that they can perform their jobs in compliance within the law. This summary below gives a general overview of the government's framework rules around the media. This summary is based on the 2008 version of the law. It was updated in 2016, but the new version is similar to the 2008 version.

Key Points for a Guidebook for Journalists Based on the Lao Media Law:

Freedom and Limitations for Journalists:

- Lao citizens have the right to receive information and express their views constructively. However, these rights are conditional upon respecting the laws and interests of the nation. Journalists are expected to correct errors and may face penalties for publishing content that is false or harmful to the country.
- Penalties for violations include re-education, fines, and temporary or permanent revocation of licenses and credentials.
- Journalists and other media workers are prohibited from creating information that contradicts the ethics of Lao journalists, such as using poor language and rude words, as well as following the prohibitions determined in article 50 of this law.

Role of the Government in Oversight of the Media:

- The media in Lao PDR is overseen by the government. It serves as a tool for disseminating information that aligns with government directives. Media organizations are expected to promote national unity, patriotism and the protection of state policies.

- The Ministry of Information and Culture manages and monitors media operations nationwide. This includes issuing licenses for media organizations, managing broadcasting frequencies and ensuring compliance with government directives.

Media's Role in Lao PDR:

- According to the law, the media's role is not only to inform but also to educate and advocate for the government policies and national development, writing stories accurately and clearly around arising situations in Laos and other countries.
- The media is responsible for upholding the nation's cultural values and promoting the government policies and socio-economic plans.
- The media should create a positive atmosphere for society and to constructively criticize illegal activities and negative social activities such as corruption and illegal drug activity.
- The media is tasked with ensuring that content is accurate, reflects truth, promotes education, advocates government policies and defends the nation's interests. Media organizations are also expected to fight against corruption and negative social phenomena while promoting gender equality and the rights of women and children.

Restrictions on Expression:

- The media is prohibited from disseminating content that could harm the interests of the nation, reveal state secrets, create division among ethnic groups or spread false information. The law also prohibits promoting violence, war or other content that could damage the country's reputation.
- Journalists and media staff are required to adhere to journalistic ethics, and there are prohibitions on the use of misleading or defamatory information. Additionally, media organizations must ensure that advertising is accurate and does not exaggerate claims.

For more detail, please see the Lao version, available from the Lao Journalists Association (LJA).

Chapter 2

Digital Tools and Journalism

Digital technologies have made it easier for journalists to access information, record video and audio content, and present information to their audiences in clear, easy-to-understand ways. More and more people, especially younger people, get most of their information online, especially via social media channels. In Lao PDR, Facebook and WhatsApp are the most popular platforms. In this section, we look at a few of the tools journalists can use to improve the quality of their reporting and expand the reach of their work.



Photo by freestocks on Unsplash

Artificial Intelligence (AI)?

- AI refers to computer systems that can perform tasks that typically require human intelligence.
- Examples: recognizing speech, solving problems, learning from experience and making decisions.
- AI systems can process large amounts of data quickly and improve their performance over time through machine learning.

Main types of AI

1. Narrow AI (Weak AI): These are designed for specific tasks and functions (e.g., voice assistants, recommendation systems).

- Examples: Siri, Google Translate, Recommendations on platforms like Netflix and Spotify.

2. General AI (Strong AI): These systems could perform tasks across different domains with human-like intelligence. But this type of AI is theoretical and **does not exist yet**.

3. Machine Learning (ML): AI that learns from data to improve its performance over time.

- Examples: Spam filters, fraud detection, image recognition.

4. Natural Language Processing (NLP): AI that can understand and generate human language.

- Examples: ChatGPT, automated chatbots.

5. Computer Vision: This allows AI to interpret visual data from the world.

- Examples: Facial recognition, object detection.

6. Robotics AI: AI used in robots to perform tasks in industries like manufacturing or healthcare.

- Examples: Autonomous delivery drones, agricultural robots, self-driving cars.

AI is not new. Forms of it have been around since the 1950s. It was in the 1980s that research expanded into machine learning and it has evolved very quickly since the 2010s with the advent of **deep learning**, a type of machine learning that uses neural networks modeled after the human brain.

Generative AI

Generative AI represents the next step in the evolution of AI in that it allows users to input prompts in AI tools to generate new, original content, such as text, images, videos, audio and other media. Previous AI systems would analyze and classify, and they operated through pre-existing rules. But generative AI generates new data and ideas.

It “learns” and is trained on documents and information that already exist online, using advanced models to simulate creativity.

AI and journalism

AI can be very useful for journalists. It can alert journalists to breaking news, analyze documents and large sets of data, and even write and produce the news.

But there are also risks. AI systems can potentially spread misinformation and make biased statements or generalizations about segments of the population. Journalists now are trying to figure out how to balance the benefits and risks (especially to jobs). The field is evolving very rapidly, and AI tools are becoming cheaper and more accessible to everyone. So it is very important that media organizations come up with guidelines on how to use AI and what to avoid.

How can journalists use AI?

- **Content Creation:** AI tools can help write articles or generate summaries based on data, speeding up reporting processes.
- **Fact-Checking:** AI can assist in verifying facts by quickly cross-referencing data from multiple sources.
- **Data Analysis:** AI can process large datasets, helping journalists find trends or anomalies for investigative reports.
- **Transcription:** AI-powered transcription tools convert interviews or speeches into text, saving time for journalists.
- **Multimedia Editing:** AI can aid in editing videos and images, making it easier to create polished visual content.

Ethical guidelines for AI use in journalism

1. **Accuracy:** Journalists must double-check AI-generated content for errors or bias, as AI can sometimes misinterpret data or provide incorrect information. Don't use AI systems like Google. Reliable sources are still necessary. Nothing created by AI should go out to the public before being closely checked by a person.
2. **Transparency:** Always be clear with your audience if AI has been used to create or assist in producing content, including article, audio, video and pictures. AI content should be clearly marked. This builds trust and keeps readers informed.
3. **Bias and Fairness:** AI systems can sometimes be biased based on the data they are trained on. Journalists must be aware of this to avoid reinforcing stereotypes or misinformation.
4. **Privacy:** When using AI tools that involve personal data (like facial recognition or data analysis), ensure compliance with privacy laws and ethical standards to protect individuals' rights.
5. **Accountability:** Journalists should always remain accountable for the content they publish, even when AI is involved. Make sure you take responsibility for any errors or misinformation, and correct mistakes when necessary.
6. **Maintain human oversight:** The human touch essential for maintaining quality and ethical standards in journalism. While AI can help streamline workflows, boost accuracy and help with some reporting, it cannot replace human journalists.

AI Tools

New tools are coming out rapidly. But in Oct. 2024, the following were widely used:

Generative AI

ChatGPT 3.5 (free)

ChatGPT 4 (paid)

Google's Gemini (free)

Images

DALL-E (ChatGPT 4)

Canva (free version)

LeonardoAI (free version)

Ways to use social media when reporting on green issues

1. Raise awareness and share real-time updates: Platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp Channels can be used to share breaking environmental news, such as climate-related natural disasters like floods and severe storms, new environmental policy developments, or scientific discoveries.

2. Explain complicated science in easy-to-understand ways: Using photos with a short explanation can get educate audiences without overwhelming them. Example: The short Facebook post below explains the concept of a “feedback loop” in a simple way and includes an interesting picture.

 **NASA Climate Change**  14h ·  ...

As Arctic sea ice melts, it creates a positive feedback loop that amplifies the rate of warming temperatures and ice loss in the Arctic.

 But how does it work?
Sea ice has a bright surface that reflects light from the Sun, whereas dark surfaces – like open ocean – absorb it.

Melting sea ice exposes more ocean water, which absorbs significantly more solar energy and warms up even more rapidly over time, driving more ice loss.



   566 248 comments · 112 shares

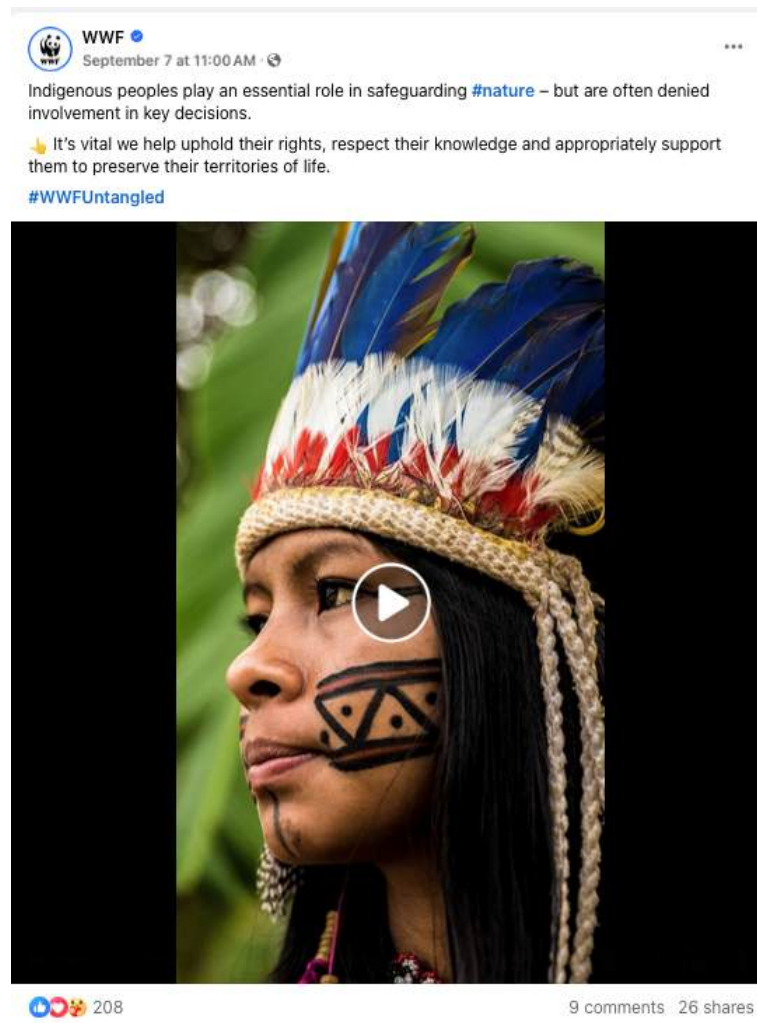
 Like  Comment  Send  Share

2. Engage audiences and reach more people: You can use photos, videos and infographics, to make complex environmental and climate issues more understandable and engaging. For example, a journalist might use Facebook Reels or Stories to visually showcase the impact of floods. Visual content is more engaging to many people and easy to share. Platforms like YouTube can be used to create explainer videos or documentary-style reports on climate change topics. The post to the left below is a video of a sea surge on Facebook; the one on the right is an Instagram post that provides an easy-to-read statistic on renewable energies presented in an attractive way.

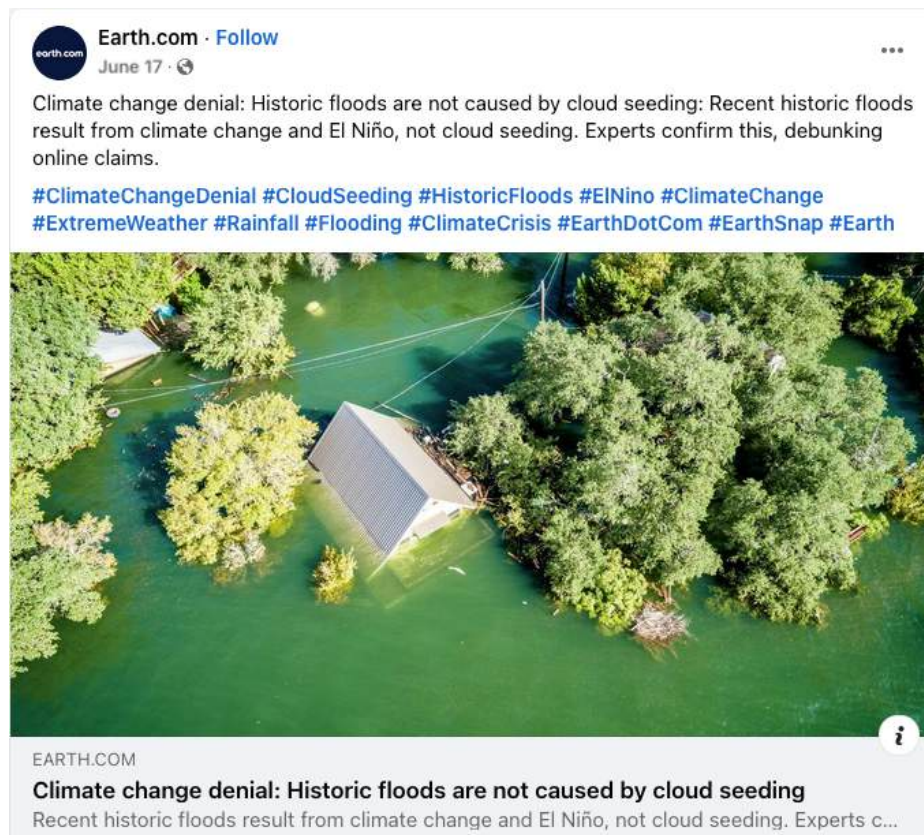


3. Crowdsourcing information and data: Use social media to ask questions and get information from a local or even global audience. You can ask people to share their experiences with climate-related events or ask people in a certain area to tell you what's happening there. You can discover new angles or stories based on what the public tells you.

4. Amplify voices of underrepresented groups: Journalists can feature communities that are especially hard-hit by climate change, including indigenous groups, women, and children and youth. You can share their stories on social media through quotes, interviews, or user-generated content (photos or videos people create and send to you). These are groups that are less frequently seen in the media, but whose struggles and successes should be told.



5. Debunking Misinformation: Climate denial and misinformation are widespread on social media. There is a lot of content online trying to convince people that climate change is not real and that it is just a conspiracy to control people. This is not true and is harmful to efforts to mitigate the worst effects of climate change. Journalists can use their platforms to debunk these kinds of lies and other myths, using accurate, verified data from reputable organizations.

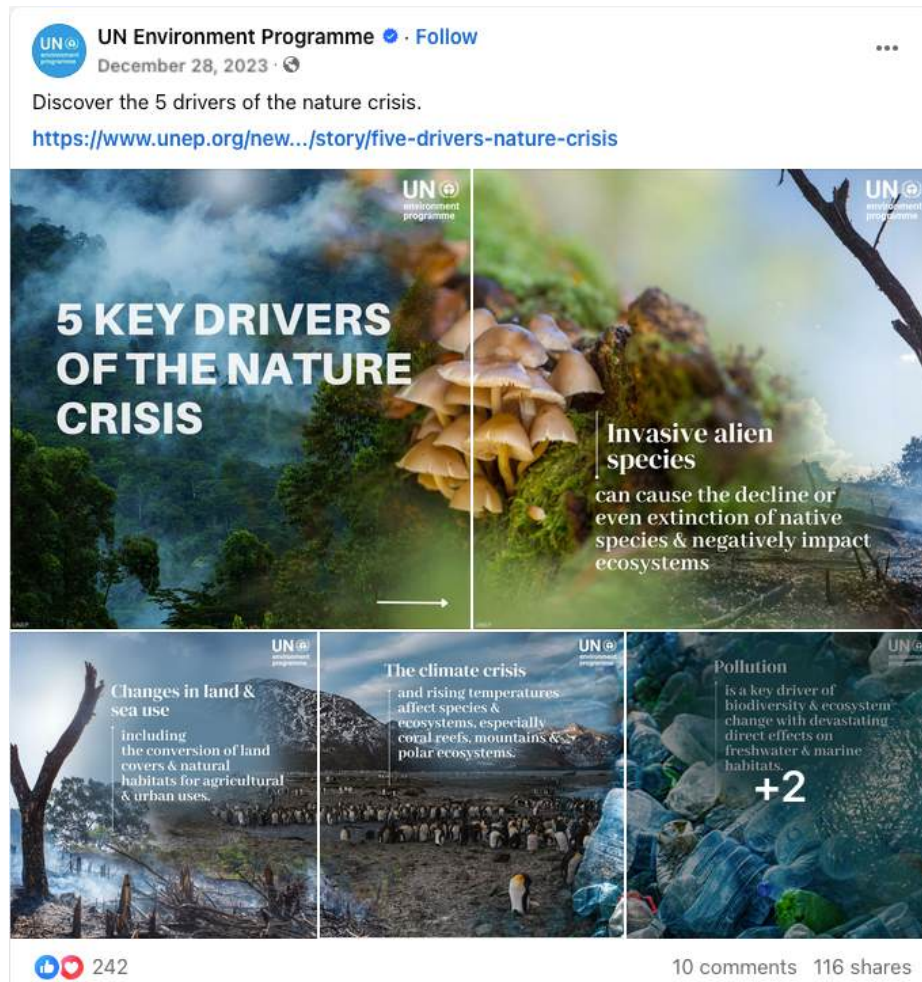


6. Interactive Storytelling: Use interactive threads, Q&A sessions, polls and live streams on platforms like Facebook Live or YouTube to engage directly with audiences. Journalists can invite climate scientists or policymakers for live discussions, answering questions from the audience.

8. Using hashtags: Environment climate-related hashtags, such as #ClimateAction, #environment, #nature, #sustainability, #climatechange and others can increase visibility and reach a broader audience.

Social Media Information Example:

This post on Facebook from the UN Environment Programme presents facts in a clear way using attractive visuals and easy-to-understand language. It provides short explanations outlining five environmental and climate challenges over a related picture. These are good to get the key facts about an issue across to audiences in ways they can easily understand.





Tips for creating better social media posts

Keep your language friendly and conversational: Social media interchanges are like a conversation. The style should be more informal style but appropriate to the subject matter.

Keep posts relatively short: Use only a few sentences per paragraph and limit the amount of total text. Few people read a lot of text on social media.

Post on a variety of topics: You should post about serious climate and environmental challenges and problems, but also add some lighter posts and even have some fun. People like variety and don't always want doom-and-gloom stories.

Post regularly: Make sure people see you every day in their newsfeed. But don't flood people with information.

Ask people's opinions: Ask your audience to share their thoughts and feedback on the story. Start conversations—but also monitor them for rude or defamatory comments.

Engage in dialogue: Keep your posts active. Respond to serious questions or pass comments on to a specific person or department.

Use "calls to action": Ask the reader **to do** something. "Leave a comment", "Tell us what you think" or "Share your family's story". Short, concise and clear, this improves response rates.

Tips for better photographs

People are attracted by good photographs. It will make them interested in reading the story that accompanies it or to stop scrolling on their phone and actually read a post. That's why it's important to take good photos. With today's phone cameras, it's easier than ever to get high quality pictures. As a photographer, you have to think: what will interest people visually?

Action or activity instead of posing

The kind of photos like the one below – from a training workshop – is fine for some things, but it is hard to read on a small screen (the people will be very small) and doesn't tell the viewer much about what is going on because there is no action or activity in the picture. It is static because it is just people posing. There is nothing wrong with the photo in itself, but for a social media post or main picture online or in print, try to capture some kind of activity if you can.



Credit: Deborah Urban

BETTER: The picture below from the same workshop shows someone presenting information. There is some activity going on.



Credit: Kyle James

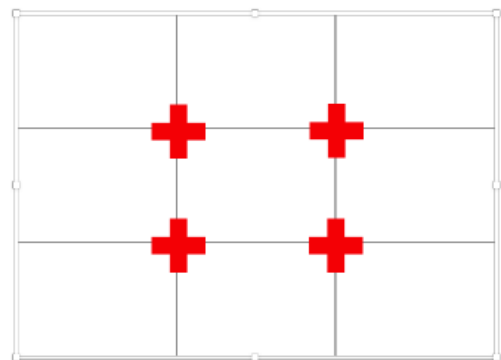
BETTER: This man is rowing up a river, engaged in an activity. It could illustrate a remote area endangered by development or water shortages.



Credit: Kyle James

Using the “rule of thirds”

This technique is used frequently by photographers to make photos more interesting and dynamic. Using the “rule of thirds” add tension and movement to a photo by offsetting the subject from the very center and along the lines or intersections of an imaginary grid on your phone screen or camera viewfinder. Placing a horizon line along the upper or lower third, rather than the center, makes a landscape more dynamic and balanced.



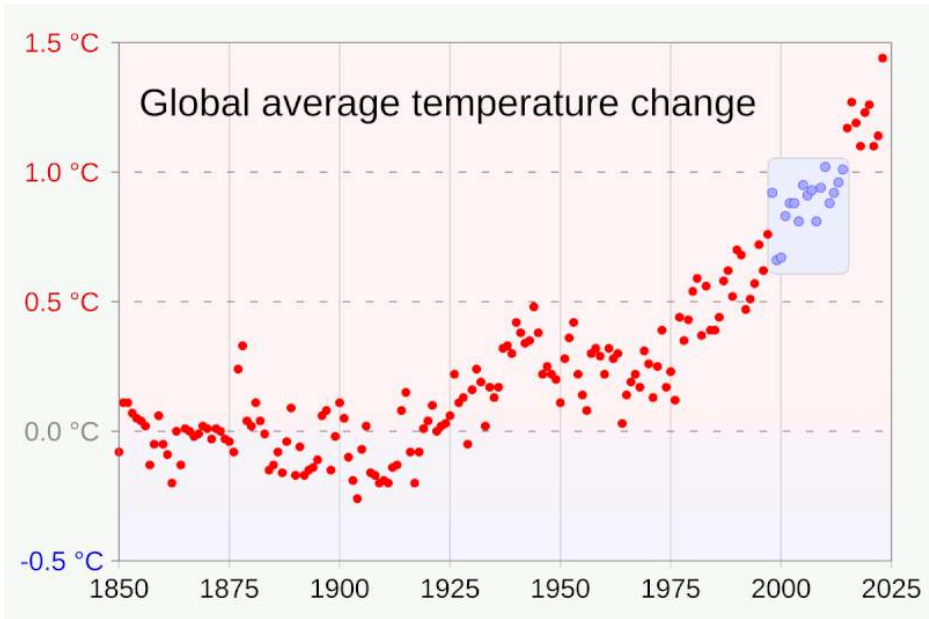
Try to position a key visual element **where the lines intersect** (in the picture below, the woman’s eyes). The subject doesn’t have to be exactly at the intersection but should be fairly close. In doing so, you can highlight the most important elements of your photo by NOT placing them in the middle of the picture (for example, a person’s face or eyes, the horizon, etc.). In action shots, placing the subject off-center can enhance the feeling of motion by providing more space for the subject to “move” within the photograph.



Use infographics to present information visually

In green reporting, there is often a lot of data and statistics. This can be confusing to the public and hard to understand. Putting this data in visual form through graphs and charts can break down this information into smaller pieces that are easier to understand. They can. Infographics can easily illustrate trends like rising global temperatures, carbon emissions, or deforestation rates, simplifying complex scientific findings into easy-to-follow visuals. Also, these visuals capture people's attention and hold their interest better than text alone.

Infographics make it easy to compare different sets of data and show how they are related. This is useful in climate reporting when comparing things like CO2 emissions by country or temperature changes over time (as in the graph below).



Credit: Wikimedia Commons

The pie chart below shows where greenhouse gases came from in 2016.

Global GHG Emissions by Sector

2016 global emissions of greenhouse gases
(fuel combustion emissions attributed to energy consumers)

- Energy industry own use (4.4%)
- Manufacturing and construction (24.3%)
- Transport (Road) (12.1%)
- Transport (Int. Shipping) (1.4%)
- Transport (Int. Aviation) (1.1%)
- Transport (Other) (1.9%)
- Residential (11.0%)
- Commercial (6.7%)
- Unallocated Combustion (3.6%)
- Agriculture (11.9%)
- Land Use Change and Forestry (6.6%)
- Waste (3.2%)
- Industrial Processes (5.7%)
- Fugitive Emissions (5.9%)

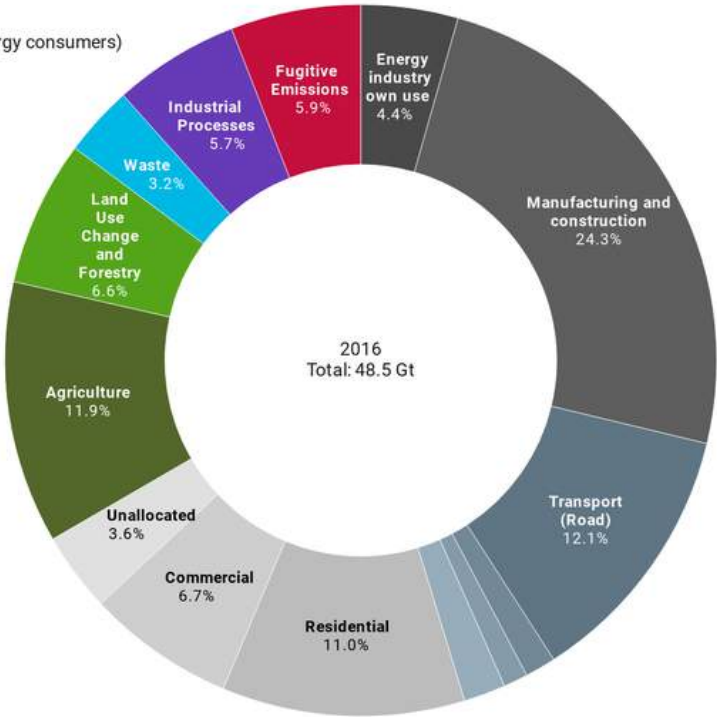


Chart: EarthCharts.org • Source: See website • Created with Datawrapper

Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Tools for creating infographics

There are several tools you can use to create graphs and visuals. Some require a paid subscription although others are free or have free plans. If these don't meet your need, just do a search on Google. There are new tools appearing all the time.

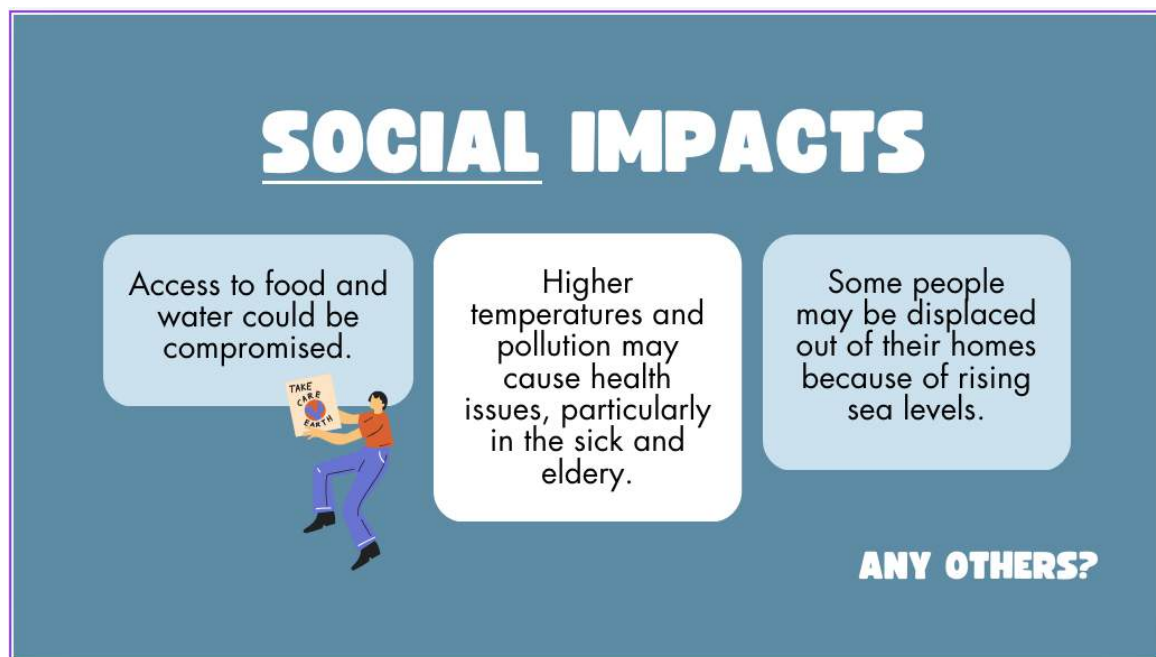
DataWrapper: A popular online tool with a free version that allows users to create charts, maps and tables to present data clearly. It is known for being easy to use.

<https://www.datawrapper.de/>

Excel: This widely used spreadsheet tool allows users to visualize data in formats such as charts and graphs. You can create bar charts, line charts, pie charts, scatter plot, and other types.

Canva: An online graphic design tool on which you can create a wide variety of visual content like infographics, social media posts, presentations, posters and more. It has a user-friendly interface, a free plan, and a big library of templates. It is widely used for social media posts on Facebook and Instagram.

<https://www.canva.com/>



(This post has a “call to action” question in the lower right-hand corner. That encourages people to leave comments about their ideas. It’s a good way to engage your audience.)



Credit: Canva.com

Chapter 3

Green Reporting: Covering the Environment and Climate

Lao PDR's Green Growth Strategy

IN 2018, The Lao PDR government released its **National Green Growth Strategy of the Lao PDR till 2030**. The overall strategy focuses on economic growth, environmental protection, and social development and emphasizes long-term sustainability.

Key Focus Areas:

- 1. Investment Environment and Management:**
 - Improving the regulatory environment to facilitate investments that contribute to sustainable development.
 - Addressing inefficiencies in the investment approval process, reducing environmental and social impacts from approved projects.
- 2. Rural Development and Poverty Reduction:**
 - Promoting comprehensive, inclusive and fair economic growth that reduces poverty, especially in rural areas.
 - Emphasizing infrastructure development, education, and healthcare access in rural communities.
- 3. Gender Roles and Women's Advancement:**
 - Ensuring gender equality in development by focusing on education and socio-economic opportunities for women.
 - Mainstreaming gender roles into national and local policies.

Sectoral Focus:

- The strategy highlights seven key sectors for green growth: natural resources and environment, agriculture and forestry, industry and commerce, public works and transport, energy and mines, information and culture, and science and technology.

Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability:

- Emphasis on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting renewable energy and sustainable agricultural practices.
- Strengthening the country's resilience to natural disasters and climate-related risks.

Institutional Mechanisms:

- Establishment of a National Green Growth Promotion Centre and a Green Growth Fund to coordinate and finance sustainable development initiatives across sectors.

The **National Green Growth Strategy** lays out its strategies for addressing the environmental and climate challenges facing Laos in the coming years. Here is a summary:

1. High Vulnerability to Climate Change:

- Laos is highly dependent on natural resources and vulnerable to climate change. This makes the country particularly susceptible to the impacts of climate-related natural disasters, such as droughts, floods, storms, and outbreaks of diseases.
- By 2050, it is estimated that the temperature in Laos will rise by 0.5–0.7°C, and rainfall will increase by approximately 14%, leading to heavier rainfall but shorter rainy seasons. These changes are expected to increase the frequency and intensity of natural disasters.

2. Key Adaptation Strategies:

- The government has implemented policies and strategies to adapt to climate change and manage natural disasters, such as the National Adaptation Plan for Action (NAPA) and the Strategic Plan on Disaster Risk Management.
- The National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM) has been established to coordinate surveillance, early warning systems and post-disaster restoration efforts. The committee operates at national, provincial and district levels.

3. Promoting Resilience and Reducing Vulnerability:

- The strategy aims to improve the awareness, capacity and understanding of officials and organizations involved in climate adaptation.
- Efforts focus on promoting diversified income sources for the population to reduce their vulnerability to natural disasters. This includes creating opportunities for people to generate income through environmentally sustainable and disaster-resilient practices.

4. Low-Carbon Economic Growth:

- Laos is committed to promoting economic growth with low greenhouse gas emissions. The strategy emphasizes the use of clean and environmentally friendly technologies that are energy-saving, produce less waste and contribute to climate change mitigation.
- The strategy also encourages the protection and expansion of carbon sinks, such as forests and soil, to help absorb greenhouse gases.

5. Challenges in Implementation:

- Despite these efforts, challenges remain, including a limited budget, low awareness among key stakeholders and a lack of efficient adaptation technologies. These challenges hinder the full mainstreaming of climate adaptation strategies across national and local development plans.

What is Environmental and Climate Change Journalism?



Photo by Ivan Bandura on Unsplash

Definitions and differences:

Environmental Journalism focuses on covering stories related to the natural world, ecosystems, biodiversity, and the human impact on the environment. It involves reporting on a broad range of issues, including:

- **Pollution** (air, water and soil)
- **Deforestation** and land use
- **Wildlife conservation** and biodiversity loss
- **Water scarcity** and resource management
- **Sustainable agriculture** and land degradation
- **Energy resources** (both renewable and non-renewable)
- **Environmental policies** and laws at local, national, and international levels

Environmental journalism aims to inform the public about the state of the environment, highlight any degradation or improvements, to explore impacts of a changing environment on people and communities, and to advocate for better environmental protection through public awareness. Journalists in this field might cover stories on local pollution issues, government policies on natural resource management or the impacts of industrial activities on ecosystems.

Climate Change Reporting is an aspect environmental journalism but focuses specifically on the causes, impacts, and responses related to global climate change. Some specific climate change themes are:

- **Greenhouse gas emissions and global warming**
- **Fossil fuels and renewable energy** and their role in the changing climate
- **Extreme weather events** (hurricanes, floods, droughts) and their links to climate change
- The impact of climate change on **seasons, agriculture, livelihoods and ecosystems**
- **International climate agreements** (like the Paris Agreement) and the progress of climate policies
- **Adaptation and mitigation** strategies to cope with the effects of a changing climate

How to Find Green Stories

Environmental and climate-change stories are not difficult to find as these challenges are becoming more and more evident in our everyday life. Of course, reporters can cover extreme weather events like storms and the resulting floods, but they can dig deeper and look for different kinds of green-related topics.

1. Monitor local and global climate trends and research: Read reports about changes in weather patterns, extreme weather events, and climate-related issues such as floods, droughts, or rising sea levels. Look at websites that feature new research on weather and the environment. Weather services, government agencies, and international platforms (some listed below) often release climate data and developments that can serve as a starting point for stories. Find local communities and businesses which are affected by these trends and or people and organizations doing something to help the environment or the climate.

2. Connect with environmental and climate groups: Build relationships with local NGOs and environmental activists. Consult the websites of global organizations like WWF or Greenpeace, some of which have operations in Lao PDR. These groups can provide story ideas or information about ongoing projects and developments.

3. Attend environmental conferences and summits: Go to meetings or conferences having to do with the environment or climate in Lao PDR. If resources are available, send a reporter to the UN's annual Climate Change Conference (COP). Conferences provide access to decision-makers, researchers and activists who can talk about current issues.

4. Follow policy developments and government activities: Stay up to date about government climate policies, sustainability initiatives or international agreements, such as the Paris Agreement. Report on how these policies are being implemented.

5. Visit local communities: Explore how local communities, especially vulnerable or indigenous populations, are being affected by climate change or environmental challenges. Attend town meetings, talk to farmers, or explore how urban areas are coping with environmental challenges like pollution or extreme weather.

6. Use social media: Follow climate change topics on social media and monitor conversations to see what people are talking about or if any grassroots campaigns are

starting. Social media can offer clues about what people are talking about regarding climate change.

Understand the (Basic) Science

Reporters covering green stories do not have to have advanced degrees in environmental sciences but they do need to understand the basics so that can understand and explain complex topics like carbon cycles, biodiversity and greenhouse gases in a way that their media outlet's audience can understand.

Like with all sciences, environmental and climate science is evolving, and you should try to keep up with developments. You can familiarize yourself with the overall issue through videos on YouTube. (Just make sure the maker of the video is a reliable source.) Here are a few good introductions to the climate change issue in English.

What is Climate Change? (13:02)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PFhrpyWV-w>

IPCC's Climate Change Report Explained (12:41)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82dBcj_GaVU

Al Jazeera "What is Climate Change" (7:06)

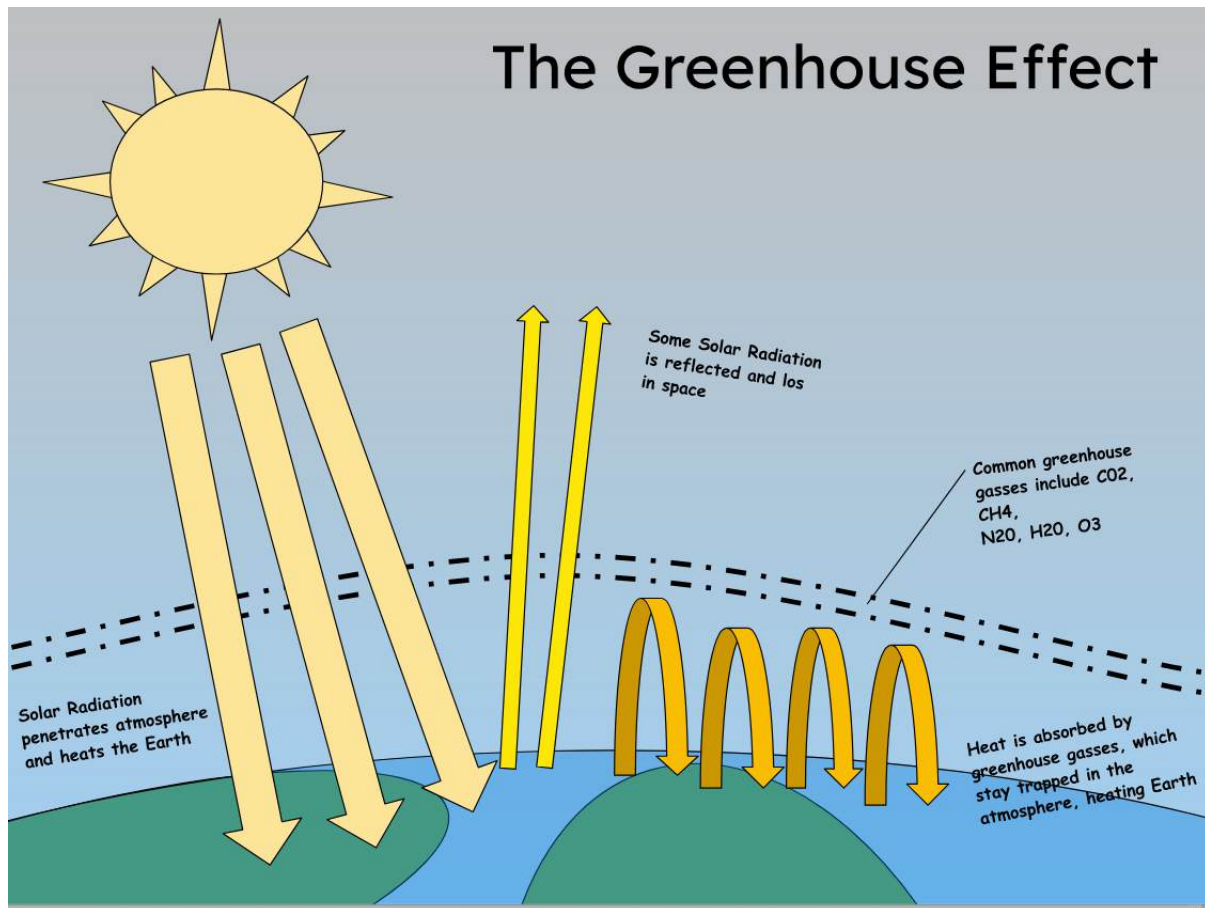
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcBXmj1nMTQ>

Journalism & Environment (video series)

<https://conseilsdejournalistes.com/en/journalism-environment/>

The Greenhouse Effect

The **greenhouse effect** occurs when gases like carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), and water vapor in the Earth's atmosphere trap heat from the sun. Normally, solar energy enters the atmosphere, warms the Earth and then radiates back into space. Greenhouse gases absorb some of this heat and radiate it back to the Earth's surface, keeping the planet warmer than it would be otherwise. While this natural process is essential for life, human activities have increased greenhouse gas levels, intensifying the effect and leading to **global warming**.



Credit: Hungrypenguin459, CC BY-SA 4.0

Other Climate and Environment Resources

This guide is not a comprehensive guide to climate or environmental science. But you can visit some of the following websites to get more detailed information. They are in English, but you can try translating the web pages into Lao.

Reporter resources – Earth Journalism Network

<https://earthjournalism.net/resources>

Tools to help report on climate – Covering Climate Now

<https://coveringclimatenow.org/resource/tools-to-help-report-on-climate/>

Climate science 101 – Covering Climate Now

<https://coveringclimatenow.org/resource/climate-science-101/>

Environmental Reporting Toolkit

<https://ijn.net.org/en/toolkit/environmental-reporting>

Learn basic vocabulary around green issues:

Below are just a few examples of vocabulary that reporters come across in reporting on green issues.

Anthropocene

Proposed new geological epoch resulting from significant human-driven changes to the structure and functioning of the Earth system, including the climate system.

Biodiversity

The variety of all living organisms, including plants, animals, and microorganisms, in a particular environment. Greater biodiversity ensures ecosystems are healthier and more resilient to changes.

Ecosystem

A community of living organisms, like plants and animals, interacting with their physical environment, such as air, water, and soil.

Sustainability

Meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs, especially in relation to resource use.

Anthropogenic

Refers to environmental changes or impacts that are caused by human activities, such as pollution, deforestation, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Eutrophication:

The process by which excess nutrients, often from fertilizers, run off into water bodies, causing algae blooms and reducing oxygen levels, which harms aquatic life.

Decarbonization

The process of reducing or eliminating carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from energy production, industries, and transportation to mitigate climate change.

Feedback Loops

A process where an initial change causes further changes that either amplify (positive feedback) or diminish (negative feedback) the initial effect. For example, melting Arctic ice reduces surface reflectivity, causing more heat absorption and more melting (a positive feedback loop).

Ecological Resilience

The ability of an ecosystem to recover and maintain functionality after being disturbed by external factors, such as natural disasters, climate change, or human activities.

Climate Change Vocabulary

Carbon Footprint

The total amount of greenhouse gases produced by human activities, usually measured in tons of CO₂. For example, if someone flies or drives a lot, they have a larger carbon footprint.

IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)

An international body of scientists that reviews and assesses scientific research on climate change and provides comprehensive reports to guide global policies.

Net zero emissions

When human-caused emissions of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere are balanced by human-caused removals over a specified period.

Mitigation measures

Technologies, processes or practices that contribute to reduce emissions or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases.

El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO)

Warming of the tropical Pacific Ocean and fluctuation of a surface pressure pattern. It has a large impact on the wind, sea surface temperature and precipitation patterns in the tropical Pacific.

Climate justice

Addressing climate change while safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable people and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its impacts equitably and fairly.

Decarbonization

The process that aims to achieve zero fossil carbon existence. Typically refers to a reduction of the carbon emissions associated with electricity, industry and transportation.

Decoupling

In relation to climate change, it is where economic growth is no longer strongly associated with consumption of fossil fuels.

Anthropogenic

Resulting from or produced by human activities.

Adaptation

The process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects, in order to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities.

Carbon sequestration

The process of storing carbon in a carbon pool.

Tropical cyclone

The general term for a strong, large-scale disturbance that originates over tropical oceans. Distinguished from weaker systems by higher wind speeds.

Sustainable development

Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and balances social, economic and environmental concerns.

Tipping point

A level of change in system properties beyond which a system reorganizes and does not return to the initial state even if the drivers of the change are abated.

Greenhouse gases (GHGs)

The atmospheric gases responsible for causing global warming and climate change. The major ones are carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O).

Resilience

The capacity of social, economic and environmental systems to cope with a hazardous event or trend or disturbance.

Industrial revolution

Period of rapid industrial growth with far-reaching social and economic consequences, beginning in Britain during the second half of the 18th century.

Climate target

A temperature limit, concentration level, or emissions reduction goal used towards the aim of avoiding dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.

Avoid Jargon

While you might know these and other issues, your audience probably doesn't. Don't just mention words like "anthropogenic" or "mitigation" without explaining what they mean in simple terms.

Also, when interviewing experts, do not be afraid to ask them to explain something again if you don't understand it or the jargon he or she uses. Experts are used to these terms and the complicated science involved, but you and your audience probably isn't. **The goal: understanding!**

Use Reliable Sources

It is important for journalists to use reliable sources, also when reporting on green issues. Using reliable sources ensures that the information presented is credible and trustworthy. Inaccurate reporting can mislead the public, break the trust between the media and the public, and diminish the journalist's and publication's credibility.

Green topics often involve complex scientific data. So journalists should go to expert sources to make sure the information they're getting is correct. Errors or misunderstanding the science can lead to confusion and result in a poor-quality or even damaging report.

Because green journalism often influences government policy and action, accurate reporting based on reliable sources can influence legislation and corporate behavior. Inaccurate reports can slow progress or lead to poor decisions being made.

How can you know if a source is reliable?

Check the Source's Expertise

Verify the qualifications of the source. Experts in climate science, environmental policy, or ecology, such as climatologists, environmental scientists, or organizations like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), are much more credible than generalists or non-experts.

Use Research from known and trusted organizations

Rely on studies and data published in well-known scientific journals or organizations with a solid track record whose research is checked by other experts in the field. Trust sources that are known for rigorous fact-checking and journalistic standards, such as BBC, Reuters or the United Nations Environment Programme. Avoid relying on websites or publications with a known history of spreading misinformation or sensationalizing facts.

Cross-Check Information:

Cross-reference facts with multiple sources to confirm their accuracy. If multiple reputable sources report the same information, it is more likely to be reliable.

Evaluate the Source's Objectivity:

Ensure that the source does not have a conflict of interest or a bias that could influence the information. For example, corporate-funded studies on environmental issues may carry bias, while independent academic research tends to be more objective.

Some reliable information sources (international):

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

<https://www.ipcc.ch/>

Covering Climate Now

<https://coveringclimatenow.org/resources/>

Carbon Brief

<https://www.carbonbrief.org/>

Climate Central

<https://www.climatecentral.org/>

World Resources Institute

<https://www.wri.org/>

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

<https://www.unep.org/>

The International Energy Agency (IEA)

<https://www.iea.org/>

Yale Climate Connections

<https://yaleclimateconnections.org/>

Conservation International

<https://www.conservation.org/>

WWF (World Wildlife Fund)

<https://www.worldwildlife.org/>

Environmental Defense Fund (EDF)

<https://www.edf.org>

Global Forest Watch

<https://www.globalforestwatch.org/>

International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)

<https://www.iied.org/>

Earth Journalism Network (resources for journalists)

<https://earthjournalism.net/resources>

Some reliable information sources (in Lao PDR):

Lao Biodiversity Association (LBA)

Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) – Laos Program

<https://laos.wcs.org/>

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) – Laos

<https://www.wwf.org.la/>

The Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC) – Laos Office

<https://www.recoftc.org/>

Green Community Development Association (GCDA)

<https://laocso.org/member/gcda/>

Village Focus International (VFI) (Land rights, environmental conservation, sustainable rural development)

<https://villagefocus.org/>

Lao Conservation Trust for Wildlife (LCTW)

<https://lctwildlife.org/>

Accuracy, Transparency and Balance in Green Reporting

While accuracy and transparency are central pillars of quality journalism, they are especially important in green reporting for several reasons:

- **The reporting can have a long-term impact:** Environmental and climate changes are long-term and global in scale. Accurate reporting influences not only current understanding but also future policy decisions. Facts must be well-supported.
- **The issue is complex:** Climate science is complex. Accurate, transparent, and balanced reporting helps break down complex ideas that the public can understand.
- **The issue is urgent:** As the consequences of climate change become evident, strong responses are urgent. Inaccurate or unbalanced reporting can delay action.

1. Why is accuracy essential?

- Misinformation can cause public confusion about the seriousness of climate change, hurt efforts to combat it and undermine the credibility of environmental journalism.
- **Example:** Misreporting data on rising sea levels or greenhouse gas emissions can distort public understanding and delay necessary policy actions.

2. Why is transparency essential?

- It ensures that journalists say how they gathered their information and from whom. This builds trust with the audience, especially on contentious issues like climate change, where skepticism and misinformation are common.
- If information sources, research methods, or affiliations are not disclosed, audiences may doubt that the reporting is reliable.
- **Example:** Clearly citing scientific studies, organizations or the credentials of experts and openly explaining uncertainties helps maintain credibility.

3. Why is balance essential?

- Balance makes sure that various points of view are represented, especially when looking at the social, economic and political dimensions. However, balance does not mean giving equal weight to scientifically debunked views, like climate change denial. That is called false balance and misinforms the public.
- **Example:** Journalists must ensure that science-based views on climate change are covered more prominently than fringe viewpoints that lack evidence.

4. Communicating risk and uncertainty:

- Climate and environmental issues often involve uncertainty and future predictions. It's best to use terms like "likelihood" or "probability" when discussing future climate scenarios and be transparent about the limits of scientific predictions.

Storytelling

This is the question reporters should be asking themselves when they are producing a story on green issues:

**What makes a green story compelling and engaging?
How do you present the facts in a way that makes the
audience care?**



Photo by Roman Kraft on Unsplash

Getting the science and facts right is crucial, but that might not connect emotionally with your audience. **You need to tell a story !**

Storytelling is the most powerful communications tool you have available. People have been communicating through stories for thousands of years.

But why do people like a good story?

Stories help people remember.

When you have facts you want people to remember, it's better to incorporate those facts within a story that involves people and their hopes and fear, struggles and successes.

Stories help people emotionally relate to an issue

Studies show that donors tend to give twice as much when presented with a story about an affected individual as opposed to reading huge abstract numbers of the overall scope of a problem.

Which of these stories is more compelling to you?

Story #1

Rising sea levels are affecting the Philippines. As ice caps and glaciers melt, sea levels are rising, which affect communities near the coastlines. The Philippines has seen a 25% increase in the number of typhoons that hit the country each year. Scientists, including the meteorology department at the University of Manila, say this is connected to climate change. If trends continue, an estimated 500,000 Filipinos could have to flee their homes by 2027.

Story #2

An increase in sea levels around the Philippines has driven Rokia, a 7-year-old girl who lives in Manila, and her family out of her home. Rokia lives in the poor Baseco neighborhood in central Manila near the coast. Water has continued to rise toward the small room she shares with her parents this year and every time there is a typhoon, her home is flooded, and her family has to flee. Usually they can come back, but the water is not subsiding this time. Last year, the number of typhoons hitting Manila was the highest on record, an increase of 25% from the year before, which climate scientists from the University of Manila say is connected to climate change. Climate change is not abstract any more to Rokia. It has taken her home away from her.

Both reports contain the same basic information, but Story #2 tells the story of a young girl who is losing her home due to climate change. It takes the reader beyond a list of statistics and shows how humans are impacted.

People-Centered Reporting

Humanize your story

More than anything else, people care about their health, their wealth and the future of their children. The environment and climate change are relevant to all three of these things, so try to think in those terms when you are working out how to tell your story.

As in the example above, make the abstract real. Putting a price tag or real-world consequence on action or inaction will help, especially if you do it in terms people readily understand (like their homes, livelihoods or the price of food).

Highlight a main character

Highlight a living being involved in the action, like Rokia in the example above. Or a farmer who has lost his crops to flooding.

Every story revolves around at least one character. Maybe it's even an animal. Most memorable stories stick in our minds because of the characters involved.

Characters are crucial to storytelling because they are the connection between the storyteller and audience. The more your audience can relate to the character, the more they see themselves in that person's shoes and relate to the experience or the issue.

Example: The UNHCR says 20 million people are displaced due to climate change a year. This is important, but stories of big statistics can be overwhelming and abstract. It's better to:

- Tell the story of one family
- Tell how it is affecting them personally
- Get quotes from them that tell how they feel (emotional impact)
- Add data and experts to explain the reasons for their problems (data and evidence)
- Show the human cost.

Three Storytelling Takeaways

1. Storytelling helps people to emotionally relate to what you are reporting on
2. Storytelling is non-fictional. You are not making up a story. The story has to be genuine and backed up by data and technical information.
3. Storytelling is a technique that involves characters, describing a scene with details, describing action or conflict and touching emotions.

From Local to Global and Global to Local

Try to connect **local issues to global ones**, and **global issues to local experiences**. This makes big, complex topics easier to understand and more relevant to people's everyday lives.

For example, explaining how global climate change affects a local drought or flood helps people see how these large-scale problems directly impact their communities. The connection makes the issue feel more real and urgent, encouraging people to care about and act on the environment in their own areas.

Linking local events to global trends gives people a clearer idea of how their situation fits into a worldwide problem.

- How does this relate to similar events in the region?
- Is it part of a global trend?
- What are the causes/effects beyond the local area?

For example, a report on deforestation in Laos can show how it contributes to bigger issues like global warming or the loss of biodiversity around the world. This helps readers understand that their local environment is part of a bigger system, and what happens in one place can affect other parts of the world.

Making these connections shows that solving environmental problems requires both local action and global cooperation. It highlights how local efforts, like community conservation projects, can make a difference on a larger scale and inspire other communities to do similar things.

Include Diverse Voices

Too often, green issues only include voices of experts and policymakers. But it is important to include a wider variety of perspectives to show how different communities and populations are affected in different ways.

For example, marginalized groups such as indigenous populations, ethnic groups, low-income communities and women often suffer the most from environmental damage and climate change impacts. Even though, they contribute the least to these problems.

By including their perspectives, journalists can provide a fuller and more accurate picture of how climate change affects people in Laos.

Diverse voices also offer valuable local knowledge and even possible solutions that might otherwise be overlooked.

Rural ethnic communities, for example, might have traditional knowledge about managing natural resources and adapting to environmental changes. These viewpoints could present alternative, more sustainable ways of thinking about and tackling environmental issues. It allows journalists to not only document problems but also share innovative solutions rooted in local, traditional practices.

Another reason for including more diverse voices is to make reports more appealing to the public. When readers or viewers see stories that reflect their own experiences and challenges – when they see people like themselves – they are more likely to feel connected to the issue and act.

Of course, politicians making policy decisions and experts giving hard data and technical knowledge are crucial, but do not forget to be inclusive and include the voices of:

- People from different regions
- People of different genders
- People from vulnerable communities
- People of different socio-economic backgrounds

- People of different ethnic groups
- People of different ages
- People with different kinds of jobs and professions

Reporting on vulnerable and marginalized communities

As mentioned above, green issue reporters should talk with a variety of people, not just urban residents and experts. As vulnerable and marginalized communities are often those who are most negatively affected by climate change – often because they lack the capacities to absorb climate and environment shocks – it is crucial to get their perspective. But reporters need to keep a few things in mind:

1. Avoid stereotypes and victimization: Vulnerable communities are often portrayed as helpless victims, which can reinforce negative stereotypes. Reporters should not shy away from stories of hardship and suffering. But you can also show resilience, adaptability and efforts of these communities to address green challenges. Are they trying out new solutions to problems? Highlight them.

2. Cultural sensitivity and understanding: Communities can have unique cultural values and traditions that influence how they relate to the environment. Try to understand their beliefs, practices and points of view.

3. Get consent, treat with dignity: Vulnerable communities may be hesitant to share their stories because of past misrepresentation or exploitation. Always seek informed consent before conducting interviews or taking photos.

4. Understanding the impact on livelihoods: Green challenges often negatively affect livelihoods and lead to displacement and food insecurity. When reporting, link environmental and climate impacts to broader factors like agriculture.

5. Collaborate with local journalists and organizations: Local journalists and NGOs often have more knowledge of the issues affecting their communities, and they have built up trust with local groups. Team up with local journalists or NGOs to navigate sensitive issues and provide a better understanding of the local challenges.

Tackling Climate/Environmental Denial and Misinformation



Photo by Hartono Creative Studio on Unsplash

The huge majority of the world's scientists accept that climate change is real, and that environmental degradation continue to have huge negative effects around the globe, yet denial, distortion and falsehoods about well-established scientific facts are still flooding the internet and media landscape.

- The United Nations polled six countries in 2023 and found that 20% of the people in those countries did not believe that climate change was caused by humans.
- In the United States, 23% believed that climate change is a hoax.

Here are six ways reporters can confront this problem:

1. Always rely on credible, science-based sources

2. Avoid false balance: Don't give equal weight to climate change denial arguments alongside scientifically supported facts. Make it clear that climate change denial is not supported by credible scientific evidence. Presenting the two sides as equally valid confuses audiences.

3. Communicate clearly and simply: Use clear, straightforward language to explain climate science, focusing on relatable examples. Misinformation thrives in complexity and confusion.

4. Stay Up to Date on climate and environmental findings: If you are informed you can quickly counter misinformation with the latest evidence and expert opinions.

5. Consider the reasons behind the denial: Skepticism is sometimes rooted in fear, economic concerns or political beliefs. Acknowledge these concerns and be empathetic while still focusing on the facts.

6. Use Local Examples: Highlight local impacts of climate change and feature voices from people experiencing its effects first-hand (for example, farmers dealing with droughts or communities facing floods).

Greenwashing

The term greenwashing refers to companies and organizations who promote themselves as environmentally friendly – or taking steps to improve the environment and lessen their impact on the environment – but are really not doing much at all to change their practices or environmental impact. It’s an attempt to mislead the public and make themselves look responsible. But it’s mostly public relations and deceptive marketing.

Reporters should be on the lookout for greenwashing and expose it for what it is.

Environmental and climate reporters often encounter greenwashing, where companies or organizations falsely promote themselves as environmentally friendly to improve their public image without making substantial changes. Here are strategies journalists can use to effectively deal with greenwashing:

- 1. Investigate “green” claims thoroughly:** Don’t take environmental claims at face value. Investigate a company’s practices, policies and track record to see if their actions align with their green marketing claims. Ask for evidence and data supporting the company's claims. Cross-check this with independent sources and consult the experts.
- 2. Look beyond public relations materials:** Greenwashing often relies on PR-driven campaigns that focus on one small environmentally friendly aspect while ignoring larger, harmful practices. Go beyond press releases and advertisements by interviewing environmental experts, local communities and employees.
- 3. Focus on real impact, not promises:** Companies often make promises about reducing emissions in the future or becoming carbon-neutral by a certain year. Ask for details on what actions are being taken now, rather than just future goals. What concrete steps are being taken? Or is it mostly just talk?
- 4. Educate the audience on greenwashing tactics:** Help the public recognize greenwashing tactics like vague terminology (“eco-friendly,” “sustainable,” “natural”) and misleading visuals (green imagery, nature-related branding). Write about past greenwashing instances and how the company was not really doing what it said.

Constructive/Solutions-Oriented Reporting

Have you heard of the term **News Fatigue**? Or **News Avoidance**? It means people who actively avoid reading, listening to or watching the news because it makes them sad, upset or feeling helpless.



What share of the population avoids the news often or sometimes?

36%
Up from 29% in 2017

This is according to a 2023 study by the news agency Reuters, which surveyed around 45 countries around the world. People reported that the news:

- made their moods worse
- they were worn out by the amount of news
- It led to arguments with people
- There was nothing they could do about the bad situations reported on

And much of the reporting on the environment and climate does not make people feel hopeful. In fact, much of it is all doom and gloom. These problems are often presented in catastrophic terms that leave people feeling depressed and extremely fearful.

Studies have found that doom-and-gloom, very alarmist reporting does the following:

- It drives more engagement on social media.
- BUT it drives the least amount of climate action.
- It doesn't change beliefs.
- It can backfire, causing people take significantly less action.

Constructive and solutions journalism attempts to change that by offering the other side of the bad news that is so dominant in traditional media coverage.

Constructive journalism is a shift away from ONLY covering conflict and problems to ALSO addressing solutions to challenges and how to move forward.

Example: Here is a **traditional** headline about COVID-19



The overall sensation is one of **negativity, fear and doom**. People reading this will imagine their family members in funeral homes in the face of a very desperate situation.

Example: Here is a more **constructive approach** about the same issue.



Can you spot the difference? Here the story has been reframed and is more **hopeful, showing the possibilities**, focusing on how people and governments can **work together** to prevent infections. It still addresses the seriousness of the problem below the main headline, so is not avoiding the bad news. But it is saying that something can be done about it. We can move forward – we are not all doomed to die.

This approach, looking at ways forward and possible solutions to problems, can be an important part of news coverage and inspire people to take action, show what others are doing, and illustrate the world is not just a dark and gloomy place. There are bad situations and events, yes, but there are also good, positive aspects and innovative ideas to move beyond the challenges we face.

Constructive/Solutions Journalism	
IS NOT	IS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reinvention of journalism • Uncritical or naïve • Dumbed-down, soft or happy news • Promotion • Activism • Oversimplification of complex problems or solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigorous journalism • Critical, objective and balanced • Fact-based and unbiased • Concerned with important issues • Bridging, not polarizing • Forward-looking and future-oriented • Nuanced and contextualized • Good journalism

Solutions-oriented journalism

Solutions journalism is a subset of constructive journalism that focuses on reporting on the responses and solutions to problems. It involves investigating how individuals, organizations, and communities are addressing social, environmental, climate or other issues and whether their efforts are effective.

The aim is to provide in-depth, evidence-based coverage of solutions that:

- inspires positive change
- informs the public
- offers examples that can be used in other regions
- upholds journalistic standards by evaluating the results and limitations of solutions highlights progress and potential way toward improvement

But be careful, some people claim that solutions stories are public relations or activism and not “real” journalism. If you include these four elements in your solutions story, you can avoid this critique.

- 1. Problem/response:** Include info about problem and approach to resolve (part of) it.
- 2. Evidence:** Include data on effectiveness. Is it working or is it not? How do you know?
- 3. Insights:** How does the solution work? Can it be scaled up? Can People in other places might be able to do something similar.
- 4. Limitations:** No solution is perfect. Talk about the limitations. (This is very important to avoid accusations of being a PR story.)

Examples:

Healthy mangroves build a resilient community in the Philippines' Palawan

By the turn of the 20th century, much of the area's mangroves had been cleared or degraded, leading to a decline in fish catches. Today, however, thanks to ongoing outreach initiatives, community partnerships and Indigenous belief systems, the importance of preserving mangroves is widely recognized and the area's coastal forests and fisheries are seeing a recovery.

<https://news.mongabay.com/2022/08/healthy-mangroves-build-a-resilient-community-in-the-philippines-palawan/>

Cleaning up Cambodia's kitchens could curb deforestation, climate change

NGOs and companies across Cambodia are acting in response to the mass use of charcoal and forest biomass in household and restaurant kitchens countrywide. The shift away from these polluting fuel sources to cleaner energy alternatives is being sparked by health and environmental concerns.

<https://news.mongabay.com/2021/06/cleaning-up-cambodias-kitchens-could-curb-deforestation-climate-change/>

Agroforestry offers Thai rubber farmers a pathway to profit and sustainability

Rubber farmers in Thailand are increasingly adopting agroforestry as a more climate-friendly and sustainable way of cultivating the commodity, which ranks among the world's largest drivers of tropical deforestation. Government agencies, trade groups and key parts of the rubber supply chain are backing agroforestry as an alternative to monoculture by providing trainings and price premiums, though experts say additional supports like policy changes are needed.

<https://news.mongabay.com/2024/07/agroforestry-offers-thai-rubber-farmers-a-pathway-to-profit-and-sustainability/>

Chapter 4

Promoting gender and ethnic equality

Gender and ethnic equality means that people of all genders and ethnic backgrounds have the same rights, opportunities, and treatment in society, without discrimination or bias based on their gender or ethnicity.

That includes fair and equal access to education, employment, healthcare and political participation. Gender and ethnic equality also promotes respect for cultural differences and values diversity.



Photo by Sandy Millar on Unsplash

Sex vs. Gender

While sex is biological and has to do with chromosomes, reproductive organs and genitalia and hormones, gender is a culturally defined phenomenon.

This cultural aspect has **traditionally** featured different roles and attributes “assigned” to males and females.

Females	Males
Roles and responsibilities: caring, teaching, service jobs	Roles and responsibilities: construction, defense, business, finance
Attributes: fragile, emotional	Attributes: risk-taking, aggressive
Entitlements: inferior healthcare to men, lower pay, financial dependence	Entitlements: higher workforce participation, financial independence, leadership roles

Source: based on Lancet Series on Gender Quality, Norms and Health. Paper 1, 2019

However, these definitions and strict roles have begun breaking down in many places and this traditional “wall” between male and female cultural roles has become more porous, although traditional ideas are still very strong in many places.

The goal of gender equality is to challenge these restrictive cultural norms around gender and allow all individuals, regardless of their gender identity, to have equal opportunities for personal and professional fulfilment, without discrimination or bias.

Equality and Journalism

In reporting, gender and ethnic equality mean giving fair and balanced coverage to all communities. When journalists understand the unique challenges faced by women, minorities and other underrepresented groups, they can report on these issues with greater depth and sensitivity.

This is especially important when covering stories about the environment and climate change. It is often these groups who are most affected by the negative consequences of environmental degradation and a changing climate and, at the same time, are the least equipped to adapt due to limited resources, a lack of knowledge and poor infrastructure.

Journalists who are mindful of gender and ethnic equality help raise awareness of these challenges and contribute to a more informed and empathetic public.

In the newsroom, gender and ethnic equality are important in journalism because they ensure that news and stories reflect diverse perspectives and experiences. When reporters and editors come from a variety of backgrounds, they are more likely to cover issues that matter to different groups of people. This leads to more inclusive reporting, where everyone’s voice is heard, and stories that might otherwise be overlooked are given attention. Gender and ethnic diversity in the newsroom helps avoid bias and ensures that the news is more representative of the real world.

How can reporters promote gender and ethnic equality in their work?

Reporters can promote gender and ethnic equality in their reporting by following these key practices:

1. Seek diverse sources: Ensure that stories include voices from a wide range of genders, ethnicities and backgrounds. When covering a topic, avoid **only** quoting or featuring people from dominant groups or the usual – usually male – high-profile sources.

2. Avoid stereotypes and bias: Consider how certain groups are represented and do not perpetuate harmful stereotypes or use language that reinforces bias. Reporters want to promote understanding and respect.

3. Cover stories that matter to marginalized groups: Seek out stories that affect underrepresented or marginalized communities, focusing on their unique experiences with green issues. **Example:** flooding and drought in remote areas where ethnic groups live.

4. Use inclusive language: Always try to use language that is respectful, gender-neutral and inclusive of all ethnicities. Avoid terms that may exclude or offend certain groups. No one should feel excluded because of their gender or ethnicity.

5. Collaborate with diverse colleagues: Work with reporters, editors and producers from diverse backgrounds to gain different perspectives and insights on stories. They can have insights based on their unique experience that you can learn from.

Gender gap

Truth be told, most experts and sources in the media are male. According to the Global Media Monitoring Project, only 24% of news sources were women as of its last comprehensive report.

Women are more frequently asked to provide personal opinions or comment on topics like health and education, which receive less overall news coverage compared to politics or economics. In those fields, women's voices are scarce. The reasons for this disparity include unconscious bias, lack of media training for women and structural issues in industries where men dominate leadership positions.

How can journalists improve the situation?

Journalists can actively work to include more female voices in their stories by using several strategies:

1. Find female experts: Try to find female experts in relevant fields, especially in fields like politics, economics or science. Don't limit female voices in stories to traditional "women's issues" (e.g., health or family matters).

2. Build relationships with female sources: Develop ongoing relationships with female sources and trust and familiarity.

3. Ask for female spokespersons: When contacting organizations, specifically request female spokespeople or representatives if they're available. Ask if there are women in leadership roles or subject matter experts who could contribute.

4. Be mindful of gender in everyday reporting: Check your source list when preparing a story. If it's dominated by male voices, look for female perspectives to balance the narrative.

5. Advocate for a gender balance policy: Encourage newsroom policies whose goal is gender balance in reporting. These could include editorial guidelines that require journalists to ensure a certain percentage of sources in stories are women.

6. Collaborate with women-led organizations: Get to know women's organizations, advocacy groups and professional associations to find female experts or get leads on stories where women's perspectives are central.