THE CHANGE WE NEED:

STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM

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THE NEW INSTITUTE Centre for Environmental Humanities (NICHE)
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Foreword

As the summer of 2023 draws to a close, the news that this was the hottest summer on record is a stark reminder that the climate crisis is real and affects all of us. Looking for solutions to the no longer exceptional extreme heat, many news readers will have considered acquiring a well-functioning air conditioning unit. But how many of them will have worried that this is possibly one of the least sustainable solutions to global warming? That in fact it contributes to the very crisis that we need to address? How many will have asked themselves if more sustainable solutions exist, which ones actually work and, most importantly, how they can help tackle the climate crisis? Probably not many and, in most cases, news coverage will not have aided them in their considerations.

The field of environmental and climate journalism has been growing fast in recent years, both in quantity and scope. With the climate crisis increasingly affecting every aspect of our lives, news organisations have been looking for ways to add a climate journalist, a climate desk, or a team of journalists to their newsrooms, and many are in the process of defining policies and guidelines on how to cover developments as well as how to mobilise the necessary resources.

The complexity of environmental subjects, their polarising nature, the strong interests linked to the fossil fuel industry, and the overabundance of disinformation circulating on these topics all make the coverage of environmental topics particularly challenging, and yet they also underscore the need for strong, independent public interest environmental journalism.

This brief report presents a critical analysis of some of the solutions adopted by news organisations, the challenges they have encountered and the questions that journalists and editors are currently considering. The findings are based primarily on interviews with some of the leading experts in this area, people who have worked to produce and to support environmental journalism for many years, always looking for innovative strategies to better serve their audiences, fulfil the public interest and ensure that journalism continues to play a central role in society.

This report doesn't aim to be comprehensive, but rather offer some insight into a field of journalism that is evolving fast. It hopes to inspire a conversation about the best way to support environmental and climate journalism, while praising the important work that

many environmental journalists do to help humanity identify and implement solutions to the biggest crisis of our times.

I would like to thank the many experts who agreed to exchange their thoughts and experiences with me for this research. Their passion and dedication have been an inspiration to me, as I hope it will be to those who read this report.

Barbara Trionfi

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Index

Introduction

The coverage of environmental topics has significantly increased in the past decade and it has dedicated ever more attention to the climate crisis. Looking specifically at the global media coverage mentioning “climate change” and “global warming”, the Media and Climate Change Observatory (MeCCO) at the University of Colorado Boulder noted that “2022 coverage was up 38% from 2020, and up 7% from 2019. The data collected by MeCCO’s partners also show that world coverage of anthropogenic climate change and global warming across all sources more than doubled between December 2012 and December 2022, with coverage by international wire services increasing almost fourfold.

While the MeCCO analysis is quantitative and does not take into consideration the quality of the climate coverage, growing attention to environmental topics has also given way to discussions within the journalism community about how best to cover them - whether we need new journalistic standards and principles specific to the coverage of the environment, what “fair and balanced” means when covering the causes and consequences of environmental changes, as well as which language and terminology should be used.

Well aware of the importance of covering the climate story in a way that accurately reflects scientific facts, highlights the urgency of the situation and gives audiences a sense of agency, editors and journalists have been experimenting with different contents, formats and styles to navigate the strongly polarised public discourse on climate topics without running the risk of being perceived as activists.

As almost the entire scientific community agrees that the changes to the climate that we are experiencing and that are causing an increase in natural catastrophes are caused by human action and polarising disinformation campaigns argue against this, many in the journalism community believe that stressing the anthropogenic aspect of climate change when covering the environment is part of journalism’s efforts to pre-empt and counter disinformation. Much of the analysis of media coverage of the environment focuses on this particular aspect, which has for some become a sign of quality coverage.

A 2021 study by Lucy McAllister and others based on a content analysis of thousands of newspaper articles in 17 high-circulation national print media sources in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Canada from 2005 to 2019 found that “across all the years of analysis, 90% of the sample accurately represented climate change. In

addition, our data suggests that scientifically accurate coverage of climate change is improving over time."

"That's a sharp change from the last comparable study in 2004, when researchers discovered that more than half of the articles treated dissenting opinions as equally valid", reports noted.

Not so positive is the picture offered by Media Matters, a progressive U.S. media content monitor. An analysis of over 120 segments on the global heat wave that aired on ABC, CBS, and NBC in the summer of 2018 "found that only one, on CBS This Morning, mentioned the connection between climate change and extreme heat." The same trend is highlighted in Media Matter's monitoring of news coverage of floods, wildfires and heat waves.

The experts contacted in the context of this research all pointed out that there was a clear increase in the coverage of environmental issues overall and that many news organisations had been thinking about how to tackle environmental issues within their editorial framework, reflecting on the mistakes of the past and looking for opportunities to improve practices and better serve audiences.

In a 2019 article in the Columbia Journalism Review, Mark Hertsgaard and Kyle Pope, co-founders of the Covering Climate Now (CCN) network, looked back at trends in media coverage of climate change over the past three decades and recognised two core weaknesses: an overall lack of coverage and a misleading approach to fairness and impartiality.

> **"A big part of the reason our civilization today faces the prospect of extinction is that we have waited so long to take action, not least because the media left the public and policymakers misinformed about the threat and its solutions. When the media weren't ignoring the story, they were being suckered into misrepresenting it as a matter more of political opinion than of scientific fact," Hertsgaard and Pope noted.**

Reflecting on what the authors believe has been a misleading interpretation of fairness, the article states: "Perhaps the media's most damaging climate-change error has been to cover a science story as if it were a politics story. Beginning in the early 1990s, U.S. print and broadcast outlets repeatedly presented climate-change stories and on-air debates as a disagreement between two equally valid viewpoints: one from a scientist who affirmed the

consensus articulated by the vast majority of peer-reviewed studies, the other from a contrarian who disputed that consensus and, in many cases, was funded by fossil-fuel interests, though rarely was that association known or disclosed."

Similarly, Alan Rusbridger, former editor-in-chief of The Guardian, UK, in a 2018 column complained about the failure of the media industry to cover the climate emergency in a way that best serves the interests of the public: "If editors ignore climate change, downplay it, or don't really accept the overwhelming opinion of scientists, then how are their readers — our fellow voters — expected to make rational decisions about what's best for them?".

While it is always easier to recognise mistakes in hindsight, we can learn from them only if we also understand the causes that led to them. According to Jay Rosen, professor of journalism at New York University, these mistakes are the inevitable outcome of common and universally accepted journalism practices as well as the news industry's business model. In a 2022 interview with media expert Alexandra Borchardt, Rosen called for a change in this approach, urging journalists to go beyond the coverage of facts related to the climate crisis and critically assess the solutions presented.

> **"Today's news system, at least the one we have in the U.S., is not designed to create public understanding. It is designed to produce new content every day. With climate change the first step that is required is learning, you need background knowledge, without this the news about climate change doesn't make any sense. But our news system is not designed to create background knowledge but to report what's new today. It is a new challenge. Journalism has to become more problem-solving," Rosen said.**

Rosen is not the only one calling for a solution-oriented approach to environmental journalism. A growing number of environmental journalists agree that a greater focus on solutions may be particularly relevant at least for some forms of environmental coverage. This report will analyse when a solution-oriented approach may be most needed in covering environmental issues, and what challenges it presents.

The complexity of environmental topics, their tendency to portray desperate scenarios, their perceived detachment from the lives of large groups of audiences – although this, too, is changing as the crisis deepens and spreads, affecting more and more people – makes it

particularly difficult to cover the environment. The concern that audiences will choose to look away when confronted with "doom and gloom" environmental coverage is widespread and for many years editors have considered environmental subjects to be a "ratings killer", as MSNBC anchor Chris Hayes stated in a much-discussed 2018 tweet.

Hellen Shikanda, climate reporter at *The Nation* in Kenya and an alumna of the Oxford Climate Journalism Network (OCJN), wrote:

> **"Many newsrooms in Kenya, and around the world, feel they are simply reflecting hard economic realities when it comes to sidelining climate stories. The perception — true or not — is that these stories are ignored because the return on investment for newsrooms is almost trifling. They think these stories don't make business sense."**

Audience data actually shows an even more complex picture, as audiences on the one hand state that they want more coverage of environmental topics, while on the other hand do not consume as much environmental news as this would suggest. A 2019 survey among U.S. adults shows that climate news is among the top coverage preferences of readers, second only to health care. However, audience traffic data ranks climate news in fifth place, after national security, politics, sports and immigration

There are two plausible explanations for this apparent contradiction: Either the data is not fully correct, or something needs to be changed in the way climate is covered.

The experts interviewed for this report argue that both are true. The widespread perception that audiences are not interested in news related to climate and the environment is to a great extent outdated: As the climate crisis has become increasingly part of everybody's daily life, interest in news and information that help people understand the changing reality around them and what they should expect has also increased. However, this is only true if the content and format of news covering environmental topics also pay attention to audiences' needs.

The field of environmental journalism is evolving fast and newsrooms around the world have been searching for strategies for a successful, sustainable, public-interest coverage of environmental topics. The recent trend to place greater focus on solutions in environmental journalism, as well as to look for formats, products and content that engage audiences, is part of an effort to better serve audiences. According to the 2023 Digital News Report of the

Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, “Many news organisations are looking to tackle both periodic and specific avoidance in a variety of ways. Some are looking to make news more accessible for hard-to-reach groups, broadening the news agenda, commissioning more inspiring or positive news, or embracing constructive or solutions journalism that give people a sense of hope or personal agency.”

The following chapters will analyse some of these strategies and assess the challenges linked with their implementation as well as the obstacles they may present.

Who covers environmental news?

For many years, the common practice within newsrooms has been to assign the coverage of environmental and climate news to a specialised science reporter or, in the best case, a team of environmental journalists. Environmental news would generally appear in a separate section of the newspaper or be part of dedicated programmes in broadcasting.

Many of the experts contacted for this report argue that separating environmental coverage not only contributes to news avoidance but is also misleading as it portrays environmental developments as taking place in a separate space, rather than being intrinsically connected to every other aspect of life, such as finance, politics or culture, to mention a few.

“A news organisation’s climate journalism should be as all-pervasive as the consequences of the climate crisis itself are. It should be completely normal to have a paragraph on climate impacts in, let’s say, a sports story or a story about company earnings. Climate desks are important, but they carry the risk of creating a new silo in the newsroom,” said former news executive Wolfgang Blau, co-founder of the Oxford Climate Journalism Network.

Breaking the “silo” approach in favour of coverage that addresses environmental topics as part of other news would help audiences understand the causes and consequences of environmental changes, and present these as part and parcel of many different aspects of their daily realities.

> **“Climate change is no longer just a science story. It’s now a political, economic, societal and cultural story,”**
> **- said Max Boykoff, MeCCO lead project investigator and chair of the Department of Environmental Studies.**

Talking to the author of this report, Mark Hertsgaard, co-founder and executive director of the U.S.-based journalism support organisation Covering Climate Now (CCNow), compared the coverage of climate to that of another recent crisis: the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We should be covering the climate emergency in much the same way the media covered the COVID emergency. And of course, we made mistakes in covering COVID as we make on every story. But, in general, we did a pretty good job. And the parallels are clear: in the case of COVID, we treated it like an emergency, because that's what the science said, that

it was an emergency. So, we gave it a lot of coverage. There was a story pretty much every day and often two or even three stories every day on pretty much every media platform.

> **"Likewise, with COVID, we did not silo our COVID coverage on the health beat or the science beat.
> We also treated COVID as a politics story, as a business story, as an education story, as a culture story. And, crucially, the final parallel is that we talked a lot about solutions: social distancing, wearing a mask, getting a vaccine, etc. All of those things are what we should be doing on climate coverage going forward."**

Newsrooms traditionally consist of different desks or departments, which to a great extent work separately from each other. Efforts to integrate and create cross-departmental conversations and coverage have generally put even greater pressure on already overburdened newsrooms and journalists. Reflecting on the coverage of climate and environmental topics, however, many of the experts interviewed for this report said they would love to see either a greater understanding of environmental issues among all journalists, so that they can add the environmental angle into any story they are working on, or alternatively have one editor in charge of environmental coverage who works with many desks in the newsroom to help them identify and frame the environmental angle of different stories.

> **"If a given newsroom can afford to have a climate expert, that's great. And if you've got a climate unit of more than one person, even better. But make sure that you don't silo the coverage just on that unit. One of the jobs of that unit is to actively reach out to their colleagues on the politics desk, on the business desk,
> on the culture desk. That climate unit has to evangelise, actively evangelise the rest of the newsroom,"
> Mark Hertsgaard said.**

Similarly, when asked whether she would encourage newsrooms to have a climate expert who works with different desks, media expert Alexandra Borchardt said: "I would love to see that approach! But it's still very seldom. [...] Has journalism understood that the environment is not only a science? Yes! But I think there needs to be much more."

James Fahn, executive director of Internews's Earth Journalism Network, a global community of over 15,000 reporters covering environment and climate topics, also reflected on the benefit of integrating climate coverage across the newsroom: "I worked in Asia for a decade as an environmental editor and led a team of journalists covering climate and environment. For a while we had our own weekly section on the environment, which was great, but then we realised the only people reading us were those who were already interested. So, we switched over and we became much more integrated into the newsroom, and we started producing stories for the political desk and the business desk and even the front page, trying to get our stories into all sections of the newspaper. I think that it's really important that journalists understand that climate touches every aspect of society. So, we strongly encourage journalists to look at these topics from multiple angles. It's not just a science story, it's a health story and a business story and a political story and cultural story, and environmental journalists need to try and get their stories to as many different sections of their media outlet as possible. And that's also a better way to reach a broader audience. So that would be something I would encourage."

While many agree that integrating environmental coverage into other beats is the preferable approach, examples of newsrooms that have been able to do this are seldom, as news organisations face structural obstacles and often lack the necessary resources for this type of transition.

Challenges include the lack of specialised training for journalists and, consequently the lack of knowledge necessary to identify and cover the environmental angle among most journalists; the lack of resources to hire a specialised environmental editors who can work across different news desks; certain funding schemes for environmental coverage that do not favour this approach; and finally a degree of concern that climate issues may be perceived as political and partisan and increasing coverage of climate may lead to criticism of the news outlet for being too close to activism.

Gustavo Faleiros, director of environmental investigations for the Pulitzer Center, spoke about the experience of newsrooms that tried to switch from a separate climate desk to a more integrated coverage, but eventually decided to go back to a climate desk. "They know that the coverage of environmental stories should be spread across all desks, but at the same time, they realised that it's not feasible in terms of expertise. Not every reporter at every desk has the expertise for doing this. I have the impression that we have more coverage in several desks, but at the same time expertise and training are badly needed."

The same view is also shared by Mark Hertsgaard: “That's what we're working on at Covering Climate Now: hands-on intensive training of newsrooms. But, I'll be honest, there's a long way to go. There's just not very strong climate literacy in most newsrooms.”

Increasing understanding of environmental issues among journalists across the newsroom is likely to bring about more coverage of the environmental angle of different stories. However, training journalists is time consuming and resource intensive, and newsrooms typically have neither. Jill Hopke, who teaches climate change communication and climate journalism at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois, argues that climate literacy education needs to be offered as part of the core reporting and editing coursework at journalism schools, and not only in specialised programmes, as is typically the case.

“For many news organisations, especially local ones, climate coverage is still seen as separate and distinct from other beats. But rapidly rising temperatures and a corresponding shift in weather patterns is now the context for most, if not all, news stories,” Hopke wrote in a November 2022 article for the Nieman Reports.

> **“A fundamental shift is needed in how news organisations cover climate issues, and that starts with training. With continued newsroom cutbacks, local news organisations are less likely to have the financial resources to hire dedicated climate journalists.**
> **All journalists need a basic understanding of the science of climate change.”**

In her research, Hopke assessed media coverage of heat waves and wildfires by 37 news outlets in five countries between 2013 and 2018.

“Research shows that news outlets that do not have dedicated climate reporters and editors on staff made the connection between heat extremes and climate change less often than those that employ specialised climate journalists. [...] For example, articles about heat waves during the summer of 2018 by climate-specialist news outlets discussed climate change 41 percent of the time on average. Non-climate specialist news outlets, on the other hand, mentioned climate issues in an average of just 17 percent of heat wave stories during that time period. This points to the need for a broader investment in climate literacy training for all journalists, especially those not on the climate beat.”

Covering facts, presenting solutions

Solutions journalism made its appearance towards the end of the last century in reaction to concerns that a journalism that covers, or uncovers, problems without presenting solutions doesn't properly serve the public interest. According to its promoters, solutions journalism — and similar trends such as "constructive journalism" or "civic journalism" — contributes to identifying solutions by offering critical coverage thereof, and so helps communities tackle the problems they face. Solutions journalism is also considered a good antidote to polarisation, as it brings communities together around common solutions, as well as to populism, as it critically analyses simplistic solutions that are typical of populist rhetoric.

Indeed, solutions journalism has also been criticised by journalists and others who believe that journalism's role is to report the facts and bring problems to the attention of audiences, while other institutions must carry the responsibility of identifying solutions to address the problems. Critics argue that asking journalists to identify solutions poses an additional burden on a profession that already faces significant challenges and risks.

Solutions journalism seems particularly important in the coverage of environmental issues and many agree that a stronger focus on solutions would help address some of the challenges, from news avoidance to apathy: The urgency of the climate emergency calls for a change of paradigm for environmental journalists, who should look for every opportunity to make their stories particularly compelling. As Jill Höpke puts it: "The goal of climate communication is to not only educate about the science and impacts but also to promote action and change social norms."

It is interesting to note that journalists who operate in countries where state institutions fail to deliver justice and democratic accountability have a greater tendency to develop a sense of responsibility for promoting action and changing social norms; whereby journalists who operate in functioning democracies tend to argue that expecting journalists to not only cover facts but also promote action increases the risk that they may be considered activists and so lose the perceived neutrality they need to retain trust.

It is reasonable to argue that the call on environmental journalists to promote positive change originates from the fact that the climate crisis is in fact the outcome of a global failure to ensure environmental justice and accountability. The important question remains:

If journalism carries the responsibility to encourage positive action, can it do this without running the risk of turning into activism?

According to James Fahn of Internews's' Earth Journalism Network, encouraging action doesn't equal activism, but rather offering prospects to the audiences. "I would definitely agree that solutions journalism is important. It's important for a number of reasons, including because, if all the news is all gloom and doom, it creates apathy among audiences and it creates a kind of fatalistic attitude, as if there were nothing we can do." Fahn said.

The EBU News Report 2023 on Climate Journalism also notes that "an increasing number of journalists understand that people are much more likely to take action when they are given at least some hope and agency."

For years, the Norwegian public service broadcaster, NRK, has been working to increase and improve its coverage of climate subjects, both by restructuring its newsroom and thereby ensuring that environmental issues are covered across the entire newsroom, as well as by adopting climate-specific editorial charters and developing new formats. While NRK does both investigative and explanatory journalism on climate topics, its news director, Helje Solberg, also supports a focus on solutions. "Constructive journalism is a big part of climate journalism. We have to acknowledge [that] the constant focus on crisis, catastrophes and wars doesn't give enough nuanced images of the world. We need to focus on hope and solutions, on new ideas," Solberg said.

Caleb Kabanda, who contributed to *The New York Times* award-winning long-format article, "What Do the Protectors of Congo's Peatlands Get in Return?", stressed how important it was for him to focus the article on solutions, as this is necessary if one wants to encourage action. "Telling this story without offering solutions would have been a waste of time. We need to offer solutions, which is why, when we worked on *The New York Times* story, we met all the actors — those who live in the peatlands, the local communities, politicians, NGOs — we interviewed all of them to understand what they see as a solution, where there is disagreement amongst them, what are the priorities," Kabanda told the author of this report.

One of the criticisms of solutions journalism is that, by focusing on the solutions rather than on the problems, it may diminish the sense of urgency, which is the opposite of what environmental journalism should aim to achieve.

Mark Hertsgaard of CCNow, however, doesn't see this risk and insists that good climate journalism "humanises, localises and solutionises".

"Solutionising means telling the whole story. You cannot sugarcoat the fact that we are in very serious danger and, frankly, your audience won't take you seriously if you sugarcoat that. But, make sure you also tell them: Here's how we can fix it. What solutions journalism to me really means is you tell the whole story of the problem, but also how you can fix it. And you don't sugarcoat the fixes either. You interrogate the fixes; you're holding those fixes accountable," Hertsgaard told the author of this report.

Following this approach, journalists should identify and investigate problems, understand, question and investigate proposed solutions, and be able to present all this in a language and in formats that are both understandable and engaging for their audiences. However, given the widespread lack of climate literacy among most journalists, how many of them are actually able to cover solutions with sufficient depth? At the same time, training journalists to do this requires resources which are simply not available to a great part of the news industry. Is good solutions journalism therefore even feasible?

"Certainly, it is important to talk about solutions, but talking about solutions in environmental journalism can easily go in the wrong direction of minimising the problem," noted the Pulitzer Center's Gustavo Faleiros. "If you want to cover solutions, you need to investigate the solutions in a very objective way. And that has been the challenge: How much time can a journalist dedicate to go deep into investigating some of the solutions, in addition to investigating the problems, in order to give a really systemic view of the issue?"

Alexandre Brutelle, director of the Environmental Investigative Forum (EIF), a global network of environmental investigative journalists and experts, also expressed concern that an excessive focus on solutions may distract from what he considers should be the primary task of investigative environmental journalists: to investigate the causes behind climate change and hold perpetrators of environmental damage accountable.

Talking with the author, Brutelle noted that much environmental journalism today involves travelling to places to show the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation, but fails to ask who is behind this and who needs to be held accountable. "The impact we are looking at is policy change," Brutelle said. This can be achieved best by thoroughly investigating the causes of the environmental degradation that journalists cover. "We should include some solution perspective, whenever there is one. Editorial

charters can encourage journalists to adopt a solution-oriented perspective. This is no problem. But we shouldn't build the whole editorial content only around this," Brutelle said.

Experts tend to agree that, as coverage of the environment increases in quantity and scope, and journalists gain a better understanding of audiences' needs, there is room both for journalism that draws attention to those who are responsible for environmental crimes and devastation, reveals how private interests violate the rights of communities to a clean and safe environment, and promotes change through accountability, as well as for a journalism that provides hope by talking about solutions while critically analysing them, thereby empowering audiences to make informed decisions.

Going local

We mentioned above the "three-word mantra" of Covering Climate Now (CCNow): humanise, localise, solutionise.

> **"To localise means to talk to people about the situation that they see in front of them that they can relate to, so that you're not just talking to their heads, but you're talking to their hearts, and you're not just talking about it in the abstract, but you're talking about what's happening in their world. Of course, climate change is by definition global, but it manifests locally and that's where people can feel ownership,"**
> **— CCNow's Mark Hertsgaard explained.**

Many of the experts interviewed for this report recognised that one of the greatest problems of environmental journalism in the past was that it talked about developments that took place in places far away from where audiences were based. This failed to transmit a sense of urgency and to answer a fundamental question in audience engagement — "How does this affect me? Why should I care?" — and contributed to the sense of apathy that environmental journalists are now trying to counter.

The EBU News Report 2023 on Climate Journalism quotes Kirsty Styles, PhD researcher at the University of Central Lancashire, UK, who says: "Our local media has been destroyed. But one of the answers to the environmental challenge is in local journalism, embedding a sense of place and purpose. We have to understand the global but be able to act locally."

The intensification of the climate crisis to the point that it is now affecting nearly every region in the world has made it easier to develop environmental journalism in local media. Floods, wildfires and other extreme weather events have been affecting people across the world and receive coverage in local news. Explaining how they relate to anthropogenic climate change should be an easy task; however, the weaknesses and systemic lack of resources of many local news outlets represents a challenge to this coverage.

Coverage of environmental topics in local news outlets is crucial for different reasons:

First of all, it is perceived as relatable by audiences, since environmental developments directly affect the local community.

Secondly, by holding accountable individuals, companies or institutions that the community knows well and, in some cases, whose decisions they have the power to influence, such as local authorities or industries that are present locally, local environmental journalism empowers local communities.

Thirdly, solutions, too, are likely to be specific to local realities, although comparisons with solutions adopted elsewhere may be relevant.

Finally, and probably most importantly, local news outlets typically enjoy greater trust than national or international news outlets, as many studies have shown, and trust is immensely important when it comes to the coverage of issues that tend to be divisive or around which so much disinformation exists, as is the case with environmental topics.

Focusing on local realities has also revealed how some environmental policies promoted at the international level as positively contributing to the climate cause have in fact had damaging environmental consequences at the local level.

For example, a 2021 cross-border collaborative investigation in Italy, Romania and Germany showed how projects developed and supported under the EU Renewable Energy Directive have promoted illegal logging in Tuscany, Italy, and Suceava, Romania.

Similarly, in 2022, a Colombian journalist revealed that a private carbon project belonging to a Mexican company was selling carbon credits for a forest in the indigenous reservation of Cumbal, southern Colombia. However, no one in the indigenous community that lived in the reservation had been informed or consulted about the project beforehand, nor had they profited from it.

Experts agree that a focus on local news has many benefits and helps readers grasp the bigger picture and understand the complexity of environmental themes. However, local news outlets have very limited audiences and typically a smaller reach than the large national or international level players. Considering the urgency of the climate crisis and the need to raise awareness about this urgency among as many people as possible, some of the experts contacted for this report question whether we can afford to focus on supporting coverage of the climate in local news outlets, or whether we shouldn't rather look at strategies to increase climate coverage by large news outlets with their large reach. On the

other hand, are size and reach the most important factors to be considered when we aim at bringing about positive change? And, if not, wouldn't local outlets, which are deeply rooted in and enjoy the trust of the community, be more likely to have impact? Journalism support organisations need to carefully consider what their goal is when providing support to environmental journalism and how they are most likely to achieve it.

James Fahn of Internews' Earth Journalism Network stresses the need to place stories in local-language news outlets, rather than international ones, but at the same time to also look for those outlets that reach larger audiences. "There are a lot of sites out there now that focus specifically on climate environmental topics. So, the question for us is always how much we should aim to support those outlets, which often have very good understanding of the topics and good reporting, but don't reach the broader mainstream audience; and how much we should focus on more mainstream outlets. We try and support both, but, if we have to choose, we will go with the mainstream outlets, those with bigger audiences, because we think that it is important. [...] But our main philosophy at the Earth Journalism Network is that we really want to get stories into the local media, whether it's large or small or mainstream. We want to get stories into the local media, in local languages, by local reporters," Fahn noted.

Marta Frigerio, editor-in-chief of the Italian online environmental outlet, Radar, also spoke about the importance of operating at the local level, covering local stories and getting involved with local communities. "In Italy we can see 'news deserts' at the local level, because of an extreme lack of funds for local journalism. However, the most successful stories that we publish all have a local focus, because they focus on the effects of environmental crimes and climate change on the people and how communities are affected.

> **"Furthermore, there are often local communities of actors who are working on environmental issues and can be easily turned into audiences. Working with them increases the impact of our stories, and our coverage increases the impact of their efforts," Frigerio noted. "Local journalism also has an important educational role."**

U.S.-based CCNow has a slightly different approach, aiming at placing the same stories both in large international outlets and local ones: “At CCNow we are very proud of the fact that we work with a lot of very small digital local community newsrooms, mainly in the U.S., but also overseas, including in Africa and Asia. One of the joys of the CCNow network is that we're able to put them together with big outlets like The Guardian. So that, when The Guardian breaks a big investigative story, we're able to then go take that story and give it to the local public radio station in New Orleans, as we have done for a particular story, and to the local ABC affiliate in Dallas, Texas. Because it was a Texas-Louisiana related story, we were able to give them content for free that they wouldn't otherwise have,” CCNow’s Mark Hertsgaard said.

Journalism support organisations and programmes, such as the Pulitzer Center or the International Press Institute (IPI)’s IJ4EU programme, which supports cross-border investigative journalism projects, have been promoting cooperation between large and small, international and local, mainstream and specialised media outlets in an effort to reach different audiences and generate greater impact.

Such cooperation allows journalists to connect the dots between powerful interests in Europe, say, and issues affecting local communities a world away. One IJ4EU-supported investigation revealed how European “green finance” initiatives reward deforestation in Indonesia. Another linked the murky dealings of a private European energy giant with political corruption in Democratic Republic of Congo. “These stories simply wouldn’t have been possible without collaboration between journalists working for different kinds of organisations in far-flung places,” Timothy Large, director of independent media programmes at IPI, said. “We’ve seen stories that connect the climate crisis with labour exploitation in rural communities, reveal deaths in local ports linked to shipping industry emissions and show how environmental devastation in Latin America is tied to lithium mining to feed Europe’s hunger for electric cars.”

Measuring impact

Measuring impact has been an activity foreign to journalists for many years, and many still fear that excessive attention to metrics may distract journalists from their public interest role.

The EBU 2023 Report on Climate Journalism notes: "The industry has its own quality standards which don't consider the potential effect of their journalism on people. For many, this is a conscious act. Many news cultures see the detachment from potential effect and therefore impact at the core of their ethics, which is researching and reporting the facts. Crafting their output with a potential impact in mind to them would come close to activism, even manipulation. 'Climate journalism that works,' measured in terms of action being taken by their audiences, is not their primary goal."

If impact is measured in terms of commercial success, some journalists fear that editorial decisions based on popularity and reader demand — typically, clicks and web statistics for online content — may not always serve audiences' best interests or empower them in making informed decisions when participating in public life. Excessive attention to metrics may, in the long run, even erode trust in journalism as audiences perceive journalism as a self-serving business, and so would be counterproductive also from a business perspective. So to what extent should journalists measure impact, which impact should be measured, and how should this influence editorial decisions?

In journalism, including the coverage of environmental topics, measuring impact tends to involve audience metrics, the assumption being that the more people we reach the more we can bring change in their thinking and behaviour. If behavioural change is the goal, however, some argue that we should aim at measuring this in terms of social impact, which is a much more difficult exercise.

> **"If 21st century journalism is to fulfil its role and prove its relevance and legitimacy, it needs to contribute to the fight against climate change using all its skills, knowledge, competence, and influence," notes the EBU News Report 2023: Climate Journalism That Works."**

Posing the question, “How can journalism make a difference?”, the EBU Report continues: “’Just report the facts,’ the most likely response from many journalists, will not be ambitious enough, this much is certain.”. “There has been plenty of climate journalism in the past three or more decades, and yet it has failed to inspire sufficient momentum. When fast political, business, and individual action is essential to initiate sweeping changes, it is not enough just to get the content right. If journalism is to have an impact, it needs to influence behaviour and inform policy.”

In an interview with the author of this report, the lead author of the EBU report, Alexandra Borchardt, said:

> **“It is very important to have impact as a criterion, not only because it is so important to have environmental impact, but also because you want to invest your resources wisely. Media organisations are resource pressed, so you should really focus your resources on projects that have impact and that make sense also for business purposes. Why waste resources on stuff that doesn't work? We should think more about impact in terms of resource investment.”**

Over the past decade, news organisations have been dedicating ever more resources to developing tools and methodologies to measure impact. This has led to a change in culture within many newsrooms, partially driven by shrinking resources and the need to employ them more efficiently, but partly also promoted by donors, who expect news organisations to provide evidence as to why they should support their journalism. Developing the right methodology to measure impact in a way that satisfies all these needs is complex.

“We do want to have impact, this is important, but we don't pretend to know what is the right way to go,” says James Fahn of Internews’s Earth Journalism Network. “So we have developed a methodology called ‘outcome harvesting’ to track what are the impacts, not just of our stories, but all of our activities. We have a whole section on our website devoted to impact, and I think that's been really important. This is a new angle for journalists these days, as before we didn’t think much about impact, we were trained not to think about it. Today, while we don't actively pursue specific outcomes, we do believe that media has a very strong influence and an important role in informing society, informing policy makers, informing the public, and it's important to show, to demonstrate the important impact that it has.”

It is increasingly clear that any journalistic project needs a clear distribution strategy that keeps impact into consideration. For Alexandre Brutelle of the Environmental Investigative Forum, “The impact that really matters is to get some policy change as a consequence of a

journalistic investigation. And this is not necessarily achieved by reaching large audiences or by publishing numerous stories, but by promoting cooperation between journalists and other players, including civil society and climate advocates, so that the journalistic investigations can be turned into legal proceedings to fight for climate justice at the local level."

Indeed, the experts contacted for this report agree that journalism should remain separate from activism, no matter how urgent the climate emergency is, as this could affect its credibility. And yet, if journalism aims at influencing social change, how does it differ from activism?

According to James Fahn, activists propose solutions and fight for them, journalists discuss solutions and question them, presenting the facts without necessarily having all the answers. By doing this, they help their audiences build their opinions. "There's a whole field out there of what we might call 'advocacy journalism', or opinion journalism. No one's denying the impact that they have and how important they are," says Fahn. "But we want to support science-based, fact-based journalism. We believe that we need to cover the solutions, but we don't necessarily know what the right solution is or what the right policy is."

For the Pulitzer Center, social impact is key, and journalism plays an important role in bringing about positive change, but journalists cannot be held accountable for it. Other institutions, ideally at the local level, should use the information that journalists research and publish and build on it to bring about social change. "One thing that I love, and I think it's one of the most important programmes of the Pulitzer Center, is the work on education and outreach. Their model is taking the journalism stories and transforming them into materials for exhibitions, films, or school curricula," Gustavo Faleiros says. "The Pulitzer Center has been doing this in the U.S. for years, and now they have started these programmes elsewhere, in Congo, Brazil, Indonesia, etc. It has built partnerships with universities, foundations, civil society groups and has launched exhibitions, film festivals, gatherings of young professionals to discuss issues touched upon by the stories. This creates impact in a different way because it reaches new audiences, and this is the goal. We can't expect that everybody is going to read an investigation, so we should present its findings in different formats."

Supporting environmental journalism

Environmental journalism has changed a lot over the past decade. On the one hand, changes have been in line with the transformation of the journalism industry overall, which had to redefine its business model in order to survive, diversifying its revenues and carefully allocating resources where they are most needed; it had to rethink and strengthen its relationship with audiences, in order to build reciprocal trust; and it had to show how it pursues the public interest and so strengthen credibility in the face of ever more powerful organised campaigns aimed at weakening it. On the other hand, the transformation of environmental journalism has also been driven by a growing sense of urgency around the climate question and the pressure on journalists to have an impact or be deemed ineffective and futile. This has pushed environmental journalists and editors to explore new approaches, new formats, to make the message about the climate more credible, more compelling, more understandable, more widespread and so more difficult to ignore.

A lot of the transformation that has been happening in environmental journalism is very recent, and few analyses have been carried out so far about which strategies have been most successful and under which conditions. However, anecdotal evidence is already being collected in the form of success stories and lessons learned that are being exchanged between news outlets, editors and journalists who are looking at growing and improving their coverage of the environment. Interestingly, we see similar trends being developed by news practitioners who operate in very diverse environments.

Many of the experts contacted for this report have stated that, while philanthropic support for environmental journalism has been increasing in response to the combined crises in journalism and the environment, most funds are still being allocated to journalism projects, that is for stories, or a series of stories, covering a given topic. While this type of support is important, and in many cases literally vital, it fails to address many of the needs identified in this report and in some cases even risks steering environmental journalism in a direction that may not be the most effective to achieve the impact desired.

The experts also identified different areas in which donor support is needed. These include efforts to transform the way newsrooms operate; building cooperation and partnerships with other news outlets; testing new products, formats, contents; developing tools to support the collection and the distribution of information; and building stronger relationships with audiences and communities by fulfilling their needs and serving their

best interests. All this would contribute to ensuring that journalism takes centre stage in efforts to tackle climate change and to counter its causes, and so ensure that journalism remains and is perceived as a pillar in global efforts to counter the biggest crisis facing humanity today.

Philanthropic institutions that want to promote public interest environmental coverage should help newsrooms achieve these goals by supporting their efforts in the following areas:

Un-siloing environmental journalism

This report analysed the importance of not relegating environmental coverage to a separate session but developing the capacity across the newsroom to cover the environmental angle of many different stories in business, politics, international news, culture, lifestyle, etc. This requires a new editorial approach, ideally supported by clear guidelines that define how climate coverage should be approached, including sources, language and style. However, it also requires that knowledge about environmental topics is spread across the newsroom. To achieve this, news outlets can pursue two strategies: either by increasing the environmental literacy of journalists who cover different beats, which requires significant training across the newsroom and is resource intensive; or by introducing the new position of an environmental editor/coordinator who works across all newsroom departments to help colleagues identify the environmental angle of their stories. The latter approach is considered more sustainable and innovative, but difficult to implement as it entails a complete rethinking of how the newsroom works.

According to Alexandra Borchardt, training journalists across the newsroom on climate literacy so that everybody is fit to cover environmental topics would have a great impact, but “that’s an expensive exercise,” she noted. “The expensive part about training is that people can't work on their regular jobs while they receive training.” As an alternative, she recommends having a trainer in the newsroom who is constantly training other reporters on the basis of the stories they are covering. However, she noted that “donors may not want to go down that road because they wouldn’t see the impact right away, and donors always need to see an outcome.”

Asked about having a climate expert in the newsroom who works with different desks, Borchardt said: “I would love to have that approach.” However, it seems that only few news organisations have tested it so far.

James Fahn also insisted on the need to train journalists, and the importance that this training is conducted effectively, so as to ensure journalists can continue to work on their reporting assignments while being trained. “There's strong demand for training capacity. And not just from journalists, but also from media outlets. Editors generally don't like to let their journalists go off to training workshops because it's time away from the newsroom. But on climate they do seem to recognize the need and are willing to share their journalists for this training.”

An approach to training that doesn’t take time away from journalists and resource-stretched newsrooms is for donors and support organisations to offer mentoring and training alongside grants for journalism projects. “When we give out money to the grantees, we also provide them a mentor so that the journalists have their own editors or producers within their home outlets, but they also have a mentor with the Earth Journalism Network that they can turn to for support as well. We very much tie together the training and the content production. It goes together. And that's really how it works best,” Fahn said.

Journalists and experts contacted for this report have all stressed the need for journalists to acquire specific knowledge to be able to cover environmental phenomena and changes, and assess the causes and how they are impacting societies. The type of knowledge that journalists need to gain to make sense of environmental phenomena include, but is not limited to, how to use geo- and earth science data, how to use satellite imagery, how to measure changes in the terrain, and what indicators allow journalists to tell the story of how landscapes and cities are changing.

In addition to providing journalists with knowledge while they are researching their stories, experts agree that it is important to create opportunities for journalists to exchange knowledge based on their experiences. So much is new in environmental journalism, in the way information is collected and disseminated, that it is easier to receive up-to-date knowledge and skills from other practitioners who work in the same field and are fully aware about the needs of the profession.

Promoting cooperation

Philanthropic institutions should also support cooperation between different news outlets. This works best when news outlets do not have competing business interests, for example in the cooperation between local outlets and those operating at the national or international level, or between specialised and generalist outlets, as well as in cross-border cooperation, where news outlets serve different audiences, often even in different languages.

Whenever concerns about market competition are out of the way, cooperation becomes natural and important both in order to collect as well as disseminate information. Local and specialised outlets are more likely to have access to specific information, and in many cases are better at putting the facts in the right context, and they are more familiar with the specific situation on the ground. Local and specialised news outlets also tend to have a closer relationship with their audiences and enjoy greater trust among them. Outlets that operate at the national and international level, however, tend to have better access to government and national level institutions and normally have larger audiences and tend to have a greater impact on governments that fear their criticism and exposure. Often, larger news organisations are also better resourced and have access to tools and experts that can greatly benefit the collection of information, the understanding thereof, and dissemination in certain formats. Big investigations into climate crimes carried out by well-resourced large news outlets can have great impact if they are also published by local news outlets, who are able to hold local players accountable.

Finally, investigating environmental developments can be very dangerous and attacks against environmental journalists are frequent. Cooperation between local and international outlets can provide a degree of protection to local journalists, as attacks generally target journalists who have little exposure and where attackers know that they will face no consequences for their criminal acts.

Caleb Kabanda, a Congolese journalist who has worked with international news outlets to cover Congo's peatlands and their global environmental impact, explained how difficult it is for local journalists and outlets in Congo to talk about environmental degradation in the peatlands and how cooperation with international news outlets is key. On the one hand, Kabanda noted, local outlets don't have the resources necessary to travel through the peatlands to cover the story or get permits to access certain areas, which are very expensive. Furthermore, it is too dangerous for local journalists. "This is something that local journalists cannot do. Even I, personally, if I try to cover the exploitation of the peatlands, with the

relative corruption and illegal logging, without the cover of working for an international news outlet, I couldn't do it," Caleb said, noting that "for some articles, if it's too dangerous, my name doesn't appear on the article." On the other hand, only local journalists can give access to the right sources, and help international journalists identify the most appropriate focus.

> **"It's complex to interact with the local communities. If you don't ask questions according to the tradition, you won't really get the information you need. And you have to navigate the conflicts between the Pygmies, Bantus, the government, the politicians, the logging companies... it requires a lot of local insight."**

Impact measurement

Philanthropic institutions should also work with news organisations to assess the best way to measure and increase impact. Donors tend to ask grantees to measure the output generated as a result of their grants. This can be measured in terms of the number of stories produced, which per se is a very weak indication of anything relevant. It can also be measured fairly easily in terms of audience reach and engagement, which already offers greater insight into audiences' interests and how they interact with the information they are offered. This can be useful when planning the production and dissemination of journalistic content, as long as other factors are also taken into consideration, such as the public interest. Measuring audience interest is particularly important as news outlets need to monetize audiences as part of their efforts to diversify income.

Finally, there is the impact of journalistic content on audiences and society at large. What generates behavioural or policy changes? This is the most difficult one to measure, as only in rare cases can a direct link be seen between journalistic investigations or publications and society or policy changes. In most cases, journalism contributes to important processes that eventually lead to change, in combination with other actors. But these are very difficult to measure.

Alexandra Borchardt stressed the importance of newsrooms measuring impact, as this allows editors to allocate resources in the best possible way. She believes that donors, when funding journalism, should also encourage grantees to develop strategies to measure the

impact of their work. However, because of the various challenges mentioned above, the way impact is assessed should be discussed and agreed upon between the donors and the grantees.

> **"You should be able to negotiate with donors what are the criteria for success. It's really hard if donors come in and push their frameworks on you."**

Projects, journalists, tools

Philanthropic support of journalism can have many goals. In some cases, it aims at promoting independent coverage of certain topics in terms of quality or quantity; in others, it aims at supporting independent news outlets, in particular if they operate in hostile environments, helping them survive and become sustainable. More often, donors fund journalism as part of their democratisation efforts and aim at ensuring that people have access to a multiplicity of sources of information they can trust.

Depending on the goal donors pursue, and the landscape in which they operate, philanthropic support can take many forms. In the field of environmental journalism, the most common approach is that of supporting the cost of production and publication of stories or a series of stories. This can be done by supporting individual news outlets or collaborative efforts and is often combined with training or mentoring opportunities. The rationale behind offering this type of philanthropic support is that complex, investigative, collaborative journalism projects require substantial resources - including travel, access to data and the possibility for journalists to focus on a single story for a long period - and most outlets would not be able to engage in these projects if they didn't receive dedicated funds.

While this model has worked well and led to the publication of some of the most important and eye-opening journalism pieces produced, editors and journalists complain that it is often difficult to combine with the day-to-day work of the newsroom. It doesn't really contribute to long-term sustainability and does not support the coverage of developing stories.

A different approach adopted by some donors to support environmental journalism is to contribute to the salary of one or more journalists or editors who focus on covering environmental stories. While it is difficult to know in advance what the outcome of this type

of support will be and donors have to trust newsrooms to make the right editorial decisions, it leaves room for greater editorial freedom and the ability to cover developments as they happen.

Talking about Internews' work, James Fahn said: "Traditionally, we've supported individual projects in the form of story grants. But I do like the model of supporting a journalist to work full-time on climate for a media outlet. I think it's something that, if we have the resources, we're probably going to do more of. I guess we would call it a fellowship. I would encourage the journalist to provide reporting for many different desks within a newsroom."

Marta Frigerio of Radar noted how grants for stories are good when supporting a large project, but do not help cover regular costs and provide little flexibility. "We would love to receive a grant to cover a salary. Securing coverage for the costs of one full-time journalist for a longer period of time through a sort of fellowship is so important for small news outlets and would offer not only a good degree of sustainability, but also the freedom to develop a medium-term editorial strategy, knowing that a big part of the costs is secured and without having to spend time on grant applications and project management."

Another area that is currently overlooked by donors is the development of open-source tools that provide data and information to environmental journalists. These include all sorts of databases measuring changes in the landscape or in the extraction and use of fossil fuels, tools to cross-reference these data as well as geoinformatics systems or access to satellite imagery that would offer journalists from many different news outlets access to hard data for their investigations and stories.

Access to hard data is key for journalists to analyse developments over a period of time, show how weather patterns are linked to climate change, how many people are affected by them, and be able to assess future developments.

Pakistani journalist Muhammad Daud Khan, a member of the Oxford Climate Journalism Network, wrote: "The national and international media covered the [2022] flood devastation extensively. But due to the lack of data, it was very difficult for reporters and newsroom managers to cover the causes of this devastation, and track how the government acted afterwards."

"To get access to official data for such stories we have two main options," Daud Khan noted. "The first is to rely on sources in the different government departments, and the second is to file a Right to Information request. But getting a reply often takes months. When neither

option produces information, we have to rely on international sources for climate data that don't necessarily have the level of detail or local knowledge that we need."

Giving journalists access to accurate, verifiable, open-source data would greatly increase the quality of climate journalism, be it of an investigative nature or otherwise.

Alexandre Brutelle of the Environmental Investigative Forum (EIF) said:

> **"I'm a hundred percent sure that the future of environmental journalism or investigative environmental journalism is going to be building systemic tools that apply not only to a country but to a whole region.**

"I am not talking about some one-off data project that is showing the level of pollution in a specific country in a specific year, for example, but rather some sustainable tools that give journalists live or constantly updated information, and to which journalists can come back to track developments. Donors should dedicate more resources to these open-source tools."

Products and formats

"The fact that people want more climate information does not necessarily mean it translates immediately into higher ratings. But that's our job as journalists. We have to figure out how to do that. We're supposed to be good storytellers," CCNow's Mark Hertsgaard told the author of this report.

Concerns about high levels of "news avoidance" on environmental topics, as well as widespread disinformation, has led editors and journalists to experiment with news products and formats that are more engaging for audiences and inspire credibility.

In addition, the high cost of producing well-researched investigative pieces requires editors to look for ways to retell the same story in many different formats and so reach different audiences.

"Readers often do not even realise how much work goes into a single investigation," Marta Frigerio says. Talking about a recent investigation report that Radar produced on polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), a group of synthetic chemicals with extreme persistence in the environment, Frigerio said: "It took my colleagues between nine and 10 months of work. Because it was such a long and complex article, it did not receive attention by a broad

audience, but only by a fairly small group of specialised readers. We are now trying to think about formats which are more attractive for a broader public so as to be able to expand our audience."

Some of the experts contacted for this report spoke about their positive experience with explanatory journalism as a means of delivering to non-specialized audiences content that is highly complex and to which typically only the scientific community has access. Even explainers that serve as a guide for audiences to understand how different decisions that they take in their daily lives affect the environment are a successful and effective format. "An explanatory format, where readers can navigate through, select different options and receive explanations as they move along, based on scientific facts and hard data, addresses a strong need of broad audiences and fills a gap," noted Frigerio, citing a recent explainer by Radar on drought as an example.

Explanatory journalism has been adopted by many news organisations as an effective tool to counter disinformation and polarisation and is therefore also relevant for climate coverage.

The use of photography in environmental journalism is also effective, as beautiful or shocking photos, which are often used to illustrate environmental subjects, typically attract readers' attention. Using powerful photographs to illustrate environmental stories, or even to structure stories, has become a successful format, especially for online publications. Indeed, photographs need to be selected carefully as they can also be counterproductive. The example of how the use of photos of polar bears or penguins to illustrate climate change has contributed to the perception that climate change is something happening far away and not affecting us has been cited often.

An important approach, in particular in addressing the credibility crisis surrounding environmental coverage, is to include news about the climate in the weather report, which is typically a part of news coverage that enjoys high credibility and is perceived as accurate and unbiased.

"Faced with a climate emergency, journalists should not keep reporting news the same old way. That's the thinking behind a path-breaking innovation in climate journalism launched this March in France, where the national public broadcaster, France Télévisions, is dramatically changing how it reports on weather," CCNow writes. "The weather is now presented in the context of climate change; viewers hear about how the weather they are experiencing may be affected by the overheating of the planet.

> **"'The goal is to not just say, 'It will be sunny tomorrow or it will rain,' but to explain why,' Alexandre Kara, the editor-in-chief of France Télévisions, said in an interview with the AFP news agency. Kara added that it is no longer 'acceptable to be happy that it is 25 degrees in Biarritz in February without explaining why.'**

"Viewers are left in no doubt that global warming is man-made and caused mainly by burning fossil fuels; indeed, they can observe the inexorable rise in average global temperature on screen in real time."

News organisations have also been experimenting with innovative formats for social media, in an effort to occupy a space where typically much of the disinformation about climate circulates.

Innovation in newsrooms requires time and resources, and only some will actually be successful. But understanding how best to break through the noise and deliver accurate content to our target audiences is key. Donors should support news organisations' efforts to develop and test new products, and understand what audiences like and what has impact.

Conclusions

The field of environmental and climate journalism is changing fast, as questions related to climate change and environmental degradation are becoming ever more pressing and newsrooms around the world face the challenge of having to reorganise their resources and develop capacity to cover the crisis and help their audiences make sense of what is happening around them.

As people struggle to understand the climate crisis, deal with environmental catastrophes, and identify solutions, journalism needs to be there for them and provide the information they need. Only if it succeeds in doing this, will it remain relevant and be perceived as a pillar in global efforts to counter the biggest crisis facing humanity.

This requires resources, strategies, training, investment and, most importantly, the will of publishers and editors to give environmental journalism sufficient space, including by identifying the climate-related elements of stories on different topics. Climate change and environmental degradation are all-pervasive and affect every aspect of our lives. Their coverage should reflect this.

The science is clear: Climate change is caused by human action and one of the outcomes is that floods, droughts and natural catastrophes have become more frequent. It is important for journalists to remind audiences of this scientific evidence and so counter widespread disinformation. However, journalists are not activists and, whenever they cover specific events, the causal link to climate change needs to be verified. For this, they need quality data that analyses changes over time and in many cases such data either doesn't exist or it is withheld by state institutions and journalists are denied access to it. Promoting the availability and accessibility of data, and journalists' ability to understand this data is key to quality environmental journalism.

When it comes to covering the environment, news organisations also need good data on their audiences' needs and expectations. The perception that environmental news doesn't sell is still widespread, but it contrasts with surveys showing that audiences actually want more coverage of the environment. Should journalism help them understand the science behind climate change and the policies of their governments? Should it suggest viable and valid solutions to the problems they are facing as a consequence of climate change? Should it help them hold those responsible for environmental degradation accountable?

Understanding which products, formats and contents audiences need requires thorough analyses and the possibility to experiment with innovative journalism, only some of which will succeed. This, too, requires time and resources, which most newsrooms don't have, but it is a necessary process if journalism is to play a central role in addressing this crisis.

If journalism is to play a role in tackling the climate crisis, it needs to have impact and we need to be able to quantify its impact and understand how to generate it. As newsrooms dedicate resources to environmental journalism, they need to be clear about the goals they hope to achieve and be able to measure their success in doing so. In some cases, this means cooperating with other players — including news outlets, civil society groups and other institutions — in order to extend the reach of journalistic projects.

Finally, as editors, journalists and news organisations move to improve their coverage of the environment and the climate, creating channels of communication and opportunities for them to exchange experiences, practices and internal guidelines will greatly contribute to improving environmental and climate journalism globally.