



**ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS
FOR JOURNALISTS**
A Guidebook on Best Practices

ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS FOR JOURNALISTS

A Guidebook on Best Practices

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Foto: Shane Rounce/Unsplash

and students, carried out by UNEP and partners from Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Brasília, Manaus and Belém, between 2018 and 2019.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	06
Foreword	10
Introduction	11
1 Human rights and the environment	12
On the front line for the planet – and for all people’s rights	16
Movement of people affected by dams, Brazil	20
Center for Justice Governance and Environmental Action (CJGEA), Kenya	22
Guardians of the forest, Brazil	23
The United Nations Human Rights System on the topic of human rights and the environment	24
Framework principles on human rights and the environment	26
UNEP’s environmental rights work: promoting, protecting and respecting environmental rights	28
How this publication can help	29
2 Why does media coverage on environmental rights matter?	30
Environmental rule of law	34
Access to environmental information, decision making and justice	36
The case of the indigenous communities of the Lhaka Honhat Association	38
Inspect, inform and guide the debate	39
NOTIMIA: Network of female indigenous and afro-descendant communicators for peace	40

Mídia Índia: The fight for demarcation of lands and screens	41
Autonomous communication for rights	42
The value of environmental news	43

3 What is lacking for the media coverage on environmental rights? 44

Put the environment at the heart of the conversation	46
Understand the relationship between environmental harm and human rights	47

4 Why do environmental rights matter to each journalist and each channel? 48

Contextualize and inform in-depth	53
Restate the social place of journalism	54
Land of Resistants	55
Earth Journalism Network	56
Agenda Propia	57

5 What's the news? 58

The topic is not always about climate change and sustainability	60
Defining the topic	61
Verifying the facts	62
Reporting on your community	63

6 Covering environmental rights 64

The challenges of environmental coverage	66
Addressing the challenges of environmental coverage	68
Access to information	69
Security of the sources	70
Searching for resources and dealing with internal censorship	70
Six steps to ensure your safety when covering environmental issues	72

- Careful planning and an understanding of the site	72
- Be careful with clothing and equipment	72
- Be mindful of where you are	72
- Pay attention to digital security	73
- Follow basic security protocols	73
- Risks to women journalists and media professionals	73

7 Tips on how to find a good topic and tell a story better **74**

How to identify a story?	76
Going beyond cliché	77
10 intersections with the environment to keep on the radar	77
1 - Environment and health	77
2 - Environment and economy	77
3 - Environment and politics	78
4 - Environment and daily life	78
5 - Environment and sport	78
6 - Environment and tourism	78
7 - Environment, industry and market	79
8 - Environment and transport	79
9 - Environment and fashion	79
10 - Environment, culture and entertainment	79
Aruanas: Defenders of the forest	80
Humanize the story	81
Get to know the audience	81

8 Visual resources and the use of images, maps and graphics **82**

Why being visual makes a difference	84
Telling stories with frameworks, lines and bars	84
InfoAmazonia: the use of data in journalism	85
References	86

Foreword

Effective environmental governance is the main vehicle through which we can reduce the impact of environmental degradation on human rights. Environmental defenders¹ are involved in the legitimate work of monitoring compliance with environmental governance commitments, and promoting the protection of the environment and our rights to it. In this way, they take a closer look at the messages that nature sends us every day and, more than that, raise their voices to respond to this cause.

On the front line of transforming our relationship with the planet, defenders become a target of many types of attacks and violence, teaching us a lesson: everyone has a role to play in preserving nature, and in protecting and respecting the human rights obligations related to the environment.

The Latin America and the Caribbean region reportedly has the highest numbers of environmental defenders murdered in the world in recent years. However, this region has also led efforts to adopt the only binding agreement derived from Rio+20 and the first to contain a specific provision on environmental human rights defenders, the Escazú Agreement.²

In its “Policy for Promoting Greater Protection for Environmental Defenders”, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) also aims at supporting solutions to mitigate abuse against environmental defenders, as well as advocating for the realisation of their environmental rights.

In addition, through UNEP’s Environmental Rights Initiative, a package of environmental rights work undertaken by UNEP with partners, several awareness-raising activities have been rolled out among, and with, people on the front line of environmental protection, helping state and non-state actors to promote, protect and respect human rights obligations related to the environment.

By working with governments, engaging with the private sector, supporting civil society and cooperating with the media, it is possible to improve the efficiency of public policies and legal frameworks for the protection of people who defend the environment, in addition to reducing the pressures of human activities on nature – key components of environmental human rights.

Denise Hamú

UNEP Representative in Brazil

Leo Heileman

Former Director at UNEP for Latin America and the Caribbean

¹ The UN Human Rights Council has defined Environmental Human Rights Defenders as human rights defenders working in environmental matters (A/HRC/RES/40/11). In line with this definition, UNEP considers an Environmental Defender to be anyone (including individuals and groups, as well as groups of individuals that may include vulnerable populations such as women or indigenous human rights defenders) who is exercising or defending environmental and land rights, including rights to a clean and healthy environment.

² The Escazú Agreement entered into force on 22 April 2021.

Introduction

“We see the clear benefits for the environment and people, a strong call from all the people we serve and the momentum to move forward and towards that universal recognition of the rights to a healthy environment. There is no reason and no time for hesitation, the time is now.”

Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

In this guide for journalists, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Brazil Country Office presents background, information and examples of good practices, related to the work of environmental defenders, collected during listening activities, knowledge sharing and interviews. Since it was launched worldwide in 2018, partially in response to the increased violence against environmental defenders, UNEP’s Environmental Rights Initiative seeks to cooperate with key stakeholders such as the media for, amongst other activities, better training and coverage on the topic.

Putting people who risk their safety and lives to preserve nature at the heart of the discussion is essential to address environmental protection as a matter of human rights. The health and well-being of people have always depended on an ecologically balanced environment. However, this relationship has never been more critical, as laid out in the UNEP report “Making Peace with Nature”, launched in February 2021. It is on this basis that this guide has been developed.

We invite journalists, communications specialists, media professionals, journalism and media lecturers, instructors and students and other people interested in using the following pages as a tool to raise their voices in support of the cause of environmental defenders and for the realisation of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment for current and future generations.

1

HUMAN
RIGHTS
and the
environment



Human rights and environmental rights are intertwined and, more than that, complementary.

The term 'environmental rights' is generally understood to mean rights related to the environment. At the inter-governmental level, the term was first agreed to and adopted in 1993 as a concept for further consideration and development as part of the second UNEP Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law (Montevideo Programme II) by way of by UNEP Governing Council decision 17/25 and was referred to again in UNEP Governing Council Decision 22/17. Human rights cannot be enjoyed without a clean, ecologically balanced, and safe environment. Additionally, sustainable environmental governance cannot exist without the recognition of human rights in relation to the environment and, consequently, socio-environmental justice.

This interdependence of the environment, the enjoyment of human rights and livelihoods is evident across several regions. For example, the *Xolobeni* area, located in South Africa, is home to the *Umgungundlovu* community comprising around 600 people. The land they live on provides the community with all their livelihood needs: food, water, firewood and medicinal plants, and it is a basis for agricultural and tourist activities. The land is also the final resting place of many of the community's ancestors, which is a deeply spiritual, religious, and culturally important connection.

Soon after a large open-cast titanium mine was planned in the area, the *Umgungundlovu* community founded the *Amadiba* Crisis Committee to coordinate a legal opposition against the mine and to address potential displacement of the community and degradation to their lands. For over a decade, the community has fought off severe acts of intimidation, threats and murders. Despite these community efforts, in 2016, the former Chairperson of the *Amadiba* Crisis Committee, Sikhosiphi "Bazooka" Rhadebe, was killed at his home in front of his teenage son.³

The *Umgungundlovu* community brought the case to a South African court and, in 2018, won the right to be consulted and consent to projects on their

³ See more: <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/south-african-indigenous-community-win-environmental-rights-case-over-mining?fbclid=IwAR2jyDTZj4--06PPpCC2DHIqt4IUTHPSbQXqrvb8QfiEwbYm2CiKINTwwqQ>

customary land,⁴ thus ensuring that their human rights are protected and respected – including, but not limited to, in this case, the right to food, health, and means of subsistence.

However, the relationship between the full enjoyment of human rights and environmental rights has not always been clear. In July 1988, in Lorca, the city of the autonomous community of Murcia, Spain, a solid and liquid waste treatment plant was built using public subsidy and began its operations without a license having been issued.⁵ The plant began to emit gases, smoke and strong odours due to malfunctioning, contaminating the entire residential area around it and affecting the health of several people, including the health of Gregoria López Ostra, her husband and the couple's daughters.

The same year, Gregoria made a complaint to the municipal authorities in an effort to cease the company's activities. Without an effective response, in 1989, she complained about the unlawful interference with her home and her peaceful enjoyment of it, a violation of her right to freely choose her place of residence. She also claimed that there were attacks on her physical and psychological integrity, as well as infringements of her liberty and safety.

Nevertheless, the Administrative Division of the Murcia Audiencia Territorial did not accept the claims of López Ostra and her family, alleging that while the operation of the treatment plant was inconvenient, it did not endanger the health of those living nearby. Ostra then appealed to the Spanish Supreme Court, which was denied. After also appealing to the Constitutional Court, her appeal for legal protection was also denied in 1990.

In 1994, the European Court of Human Rights found Spain liable⁶ for failing to protect Ostra's right to respect for her private and family life, as laid down in Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, but it took a stand against the alleged torture (Article 3), associated with the constant ailments and health problems suffered mainly by Ostra and her daughter.

These two cases illustrate some of the connections between the environment and human rights, but there are several other cases from all over the world – sometimes closer than we think – exposing the direct and inseparable relationship between human rights and the environment. When analysing them, we can clearly see the risks if we do not effectively address the environmental dimension of human rights, whether for people or communities.

⁴ Source: <http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZAGPPHC/2018/829.html>

⁵ Source: <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre?i=001-57905>

⁶ Available at: <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-57905>

ON THE FRONT LINE FOR THE PLANET – AND FOR ALL PEOPLE’S RIGHTS

“For their tireless work in empowering communities and protecting ecosystems, environmental defenders are killed in startling numbers. Murder is not the only way environmental defenders are persecuted; for every 1 killed, there are 20 to 100 others harassed, unlawfully and lawfully arrested, and sued for defamation, amongst other intimidations”

John Knox, former UN Special Rapporteur
on Human Rights and the Environment.

Protecting the environment and ensuring the protection, respect for, and fulfilment of environmental rights is a duty of all people. However, only a small portion of citizens and a small group of organizations are actively pursuing the exercise and defence of these rights. Environmental defenders are defined by the UN Human Rights Council as human rights defenders working in environmental matters (A/HRC/RES/40/11). In line with this definition, UNEP considers an environmental defender to be anyone (including individuals and groups, as well as groups of individuals, that may include vulnerable populations such as women or indigenous human rights defenders) who is exercising or defending environmental and land rights, including rights to a clean and healthy environment.

Environmental rights violations of communities and individuals have been increasing all over the world, partly explained by competition for natural resources. The expropriation of indigenous and local communities' lands by private, business, or state actors often leads entire communities into forced migration. But beyond the more rural and far-flung areas, the fight for environmental and human rights is also found in urban areas and in the cities.

Environmental defenders face an enormous challenge while conducting their work. In addition to harassment and physical violence, there are other ways used by corporate or state actors or militia as an attempt to silence activism. These methods include defamation, judicial harassment, criminalisation and allegations relying on cybercrimes. The consequences of these efforts to silence them compromise the physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing of the people who are the targets of such cases – often resulting in physical and mental illnesses. Moreover, during the global pandemic, environmental defenders have also had their digital safety compromised.⁷

The disparity in power, resources and information further contribute to a culture of indifference and, in some cases, even impunity with regard to environmental harm and the people affected by them. Hence, taking a step forward to report such violence and violations is, in many cases, a matter of survival – for a family, a community, or even a historical tradition. Being an activist or a defender is sometimes a choice, but in other cases, as a result of circumstance and the only way to protect resources and ecosystem services.

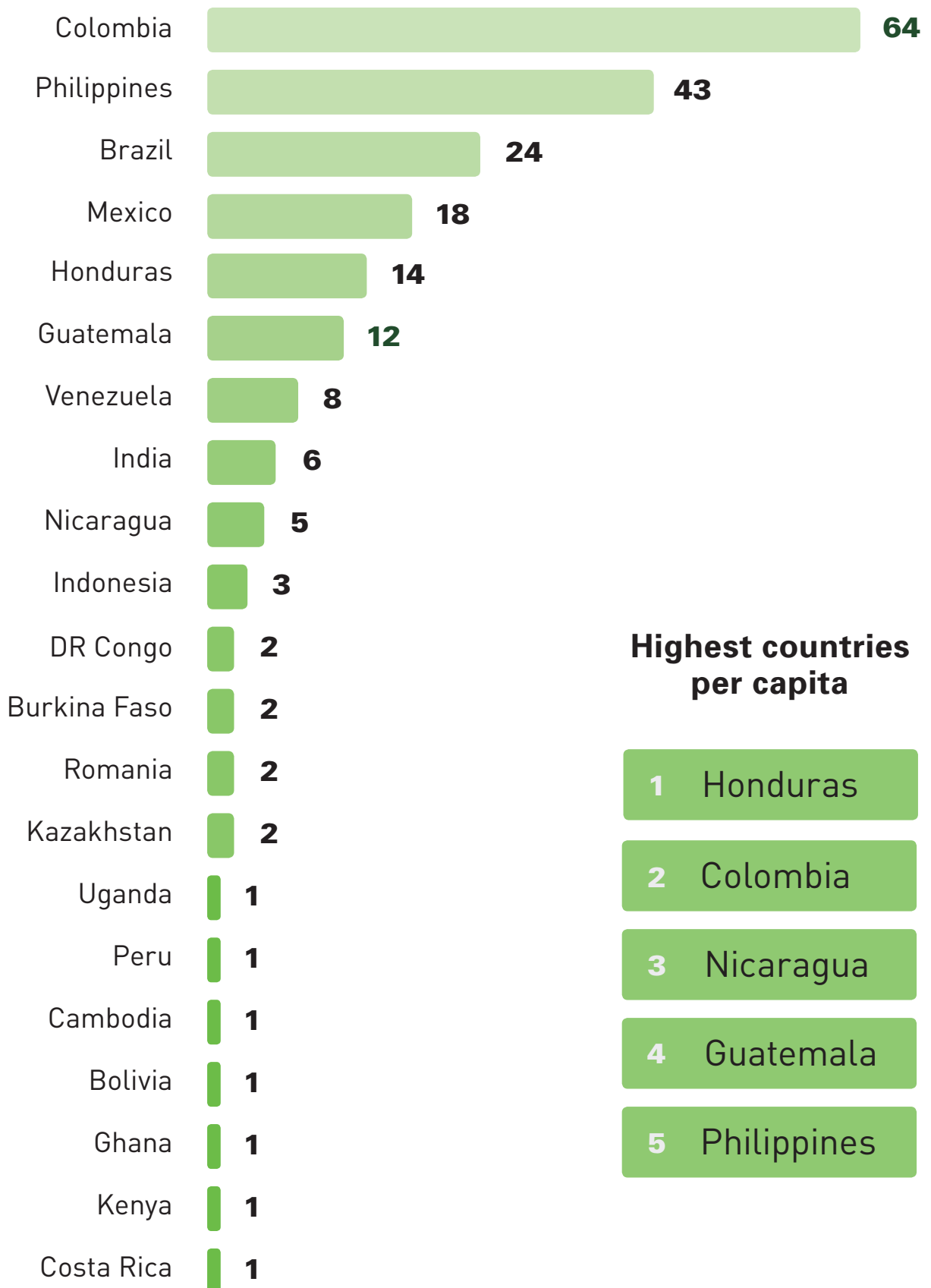
Despite the challenges, speaking out and raising important issues related to environmental harms are some of the main characteristics of the efforts of environmental defenders.

According to data published by Global Witness in 2020, an average of four environmental defenders are killed every week around the world since December 2015 – the month in which the Paris Agreement was signed – while many others are beaten, threatened, harassed, intimidated and criminalized for their work.

Around 40% of all fatal victims in 2019 were from indigenous communities. These communities are engaged in defending their lands, as well as their access to the natural resources on which they depend to survive, from the extraction of medicines, food and many raw materials.

⁷ Source: https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/fld_global_analysis_2020.pdf

Total number of killings per country in 2019



Source: Global Witness (2020)

Number of killings by sector in 2019



50

Mining and
extractives



34

Agribusiness



24

Logging



14

Illegal crops
substitution



11

Land
reform



6

Water and
dams



4

Poaching



1

Fishing



9

Other



71

No clear link
to a sector

It is also important to highlight the urban environmental defenders who strive for the realisation of environmental rights in small and large cities, whether for maintaining green areas, fighting against the pollution of lakes, seas and hillsides from which means of subsistence are extracted, or providing access to drinking water or air of an acceptable quality.

Women environmental defenders – in rural or urban areas – are especially vulnerable. The multiple forms of discrimination, stigma, and violence against them are increased or intersected by other factors, such as race, ethnicity, sexuality and generational issues, besides the gender issue itself.

According to a report of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN),⁸ launched in 2020, gender-based violence is used as a means of suppressing women environmental human rights defenders' power and authority, undermining their credibility and status within the community, and discouraging them from coming forward.

MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DAMS, BRASIL

The Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB) is a civil society organization comprising populations that were affected by dam collapses in Brazil, such as those that took place in Brumadinho and Mariana. The organization, which emerged in the 1980s, defines itself as a national, popular and autonomous movement, with collective protagonism and participation. MAB claims human rights for the affected populations, such as the right to land, water, energy and distribution of wealth. The organization's major area of work focuses on the energy policy and use of resources with sovereignty and popular control.

To read more, please visit mab.org.br

⁸Gender-based violence and environment linkages: The violence of inequality. Available at: <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2020-002-En.pdf>



Photo: Lucas Sharif/Mídia Índia

OMBASA LAW COURT



Photo: CJGEA

CENTER FOR JUSTICE GOVERNANCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION (CJGEA), KENYA

The Centre for Justice Governance and Environmental Action (CJGEA) is an organization focused on human rights and the environment, whose mission is to protect marginalized people and periphery communities around extractive industries and toxic sites in Kenya.

CJGEA seeks to support and create an empowering space so that communities can claim environmental protection and access to socio-economic rights to eradicate poverty, injustice and inequality. Its goals include, but are not limited to, developing resources and raising awareness about community issues, participating in international networks, and influencing decision-making that affects the creation of better policies and processes on environmental issues in the country.

To read more, please visit www.centerforjgea.com

GUARDIANS OF THE FOREST, BRAZIL

In north-east Brazil, a group of indigenous people, Guajajara, Kaapor and Awa-Guajá, has joined together to monitor the Amazon forest against loggers and invaders, reporting them to the authorities. The Guardians of the Forest work in many regions of Maranhão state, but especially the Arariboia Indigenous Land.

In November 2019, the murder of Paulo Paulino Guajajara, who acted as a guardian of the forest, made headlines in the international media. The young defender was killed in an ambush by loggers, after a series of threats for his work in defence of the forest.

Currently, eight indigenous areas in Maranhão state are protected by the Guardians of the Forest, who continue to risk their lives in the fight for the environment.

Photo: Patrick Raynaud/Mídia Índia



THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM ON THE TOPIC OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The United Nations has four permanent bodies for Human Rights: The UN Human Rights Council, Special Procedures (Special Rapporteurs, members of the Working Groups and Independent Experts), Treaty Bodies (Human Rights Committees) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Although the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights makes no explicit reference to the interconnection between human rights obligations related to the environment, the permanent bodies for human rights include the issue in their work. The need to ensure environmental rights for effective compliance with human rights started to build momentum with the Stockholm Declaration (1972), adopted by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, and with the Vienna Declaration (1993), adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) provides in its Article 12 (right to health) that states should take measures to assure the improvement of all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene in order to achieve the full realization of this right. In 2000, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), the body that monitors the ICESCR, stated in General Comment No. 14 that “the right to health embraces a wide range of socio-economic factors that promote conditions in which people can lead a healthy life, and it extends to the underlying determinants of health, such as (...) a healthy environment”.

The establishment of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment (formerly Independent Expert) began through the adoption of the resolution 28/11 (2015) of the Human Rights Council that recognized the need to clarify some aspects of the obligations concerning human rights and the environment. The relationship between human rights and the environment is also outlined in resolutions 34/20 (2017), which recognizes human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development, and 31/8 (2016), which invites and encourages states to take a series of measures to respect, protect and fulfil environmental human rights.

The former UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, John H. Knox, published 16 Framework Principles on human rights and the environment, based on five years of work to clarify the human rights obligations related to the environment and developed in consultation with governments, human rights mechanisms, civil society organizations and others. The Framework Principles do not propose new obligations but are instead based on existing obligations of states and responsibilities of business or private sector actors.

The Framework Principles summarise the main obligations for the enjoyment of a safe, clean, ecologically balanced and sustainable environment. They provide integrated and detailed information and guidelines for implementing these obligations in a practical way, as well as a basis for an understanding and future development.

“I encourage States, international organizations, business enterprises, civil society organizations, indigenous peoples and all others committed to safeguarding human rights and the environment to disseminate and publicize the Framework Principles, and to take them into account in their own activities”

John Knox, former UN Special Rapporteur
on Human Rights and the Environment.

Since 2018, the current Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, David Boyd, is focusing his work on clarifying elements of the right to a healthy environment and calling for the UN to recognize this right. In particular, he has clarified, amongst others, elements centred on human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment ; the global water crisis ; and healthy biosphere .

⁹ See more: <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/43/53>

¹⁰ See more: <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/40/55>

¹¹ See more: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/46/28>

¹² See more: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Environment/SREnvironment/Healthy_Biosphere_A75161.pdf

FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLES ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

John Knox

- 1** • States should ensure a safe, clean, ecologically balanced and sustainable environment in order to respect, protect and fulfil human rights.
- 2** • States should respect, protect and fulfil human rights in order to ensure a safe, clean, ecologically balanced and sustainable environment.
- 3** • States should prohibit discrimination and ensure equal and effective protection against discrimination in relation to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, ecologically balanced and sustainable environment.
- 4** • States should provide a safe and enabling environment in which individuals, groups and civil society organizations that work on human rights or environmental issues can operate free from threats, harassment, intimidation or violence.
- 5** • States should respect and protect the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly in relation to environmental matters.
- 6** • States should provide for education and public awareness on environmental matters.
- 7** • States should provide public access to environmental information by collecting and disseminating information and by providing affordable, effective and timely access to information to any person upon request.
- 8** • To avoid undertaking or authorizing actions with environmental impacts that interfere with the full enjoyment of human rights, States should require the prior assessment of the possible environmental impacts of proposed projects and policies, including their potential effects on the enjoyment of human rights.
- 9** • States should provide for and facilitate public participation in decision-making related to the environment, and take the views of the society into account.

10 • States should provide for access to effective remedies for violations of human rights and domestic laws relating to the environment.

11 • States should establish and maintain substantive environmental standards that are non-discriminatory, non-retrogressive and otherwise respect, protect and fulfil human rights.

12 • States should ensure the effective enforcement of their environmental standards against public and private actors.

13 • States should cooperate with each other to establish, maintain and enforce effective international legal frameworks in order to prevent, reduce and remedy transboundary and global environmental harm that interferes with the full enjoyment of human rights.

14 • States should take additional measures to protect the rights of those who are most vulnerable to, or at particular risk from, environmental harm, taking into account their needs, risks and capacities.

15 • States should ensure that they comply with their obligations to indigenous peoples and members of traditional communities, including by:

a) Recognizing and protecting their rights to the lands, territories and resources that they have traditionally owned, occupied or used;

b) Consulting with them and obtaining their free, prior and informed consent before relocating them or taking or approving any other measures that may affect their lands, territories or resources;

c) Respecting and protecting their traditional knowledge and practices in relation to the conservation and sustainable use of their lands, territories and resources;

d) Ensuring that they fairly and equitably share the benefits from activities relating to their lands, territories or resources.

16 • States should respect, protect and fulfil human rights in the actions they take to address environmental challenges and pursue sustainable development.

Source: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations related to the enjoyment of a balanced and sustainable environment, UN (2018).

UNEP'S ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS WORK: PROMOTING, PROTECTING AND RESPECTING ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS



UNEP has been working on human rights and the environment for almost two decades through, amongst other efforts, identifying good practices on human rights and the environment, raising awareness of judiciaries across all regions on constitutional environmental rights, and supporting the negotiations on a legal instrument in Latin America and the Caribbean, based on Principle 10 of Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Escazú Agreement.

UNEP's Environmental Rights Initiative includes the implementation of the organisational Policy on Promoting Greater Protection for Environmental Defenders and represents the current phase of the organisation's work on human rights and the environment. It is based on the outcomes of past projects, as well as on the key resolutions of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) and the Human Rights Council.

The initiative seeks to bring environmental protection closer to the people by assisting state and non-state actors to promote, protect and respect environmental rights. Through it, UNEP aims to:

Work with governments to strengthen institutional capacities to develop and implement legal structures and policies that protect environmental rights in an effective and inclusive way;

Assist the companies to make them understand better what their environmental rights obligations are, and to provide guidance on how to move from a compliance culture in the defence of environmental rights;

Support civil society organisations and vulnerable populations in their efforts to access information on their environmental rights and to outline the environmental rights violations;

Collaborate with media on the training of journalists on issues related to environmental rights and environmental defenders.

This guide contributes to the fulfilment of this last point.

HOW THIS PUBLICATION CAN HELP

These guidelines of good practices are dedicated to journalists, communication students, professors, educators, community communicators and other media professionals who are willing to raise awareness, promote advocacy, recreate narratives and tell stories that need to be told about the environment, the people who defend it, and those who depend on it for immediate survival.

The next chapters gather useful information on environmental law environmental rights and environmental defenders, which will contribute to responding to the needs identified during UNEP's engagements with journalists, media professionals, environmental defenders, students, researchers and civil society organisations in Brazil. The guide also provides some key concepts on the subject, examples of good practices, and tips for better media coverage.

2

WHY DOES
MEDIA COVERAGE
on environmental
rights matter?



Ensuring the protection and fulfilment of environmental rights is not only a matter of laws, constitutions, and international legal frameworks.

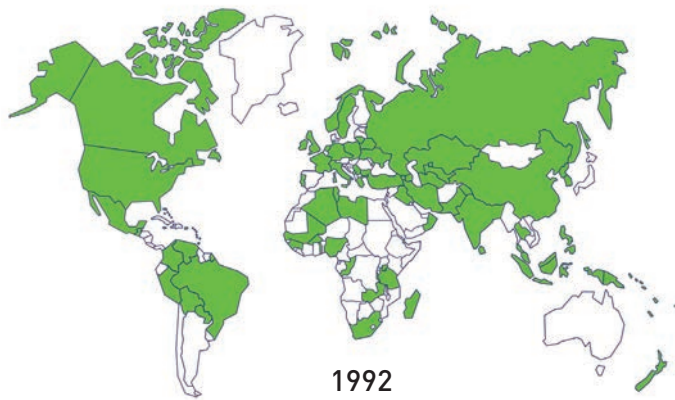
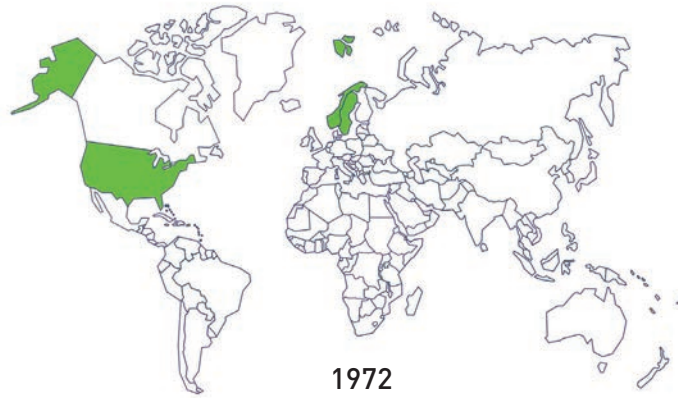
Strengthened institutions and the effectiveness of environmental laws are essential for a healthy planet and healthy people. When it comes to environmental law, the debate and need for collaboration goes much further than the legal community.

Environmental rights are growing faster than any other human right – they are already present in over 100 constitutions around the world. As mentioned earlier, in 1972, the Stockholm Declaration on the Environment helped to initiate the first recognition of the interrelationship of human rights and the environment, starting their process of wider recognition.

Since then, environmental laws have multiplied and contributed to slowing down environmental degradation. In 2017, 176 countries had already adopted an environmental regulatory framework, which is a meaningful step forward if compared to 1972 and 1992.

Countries with framework environmental laws (1972, 1992 e 2017)

Source: Environmental Rule of Law Report: First Global Report, UNEP (2019).¹³



■ Countries with national environmental framework laws

¹³ Available at: www.unep.org/resources/assessment/environmental-rule-law-first-global-report

However, while the right to an ecologically balanced environment is increasingly recognized, it has also been increasingly violated. According to UNEP's first global assessment of the *Environmental Rule of Law*,¹⁴ published in 2019, despite a 38-fold increase in the applicable environmental laws since 1972, the failure to fully implement and enforce these laws is one of the major challenges to mitigate climate change, reduce pollution, protect ecosystems and prevent the spread of invasive species and habitat loss.

ENVIRONMENTAL RULE OF LAW

The rule of law ensures the existence of a democracy. In 2004, in the UN Secretary-General's Report on the Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies,¹⁵ the rule of law was defined as a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards.

Environmental rule of law is the practice of ensuring that laws are widely understood, respected, and enforced and that the benefits of environmental protection are enjoyed by people and the planet. It is central to sustainable development and integrates the critical environmental needs with the essential elements of the rule of law, providing the basis for reforming environmental governance. It essentially connects environmental sustainability with fundamental rights and obligations. For the environmental rule of law, ecosystems and the services they provide – such as food and water – are considered the foundations of the full enjoyment of human rights.

The environmental rule of law strengthens environmental governance, which is reflected in the promulgation of global or regional agreements, creation of policies and decision making, as well as the creation or strengthening of institutions, organizations and procedures that govern the environment. However, it also creates the conditions to **reduce socio-environmental inequalities and injustices** and contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN Agenda 2030, **without leaving anyone behind**.

¹⁴ Available at https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/27279/Environmental_rule_of_law.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

¹⁵ Available at <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/2004%20report.pdf>

The increasing environmental pressures arising from climate change, loss of biodiversity, water scarcity, air and water pollution, and soil degradation, among others, contribute to poverty and an increase in social inequalities. The risks of violent conflict increase when the exploitation of natural resources causes environmental harm, loss of means of subsistence, or unequal distribution of benefits. Poor people, women and girls are especially vulnerable, but they are not the only ones affected. Socio-environmental inequality harms everyone.

Understanding environmental rights and how to bring them into public debates improves the effectiveness of environmental governance and proper enforcement of legal rights and obligations against socio-environmental inequalities. In later sections, this guide provides a clearer understanding of what this means, in a practical way, to environmental media coverage – because the way in which the media talks about the environment, environmental rights and environmental defenders creates narratives and influences society's perception and response to it.

The two main 'categories' of environmental rights:

Substantive rights

Substantive rights are those in which the environment has a direct effect on the existence or the enjoyment of the right itself. Substantive rights comprise of civil and political rights, such as the rights to life, and freedom of association; economic and social rights such as rights to health, food and an adequate standard of living; cultural rights such as rights to access religious sites; and collective rights affected by environmental degradation, such as the rights of indigenous peoples.

Procedural rights

Procedural rights prescribe formal steps to be taken in enforcing legal rights. Procedural rights include three fundamental access rights: access to information, public participation, and access to justice.

ACCESS TO ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION, DECISION MAKING AND JUSTICE

The right of access to information is essential for participation in decision-making. It allows people affected by environmental degradation to be aware of a situation, request information and potentially influence decisions about government and private sector activities, which are infringing or have the potential to infringe environmental rights. Participating is also important for the effectiveness of the law, as well as for ensuring access to justice that, in turn, requires the existence of strong and independent institutions.

Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration (Rio Declaration on Environment and Development) states that environmental issues are best handled with participation of people involved in the decision-making processes. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities – including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities.

Moreover, in accordance with Principle 10, States should facilitate and encourage public awareness and public participation by making information widely available, as well as offering people the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. The principle also envisages effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy.

Access to information, access to participation and access to justice are explicitly provided for in the Aarhus Convention (1998) and are the main points of the **Escazú Agreement**¹⁶ (Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean), adopted in Costa Rica in 2018. This is the only legally binding agreement – that is, with the force of law when ratified – derived from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). It is also the first regional environmental treaty of Latin America and the Caribbean and the only international agreement with a specific provision to protect environmental defenders.

The rights of access (to information, participation and justice or remedy) are interrelated and are considered interdependent. For this reason, it is imperative for these rights to be implemented and promoted in a full and balanced manner.

Communication channels and other media can play – and several already do – an important role in ensuring rights of access, as laid down in the Rio Declaration and the Escazú Agreement, especially with regard to access to information, essential for access to participation and access to justice.

¹⁶ Read more at <https://www.cepal.org/pt-br/acordodeescazu>

THE CASE OF THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES OF THE LHAKA HONHAT ASSOCIATION

In 2020, the indigenous communities of the Salta region, in Argentina, who are members of the Lhaka Honhat Association, appealed to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) and won the right to their lands. For decades, the 132 communities of the *wichi*, *chorote*, *toba*, *mataco*, *tapiete* and *chulupí* have come together as an association aiming at claiming the lands always occupied by them ancestrally.

This was the first time a State has been condemned in the IACHR for infringing on the right to a healthy environment, proper food, water and cultural identity. As a decision that can transform the battle against climate change, it is an example of how rights of access are intertwined.

In addition to recognizing the right to the lands, the Court also recognizes that the rights of the 132 communities, which experienced invasions, deforestation and expansion of agriculture in their territories. The right to participate in the decision-making process regarding projects and works on the communities' land was also considered, as well as the right to guarantees and judicial protections concerning the obligations to respect and ensure the realisation of the rights set out in lawsuits.

INSPECT, INFORM AND GUIDE THE DEBATE

In any democracy, journalism is based on the fundamental right to access information, including the right to inform and be informed. As such, the journalist's role is to disseminate information in a correct and precise manner, guided by the commitment to the true information and the public interest.

Providing information is a social and moral commitment, whether made by public, private or non-governmental organizations. Preventing the free dissemination of information, directly or indirectly, is therefore an offense against society, in accordance with laws around the world when dealing with censorship.

As information mediators, journalists act like supervisors for public and private actions. Thanks to this role, journalism is often seen as extra power, in addition to the powers of the State – its capacity to investigate and disseminate information is essential for maintaining democracy and ensuring the enforcement of the rule of law.

The role of informing, supervising and, consequently, guiding the debate in the public sphere is also essential to assure access to environmental rights. Media coverage can save environmental defenders' lives, promote empathy for their causes and stories, bring new understandings of reality and new behaviours, encourage positive changes in public policies and even empower people and communities. It can also inspire and encourage international cooperation between networks or countries.



Photo: Mikel Blasco/CCEMx

NOTIMIA: NETWORK OF FEMALE INDIGENOUS AND AFRO-DESCENDANT COMMUNICATORS FOR PEACE

Originating in Central America and Mexico, the NOTIMIA news agency is comprised of a network of female indigenous and afro-descendant communicators. The network seeks to make visible, promote, qualify, train and disseminate the organizational processes of communities and peoples from different indigenous languages around the world.

The agency promotes training and dissemination of organizational processes from within the local and national communities and native indigenous peoples. The purpose is not only to inform but to also train indigenous and afro-descendant communicators.

Hence, NOTIMIA seeks to share the use and management of new technologies with a social, political, cultural and environmental protection meaning. Human rights and gender issues are fundamental to this process, which gives visibility to indigenous thinking and the leadership of women.

To read more, please visit notimia.com.

MÍDIA ÍNDIA: THE FIGHT FOR DEMARCATION OF LANDS AND SCREENS

Mídia Índia is a communication project in Brazil comprised of a network of young indigenous people, which disseminates content and topics on indigenous issues in Brazil on digital platforms. The project is founded on cooperation and sharing, enabling the exchange of technologies and experiences among the participants.

In addition to reporting on the struggles of Brazilian indigenous peoples, such as the demarcation of traditionally occupied ancestral lands, it also seeks to “demarcate screens”, in other words, the representation of indigenous peoples in the means of communication, enhancing their presence on TV, social media and other communication outlets’ screens. Brazil has at least 305 groups of indigenous peoples, who speak 274 different languages, according to data from the 2010 Census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE).

Even though the scenario is challenging and each group of peoples has specific demands – although they are similar in many points – building a network of information sharing for the external audience, as well as sharing technologies and knowledge inside the network, is an example of a good practice on how to actively engage the community itself.

To read more, please visit www.midiaindia.com.

Photo: Mídia Índia



AUTONOMOUS COMMUNICATION FOR RIGHTS

Joining forces on journalism and acquiring a certain presence that is sometimes difficult to reach in traditional journalism, popular, alternative or community communication has built momentum with social media becoming popular in the recent decades.

Community communication, as the name implies, is that which is developed within the communities and their members themselves. More than just informing, it also raises awareness or promotes mobilization for the causes of that group – which is poorly represented in the traditional means of communication and the mainstream media – in order to transform the reality experienced.

Nowadays, different groups from within the communities themselves communicate in an independent and autonomous way, using social networks to expose the issues they face and to claim environmental rights.

THE VALUE OF ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

Political clashes, epidemics and pandemics, financial crises, cases of violence, natural disasters, transport problems, employment increase and decrease, large businesses, sporting events, entertainment and cultural activities: events do not stop and it is hard to select which ones will be in the news.

Although they can be approached by different editorships, the themes listed above have something in common – besides meeting the news values such as timeliness, proximity and prominence. All involve environmental issues. Environmental news is not just on the topics of biodiversity, sustainability or climate change, but anywhere where people are.

Talking about the environment is also talking about politics. The health of the planet and people are inextricably linked. Financial crises are opportunities to rethink practices and make investments that safeguard nature. People are murdered and harassed for defending their livelihoods and their environmental rights – and many times for protecting a common asset that belongs to all of us. Natural disasters can be caused or aggravated by poor management of natural resources or a failure to comply with the law. Sport, culture and leisure can also address the human relationship with urban, rural and forest areas.

A delicate approach to the environmental intersection in events of daily life when covering or reporting on any theme is a tool for understanding environmental issues, ensuring efficient environmental governance, guiding decision making, as well as for action and search for solutions to sustainability.

Importantly, nature has been sending us clear messages that we are exceeding the limits as a society, at the risk of crossing the point of no return to reverse the degradation and destruction of nature and wildlife. The sense of urgency is not a sensationalisation of the news, but a simple and sober reflection of reality.

In addition to ensuring access to information, supervising actions of public authorities and the private sector, as well as demanding better and more inclusive public policies, the role of journalists, reporters, editors, communicators and media professionals is also to show citizens that the world's environmental issues are not distant and not even in the future, but these are already influencing everyone's daily lives – and are also influenced by the choices and actions of each person, as well as by governments, the private sector and other organizations.

3

WHAT IS LACKING
IN MEDIA
COVERAGE ON
environmental
rights?



PUT THE ENVIRONMENT AT THE HEART OF THE CONVERSATION

When we pay attention to the national and international press, we find several examples of good practices on environmental coverage. Specialized channels offer a variety of readings on energy and science, finance, politics, pollution, climate change and other themes related to the environment.

However, there is still a long road ahead for media coverage on the environment and environmental rights. Putting the environment at the heart of the conversation on any topic in any communication channel is a challenge, whether due to structural, practical, financial or even educational limitations (see Chapter 6). From the perspective of journalism, there are some alternatives to addressing these challenges and driving transformation on environment-related media coverage.

Understanding that society is the environment and how impacts on the environment are connected to our lives is an important exercise for initiating the change we need. There is also a need to build greater understanding of the environmental laws in a country, international agreements and the obligations and responsibilities of the states, companies and other organizations.

UNDERSTAND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL HARM AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Putting the environment at the centre of media coverage also means understanding key concepts, such as the relationship between environmental harm and human rights. Human activities are causing pollution, destruction of ecosystems, extinction and damage to human beings themselves.

Air pollution causes millions of premature deaths per year, including of children under 5 years old.¹⁷ Wildlife is declining, and millions of species are in danger of extinction. For instance, climate change, in addition to aggravating air pollution and losing biodiversity, also affects people's health, well-being and rights.

The number of climate disasters has doubled since the 1990s. Between 2005 and 2015, over 70,000 people died, over 1.4 million people were injured and 23 million lost their homes¹⁸ as a result of climate change. Economic losses due to natural disasters, intensified by climate change, exceeded US\$330 billion in 2017.¹⁹

These are only some examples of how climate change interacts with poverty, conflicts, resource depletion, food security, loss of homes and means of subsistence, infrastructure failures and loss of access to public utilities – energy, water, basic sanitation and health care.

The tendency is often for a situation to get worse before it gets better. By 2050, the impacts of climate change are estimated to leave over 150 million people displaced, by the impacts of climate change, resulting in extreme temperatures, rise in sea level, desertification and conflicts over natural resources²⁰.

Making progress on environmental governance and ensuring the realisation of environmental rights is more important now than ever. Rights work as a platform for the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.

Without the environmental rule of law, the pursuit of sustainability and the mitigation of the impacts of climate change become more challenging. The environmental rule of law is vital to human health and well-being because it ensures legal standards, procedures and approaches to ensure clean air, drinking water and food security. In brief, the full and effective implementation of the environmental rule of law contributes to the protection of public health as well as the environment and sustainability in the use of natural assets.

¹⁷ Available at: <https://www.who.int/ceh/publications/inheriting-a-sustainable-world/en/>

¹⁸ Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Environment/SREnvironment/Report.pdf>

¹⁹ Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Environment/SREnvironment/Report.pdf>

²⁰ Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Environment/SREnvironment/Report.pdf>

4

WHY DO
ENVIRONMENTAL
RIGHTS

matter to each
journalist and
each channel?



2

പ്രാദേശികം

**മന്ത്രി വാക്കു പാലി...
വകുപ്പു കെട്ടിടത്തി...**

കുറിയ നിലവാരത്തിൽ...
മറ്റു കെട്ടിട പദ്ധതികളുമായി...
പുനർനിർമ്മാണങ്ങൾ പൂർത്തിയാക്കി

**കിഴക്കൻ കേരളം...
വണ്ടിപ്പിന്മാർ എന്തെ...**

അടുത്ത ഏകദേശം...
എന്നും മറ്റും

3

സംസ്ഥാന ഭരണകൂടം നിയമിച്ച അംഗങ്ങൾ

മുഖ്യമന്ത്രി

കെ.പി. കേശവമൂർത്തിയെ മുഖ്യമന്ത്രിയായി...
നിയമിച്ചു. അദ്ദേഹത്തിന് മുൻപ്...
സംസ്ഥാന ഭരണകൂടം...
നിയമിച്ചു.

മുഖ്യമന്ത്രി

കെ.പി. കേശവമൂർത്തിയെ മുഖ്യമന്ത്രിയായി...
നിയമിച്ചു. അദ്ദേഹത്തിന് മുൻപ്...
സംസ്ഥാന ഭരണകൂടം...
നിയമിച്ചു.



Journalism has grown in leaps and bounds in terms of content, style, digitization and coverage in the last few decades. Since the media revolution and the digital transformation of the 1990s, people have innovated the way they communicate, and the communication channels have had to transform the way they bring information to people, to adapt to a changing world.

The novelty, one of the main news values, has started to be considered differently. In the past, there was an understanding that “what happened yesterday is not news”. Today, an event that happened a few hours ago may already be outdated – given the speed at which information can be spread on the Internet, as well as the extensive volume of this information.



While social networks and digital platforms have become important opportunities for communities, peoples and groups to autonomously communicate the problems they face, putting them into the public sphere and demanding solutions, these have also become tools of disinformation and spread of lies, the so-called **Fake News**.

The expression Fake News raises discussions in the academic field of journalism and communication. Experts emphasise that the principle of news is truthfulness, accurate information based on facts. Therefore, if something is false, it cannot be





news then. However, the term has grown in popularity and is widely used to refer to disinformation, that is, lies, rumours and fabricated or manipulated information publicly disseminated, almost always on social networks, with malicious intent, and through sources that pretend to be legitimate.

These changes have intensified the crisis that the journalism industry was already facing for years, with closures, print reductions, pay cuts and mass layoffs. In addition to the previous problems — financial, political and, sometimes, ethical — journalism has become the target of a new challenge: **credibility**. Attacks on the press and journalists are common, calling into question the reliability of these professionals and the press, besides questioning the science and institutions traditionally accepted as sources of reliable information.



Media professionals and researchers have considered new paths for journalism. The discussions address many strategies including, but not limited to, media coverage that is oriented towards contexts, not only facts, which provides in-depth analytical information and resumes the relationship with science — and consequently with health and the planet. Approaches that unfailingly intersect with environmental rights.



“Much of the discourse on fake news conflates two notions: misinformation and disinformation. It can be helpful, however, to propose that misinformation is information that is false, but the person who is disseminating it believes that it is true. Disinformation is information that is false, and the person who is disseminating it knows it is false. It is a deliberate, intentional lie, and points to people being actively disinformed by malicious actors. A third category could be termed mal-information: information, that is based on reality, but used to inflict harm on a person, organisation or country”.

(Journalism, Fake News and Disinformation, UNESCO, 2019)²¹

²¹ Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000368647?fbclid=IwAR1ltj8i_F00MPv69hOx4WVviYAHzMUp8VoYlT0Mepi_TYL_utbV5xlgnnEk

CONTEXTUALIZE AND INFORM IN-DEPTH

Talking about the environment is not only talking about nature. Environmental issues are multifaceted and integrate everything concerning human life. After all, we are also part and parcel of the environment. For this reason, when covering the environment or environmental rights, it is important to address different perspectives, seek to understand the facts in a broad context, and adopt an in-depth analysis.

Even when dealing with classical environmental topics such as climate change, for example, it is necessary to include people, translate concepts, dialogue with laypeople or deniers, make connections between facts and events and put them into context. And, of course, using a good database and valuing the science — also considering the precautionary principle, as laid down in Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development: “Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation”.

The American newspaper “The Washington Post”, for example, won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting, for a series of articles on the effects of extreme temperatures on the planet²².

Besides using databases, mapping warmer zones and the effects on the United States and other countries, the team of journalists revealed how temperature rise affects people’s lives: residents started living on unstable ground, in Siberia, after an entire region has warmed by more than 3 degrees Celsius since preindustrial times, turning the permafrost into thaw. In Angola, ocean warming is making coastal areas inhospitable to a diversity of marine life.

Structural limitations have a clear influence. It is not always possible to have additional funds, an entire team dedicated to that one topic, or working conditions that bring benefits to the development of stories with all the necessary results, even less globally.

However, just as communication students train their minds to quickly identify **who, what, where, how, when and why** — basic questions that guide the journalistic text — it is also possible to train our minds to identify elements that guide us to good coverage on environmental rights or consider the environmental background in any coverage.

²² 2C: Beyond the limit (2019). The Washington Post. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/national/climate-environment/climate-change-america/?tid=lk_inline_manual_3&itid=lk_inline_manual_3

RESTATE THE SOCIAL PLACE OF JOURNALISM

Living in a world full of information does not mean that it is easier to be well informed. Although digital platforms have presented new opportunities, they also represent a new challenge and reinforce the need for well-understood information.

Journalism is essentially a social activity. The journalist, first of all, plays a role in favour of society. This is what makes professional advertising activities different from content production in fields such as marketing and public relations. The first theories of journalism, in fact, highlight journalists as responsible for selecting the news, its relevant aspects, and the facts that should be told.

The discussions have made progress since then, but journalism continues to be an activity of public interest. **Restating the social role of journalism is another factor by which environmental rights matter to each journalist and each channel.** Taking a closer look at environmental issues means paying attention to the causes that affect our well-being, economic development, peace and political stability.



Photo: Tierra de Resistentes

LAND OF RESISTANTS

Land of Resistant, *Tierra de resistentes* in Spanish, is a collaborative and cross-border journalistic project to investigate episodes of violence against environmental defenders in Latin America. The project brings together a network of dozens of journalists from Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela.

Active since 2009, the investigative project has published 29 in-depth stories and has built a database comprising 2,367 records of attacks on defenders in the region over the past eleven years.

To read more, please visit tierraderesistentes.com

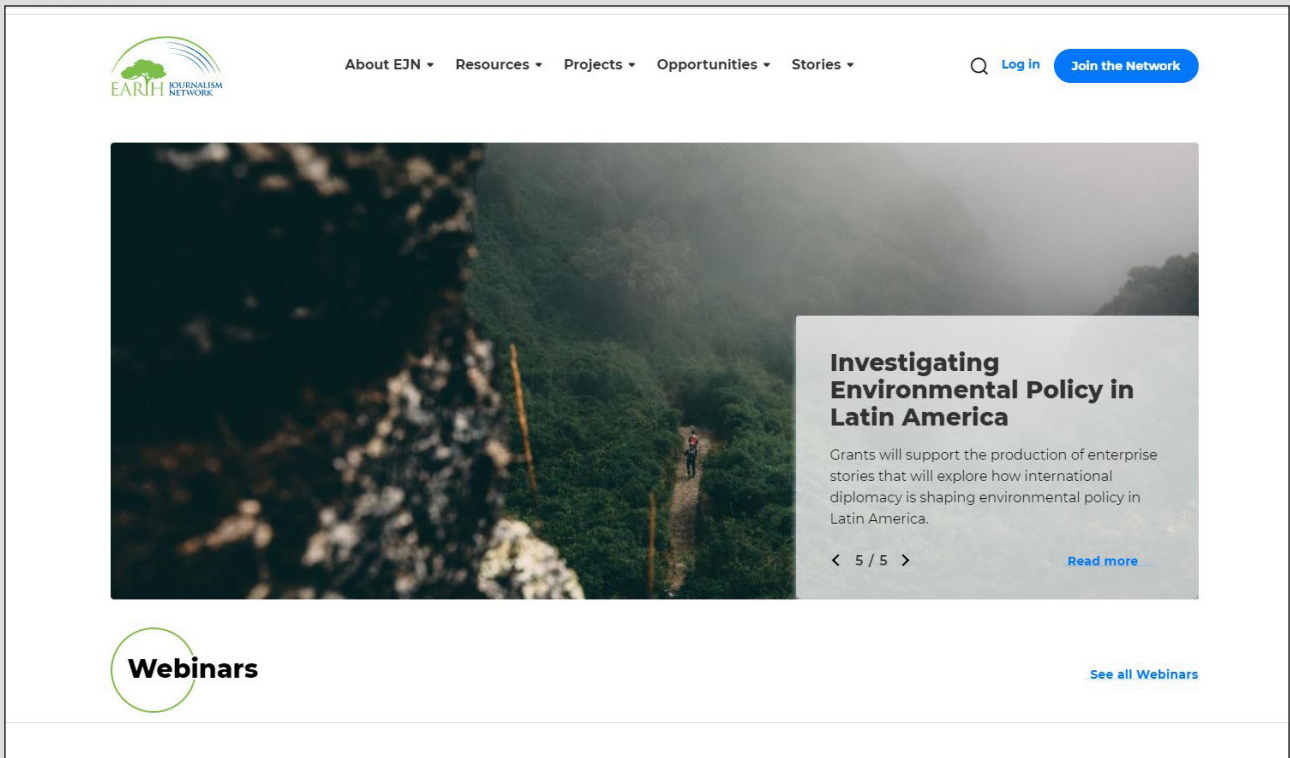


Photo: Earth Journalism Network

EARTH JOURNALISM NETWORK

The global network works with reporters and means of communication in almost all regions of the world, whose mission is to improve the quantity and quality of environmental reporting. Earth Journalism Network (EJN) trains journalists to cover a wide variety of issues, develops innovative environmental news websites and produces content for local media – including investigative reports.

EJN also establishes networks of environmental journalists in countries where they do not exist and builds their capacity where there are networks built. This project is developed through workshops and the development of training materials, offering fellowship programs, grants to media organizations, story stipends and support for story production and distribution.

To read more, please visit earthjournalism.net



Photo: Agenda Propia

AGENDA PROPIA

Agenda Propia, in Spanish, is a Colombian channel aimed at indigenous peoples and minority groups. Its work is focused on three major areas: a diverse agenda telling stories of the most remote areas of Colombia, where indigenous peoples live; collaborative intercultural journalism; and training and workshops for journalists, indigenous people and popular communicators.

In its campaign, "*Bogotá Indígena*" tells the story of 37,000 indigenous people living in Bogotá and how these peoples protect their livelihood and traditions in the city, including environmental protection. The campaign #DefenderSinMedo, Defend Without Fear in English, tells inspiring stories about fifteen environmental human rights defenders in Latin America.

To read more, please visit agendapropia.co

5

WHAT'S
the news?



THE TOPIC IS NOT ALWAYS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Climate change, sustainability and logging are some examples of environmental issues that need to be discussed. These are vital to our present and our future, demanding urgent and immediate action. Nevertheless, the news about the environment and environmental rights is not always about climate and sustainability.

According to reports published by non-governmental organizations, such as Global Witness,²³ logging, mining and agribusiness are the main sectors related to the murders of environmental defenders in the world. Additionally, there is the issue of indigenous peoples that, according to Global Witness, represent only 5% of the global population and, at the same time, are one-third of the defenders killed since 2015.

Illegal mining, import and export of raw materials, use of agrochemicals, food security or customs and traditions in indigenous cultural events are also environmental topics, which can put violence against defenders into context and help to mitigate against human rights violations.

It is also worth noting that **the topic is not always found in rural or far-flung areas**. The temperatures of cities have been increasingly rising every year. In different parts of the world, people are affected by floods, landslides, and rise in sea level. Also, in the cities, there are problems related to access to energy, basic sanitation, water crisis, epidemiological crisis and destruction of green areas.

In 2020, with the onset and spread of COVID-19, journalists from all over the world were required to adapt to the coverage of a theme that has close links to the environment. The new coronavirus disease, a zoonosis, namely, a disease transmitted from animals to humans, has changed newsrooms around the world, revealing, once and for all, that humanity needs to think about new futures, with the due contributions of journalism to this discussion.

False information about the disease did not take long to spread widely, often putting public health at risk by providing misinformation about preventive measures, going for medications with no proven efficacy and calling into question the number of deaths, sick

²³ Global Witness is an international NGO that works for sustainability, equality, and justice for those affected by the climate crisis: people in the global south, indigenous communities, and communities of color, women, and younger generations. See more: <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/>

people and availability of vacancies in Intensive Care Units (ICU).²⁴ It reinforced, even more, the important role of journalism in defending the health of people and the planet.

In different countries, media channels have not only committed to checking facts and data, and transmitting accurate information, but have also built networks to fight against Fake News related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In Brazil, different competing media channels have come together to have access to information, developing a press consortium to collect and disseminate data on the number of cases and deaths registered by state health agencies across the country.

DEFINING THE TOPIC

There is a general understanding that putting the environment and, consequently, environmental rights, at the heart of the discussion means taking a broad and analytical look, paying attention to the causes that affect human beings in different dimensions, and going beyond themes like climate change and sustainability. But the point is: considering this, how should the topic be defined?

Just as the environment is about us and everything that surrounds us and environmental rights are about primary issues, like the water we drink and the air we breathe, identifying environmental topics in journalism coverage should not be a challenge. Journalists should be capacitated to understand that common daily events are intersected by environmental elements to enable them to make this connection when reporting on these topics.

The news coverage of COVID-19, for example, has been handled by generalist journalists but also those specialized in politics and economy. If consulted, these journalists covering COVID-19 would probably not consider themselves journalists who work with a focus on environmental issues, but they performed this role when dealing with the COVID-19 disease coverage. This is an example of how the environment could be related to news coverage even when it's not expected or when the connections do not seem so obvious at a first look.

When reporting on the emergence of the virus and its required conditions to be transmitted from animals to humans, for example, the news had direct links to the environment. Another example is the conversation around post-pandemic economic recovery plans. Many people and organizations, such as UNEP itself, have paid attention to more sustainable recovery possibilities. Talking about economic plans in this context includes talking about environmental and human rights issues.

²⁴In response to this context, the United Nations have launched a campaign, Share Verified, against fake news on Covid-19.

VERIFYING THE FACTS

One of the challenges for good coverage of environmental topics is the verification of facts and obtaining data from official sources. **It is sometimes necessary to do an in-depth investigation and go into the field, adding new layers of complexity and challenges, such as security, financial resources, specific training** etc. Moreover, even using more than one source of information, some reporters need a counterpoint. For this, they rely on unscientific sources, placing themselves in a position contrary to the sources based on accurate data.

There is an old saying in the world of journalism that “if someone says it’s raining and another person says it’s dry, it’s not the journalist’s job to quote them both. Their job is to look out the window and find out which is true”. This old saying, considering the due limitations, is applied to any theme, but it has a special application to environmental rights. Presenting a false and unscientific dualism in the news does not mean ensuring that both sides of the same story are represented, as it does not always have two sides.

In January 2019, at a time when global warming was being questioned more than ever, National Geographic published an article on its website called “What is global warming, explained”.²⁵ The journalist Christina Nunez explains what the phenomenon is and what its consequences are, solely based on scientific data and information. In addition to global warming itself, she explains the effect of greenhouse gas emissions and, finally, provides information on why the rise in Earth’s temperatures is not something natural, but caused by human activities.

This is an example of a story without two sides. Although some discredit global warming, stating that the rise in global temperature is something natural, climate change is a scientific fact. Accessing negationist sources would not make Nunez’s story more complete or accurate. On the other hand, it would make it more fragile and vulnerable by becoming a tool of misinformation.

In case of doubts about how to avoid false symmetries, it is also important to listen to these agencies, independent organizations, researchers and experts dedicated to the study of the topic. This helps to build the knowledge base and to better understand, for example, how logging has reached a risk point even if conservation rates seem good, or how violence against indigenous and traditional communities has increased, even if their death rates seem low in comparison to global rates etc.

²⁵ Source: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/global-warming/global-warming-overview/>

REPORTING ON YOUR COMMUNITY

As previously discussed, the forms of communication and journalism in the 21st century enable each communicator or environmental defender to be a spokesperson for their own story, regardless of traditional media, which sometimes is unable to or may not show interest in reporting violations and harassment to communities or illegalities in the extraction or management of natural assets locally.

When using social networks and digital platforms to report on a community, people or group, it is important to know some key issues for providing accurate and more complete information. For example, if there was an attack on residents or a leader is often being harassed, **informing the day** on which the attack occurred, **the number of people** who were targeted, or **what strategies** are being used to intimidate, helps the audience that will receive this information to better understand the fact and what is at stake.

It is also very important to pay attention to security, especially when posting photos or videos that can put the informant or other people in the community in danger. One suggestion is for the community communicator to assess the possibility of creating a **community communication network**, so that more people can be connected and provide information about what is happening, by a social network or a community platform, but not only by one specific personal account.

In the development of a story, journalists and communications will ask themselves: **Where does this information come from? Why does it need to be disclosed? What is the point of this disclosure?** It thus becomes essential to talk to the people involved. Even if the purpose is to inform those who are outside the community of specific problems and demands faced, actively engaging the community itself in the communication process is the best strategy to gain visibility. Humanizing the story (see Chapter 8) and using visual resources, such as animations, infographics and images (see Chapter 9), can make this task more effective.

6

COVERING
environmental
rights



PRESS

Canon

Canon

Gulfstream

THE CHALLENGES OF ENVIRONMENTAL COVERAGE

Physical, digital and legal security

A series of common challenges can emerge when we put the environment at the heart of the topic. Many are related to the fieldwork, but not restricted to it. During the development of this publication and in previous activities, UNEP asked journalists and other media professionals about the challenges they face when covering topics related to the environment. Most of the responses from media stakeholders pointed to insecurity.

Journalists are also a group at risk due to their work. According to the organization, Reporters Without Borders, 49 journalists were killed worldwide in 2019,²⁶ and at least 10 were killed in the past five years in connection with their coverage of environmental issues.²⁷ In case of community communicators, they can face a double risk: besides becoming a target for reporting on their group or community, they often also take the place of environmental defenders.

In addition to physical security; legal and digital security are also serious problems. Journalists and communicators are subject to digital attacks, improper exposure of their images and data, defamation, threats to themselves or their families. They can also be a target of recurring legal proceedings aiming at stopping investigative work or the publication of daily news about the failure to comply with environmental rights by third parties — so-called judicial harassment or criminalisation.

Although many of these attacks are reported, those guilty are not always identified and held responsible. Published in 2013, the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity²⁸ points out that “the safety of journalists and the struggle against impunity for their killers are essential to preserve the fundamental right to freedom of expression, laid down in Article 19 of the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”.

The Plan of Action also states that without press freedom, an informed, active and engaged citizenry is impossible, directly affecting the access to information — which, as we have already seen, is also essential for decision-making process and access to justice.

The section below highlights some of the main points concerning the challenges of environmental coverage that have been identified during the listening processes with journalists, students and other media professionals, for the development of this guide, as part of UNEP’s initiative to support and promote the protection of Environmental Defenders in Brazil:

²⁶ Source: <https://rsf.org/en/news/rsf-yearly-round-historically-low-number-journalists-killed-2019>

²⁷ Source: <https://rsf.org/en/news/red-alert-green-journalism-10-environmental-reporters-killed-five-years>

²⁸ Available at: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/un-plan-on-safety-journalists_po.pdf

Access to information and official sources

The lack of access to information or consultation with official sources is an issue that puts the right to information at risk. It is not uncommon that access to data on logging, the number of people affected by environmental disasters, investment amounts in green energy or police reports and lawsuits related to environmental defenders work, for example, are omitted or the information is closely controlled by governments and companies responsible for the activities.

Omitting or hindering access to data prevents complaints from being verified or interrupts the path followed by media professionals until a fact that should be clarified, weakening or making the topic unfeasible

Unknown territory

When working in the field, covering a story or case in rural or far-flung communities distant from urban centres, the unknown territory, culture and local traditions are other challenges that a journalist may face. Besides interfering in the process and, consequently, in the way in which the fact will be reported, this lack of knowledge can result in more insecurity for journalists.

Sources at risk

When covering threats or violence against defenders, communities or groups, or even exposing the identity of leaders and the work they do, environmental coverage can put informants or sources of information at risk.

The interviewed person, group or community is not always able to predict this risk, or even if predicting it, they do not ask for anonymity. In this case it is left to the journalist to decide on the correct level of exposure of that source — a decision that is not always simple and intuitive. It is a journalist's responsibility, when talking to or interviewing a source of information to find a safe place or safe means of communication and discuss the possible risks or reprisals to mitigate them.

Lack of resources and external influence

The lack of resources intended for producing a story can be a challenge for environmental coverage if there is a need for large resources to cover travel and fieldwork. Additionally, the external influence of sponsors and other funders, which in some cases can be the government itself, is also an issue that was pointed out among the challenges raised by journalists during UNEP's engagements.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF ENVIRONMENTAL COVERAGE

States should ensure freedom of expression and freedom of the press in an effort to prevent attacks on journalists and avoid the impunity of crimes against journalists and other media professionals. Some UN resolutions, such as resolution 27/5²⁹ of the United Nations Human Rights Council, invite States to create an enabling environment for journalists, taking steps to prevent, protect and repair attacks.³⁰ In several national contexts, these obligations of states are indicated in the domestic legal frameworks as well.

However, as an individual, some actions can be taken to strengthen safety while working in the field.

²⁹ Available at: https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/27/L.7

³⁰ Check out a list of UN's base texts related to the protection of journalists at: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists/basic-texts>

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Many countries in the Latin America region, such as Brazil, Chile and Mexico, have specific laws on access to information that can help in obtaining data even if it is denied by governments, the private sector and other organizations. Journalists and media professionals should seek to identify the existence of these laws or agreements in their respective countries, as well as how to access them.

As a last resort, ethically searching for unofficial sources — that is, those who have a recognized connection to the institution, organization or company in question, but cannot officially speak on behalf of the entity — can help in obtaining public information that is denied or hidden.

UNESCO has published the report *Access to Information: Lessons from Latin America*,³⁶ which covers regulations and the implementation of policies on access to information in the region. In Europe, there is a *Guide for Journalists on How to Access Government Information*,³⁷ by Network for Reporting on Eastern Europe (n-ost) and *Access Info Europe*, and in Asia, the organization *Transparency International* has published the report *Right to Information in Asia Pacific*.³⁸ Finally, on the African continent, the report *Access to Information in Africa: Examining progress since the APAl Declaration*,³⁹ an initiative of the *Campaign for an African Platform on Access to Information*, provides subsidies to understand the legal status of access to information in 14 countries in Africa.

³⁶ Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000249837>

³⁷ Available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/7/67866.pdf>

³⁸ Available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/publications/right-to-information-in-asia-pacific#>

³⁹ Available at: <https://action-namibia.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ATI-in-Africa.pdf>

SECURITY OF THE SOURCES

When interviewing sources who are at a risk of death or other types of violence, as is often the case for environmental defenders, it is necessary to assess whether exposing the identity of that source or the information about the community will put them in jeopardy or as the target of increased attacks. The sources must provide their consent before journalists take pictures and videos of them, or disclose their image.

If the sources are under serious threat and with greater vulnerability to attacks, the exposure of the image and identity, even if authorized, should be considered carefully. In case of doubts about the real risks that the publication would offer, it is worth asking the opinion of other more experienced journalists in that field, NGOs working in the community or workers who are dedicated to their defence, such as lawyers who represent the group.

SEARCHING FOR RESOURCES AND DEALING WITH INTERNAL CENSORSHIP

Some organizations offer reporting grants for developing journalistic projects and topics. If the communication channel cannot provide the required resources so that an environmental journalistic research project can be carried out, the journalist can seek external funding.

If donors, sponsors, advertisers or financiers influence and, consequently, prevent the execution or publication of environmental topics, journalists can use other channels for publication as collaborators — cases in which there are no exclusivity contracts. As a last resort, they can pitch the news story idea to colleagues from competing media outlets who may be able to refine it. Internal censorship does not usually resist when the theme is covered by other channels and represented in the public agenda.

“In a climate where journalists are safe, citizens find it easier to access quality information and many objectives become possible as a result: democratic governance and poverty reduction; conservation of the environment; gender equality and the empowerment of women; justice and a culture of human rights, to name a few. Hence, while the problem of impunity is not restricted to the failure to investigate the murders of journalists and media workers, the curtailment of their expression deprives society as a whole of their journalistic contribution and results in a wider impact on press freedom where a climate of intimidation and violence leads to self-censorship”.

(United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, UNESCO, 2013)

SIX STEPS TO ENSURE YOUR SAFETY WHEN COVERING ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

1 • Careful planning and an understanding of the site

Before going to the field, it is essential to plan as thoroughly as possible and within the time constraints in which a story must be produced. It is important to gather information about the place or the site, including the political, socio-economic, health and infrastructure conditions. Making trusted contacts is another way to bring about better protection. Seek NGOs, local communication channels, researchers or journalists with more experience in that region with whom you can talk to and be in touch with while in the field. Always notify a trusted person your location and ensure that there will be a person from the organization or community who can welcome you. Finally, avoid staying in the same place for an extended period of time. It is prudent to regularly change one's location.

2 • Be careful with clothing and equipment

You will need to pay close attention to clothing. In the field, dress as discreetly as possible. Avoid clothing that refer to identifiable organizations, whatever they may be, colours known to be associated with political parties or even those that refer to certain football teams. Also, pay attention to dress codes, but do not try to imitate the locals. Avoiding elements that facilitate your identification is enough.

Clothing needs to be functional. Shorts or short pants and sandals can make it difficult to walk in the forest, for example. Exercise the same degree of care with equipment. If possible, do not walk around unnecessarily with visible cameras or camcorders. While in the coverage of wars and conflicts, the identification of press is a form of protection. However, in most cases, it is better not to be identified as part of the press in the coverage of environmental issues on field.

3 • Be mindful of where you are

Even after careful planning and doing a lot of research before visiting a site for a story, the security conditions in the region may be different from those you are used to. For this reason, tasks that seem very simple, like driving around to explore the place, can be risky. If possible, be with a resident during car travels or other personal or rented means of transport. Even on foot, there may be places where walking around is forbidden, as well as locations where there are disputes and vigilance between organized criminal groups that can put your physical integrity at risk. Be careful and always be respectful of the unknown.

4 • Pay attention to digital security

Digital security is an increasingly important element for journalists, especially when covering environmental issues. If possible, install security applications on your electronic equipment, avoid saving your login and password on websites, email accounts or social networks. Always be sure to “log out” when accessing various sites and accounts and disable files and data sharing on your computer or smartphone. Get a VPN (Virtual Private Network) to connect with more security to public Wi-Fi networks. In the field, use as little electronic equipment as possible and clean data from your computer and mobile. To communicate, choose encrypted messaging apps offering more security.

5 • Follow basic security protocols

Some basic security protocols offer additional preventive assistance against violence and threats to journalists, such as, for example, not following a schedule and routes; notifying a local contact about where you are going; taking a safety kit with you (simple dark backpack, flashlight or light sticks, universal adapter, extra batteries or portable chargers, sunglasses and protection, lighter, medication, bandages, hats or caps etc.); taking copies of personal documents with you and/ or keeping them in a file that can be easily accessed by you.

To better understand the security protocols and how to follow them, consult guides from recognized organizations, such as the Safety Guide for Journalists,³¹ published by UNESCO and Reporters Without Borders, and the Report on Online Harassment of Journalists,³² also published by Reporters Without Borders, which provides recommendations for digital safety.

6 • Risks to women journalists and media professionals

Resolution 2222 of the United Nations Security Council, adopted by member states in May 2015,³³ points out the specific risks faced by women journalists and media professionals. Women journalists often suffer additional and unique safety vulnerabilities, based on gender, when performing their work. The specific risks faced by these media professionals are mainly related to harassment and sexual violence.

In the report, *Ending Impunity: Acting on UN Standards on The Safety of Journalists*,³⁴ the organization Article 19 highlights the double threat to women journalists. The Safety Handbook for Women Journalists,³⁵ published by the International Association of Women in Radio and Television, provides specific tips for women against gender-based threats when performing their roles.

³¹ Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/publications-and-communication-materials/publications/full-list/safety-guide-for-journalists/>

³² Available at: https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/rsf_report_on_online_harassment.pdf

³³ Available at: [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2222\(2015\)](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2222(2015))

³⁴ Available at: <https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/SOJ-Web.pdf>

³⁵ Available at: <https://www.iawrt.org/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2017/11/IAWRT%20Safety%20Manual.Download.10112017.pdf>

7

TIPS ON HOW
TO FIND
A GOOD TOPIC
and tell a
story better



HOW TO IDENTIFY A STORY?

Identifying a good story in which the environment is at the heart of the debate does not necessarily require travelling to the Amazon Forest or closely witnessing the melting of polar glaciers. Environmental topics are in our homes, neighbourhood, city, or anywhere else where people are. This guide emphasises how the human being is also the environment and how the impacts we cause are directly connected to our lives.

An easy way to identify what can and should be transformed into a news story, photographic series or digital campaign on social networks is to understand the human dimension of the environmental issue, even when covering it from a harsh climatic perspective. For example, how a landslide affects the life of a community (human dimension) and the relationship of this disaster to climate issues – or how the climate issue interferes with the way a community lives.

Following this path, the British newspaper, The Guardian, has published a news report on elephant conservation but addressing hunger in north-east Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic⁴⁰. The story, *“Hunger fears in north-east Nigeria as roaming elephants trample crops”*, shows how a population of about 8,000 refugees in the region fears running out of food due to the return of a herd of elephants to rural areas in the state of Borno. These animals, which destroy entire farmlands, returned into rural areas emptied of people due to the advance of Boko Haram in the region.

In addition, based on the human dimensions of climate change, The Guardian has built an interactive map in which it is possible to identify how the climate crisis affects different Australian⁴¹ regions and their residents. By accessing the tool, it is possible to identify that in the south of the country, for example, temperature rise can cause a rise in sea level, a possibility of fires, and a decrease in rainfall.

⁴⁰ Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/09/elephants-roaming-land-emptied-by-insurgency>

⁴¹ Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/ng-interactive/2019/sep/21/how-the-climate-crisis-will-affect-you-interactive-map>

GOING BEYOND CLICHÉ

In covering environmental issues, it is necessary to avoid clichés. Accurate information on climate change is and will always be welcome; however, it is always worth presenting not only the issues, many of which have been reported for over a decade, but also the proposed solutions. For example: spreading positive initiatives and efforts made by groups, organizations or entities to overcome an environmental issue or guarantee an environmental right, as well as associating the climate issue not only with extreme events but also with consequences that can be identified in the local reality.

10 INTERSECTIONS WITH THE ENVIRONMENT TO KEEP ON THE RADAR

1 • Environment and health

Research reveals that being in contact with nature contributes to children's mental health and development. Furthermore, it is expected that a new zoonosis (disease transmitted from animals to humans), such as COVID-19, emerges every four months in the world. The interlinkages between environment and health is very wide and can enable an infinite number of new and interesting topics.



2 • Environment and economy



The post-pandemic economic recovery has rekindled discussion about the green economy by using renewable energy sources and less costly, creation of green jobs and income, and changes in the consumption system. Topics such as the circular economy and those related to well-being also gain momentum.

3 • Environment and politics

Environmental topics are at all levels of politics in municipalities, states, countries and regions. They are related to the options of urban planning and the so-called 'urban metabolism', the water and energy supply, the transport modes, the solid waste management, the distribution of green areas (vegetable gardens and parks, national parks, permanent protection areas etc.), applicable legislation, governance strengthening projects, to name a few. Additionally, environmental topics are not only in candidates' speeches and proposals or in legislative bills, but they also define the relationship between countries, foreign policies, and are a critical area of international cooperation and multilateralism.



4 • Environment and daily life



Lack of water, basic sanitation, floods, tree falls, landslides, beach pollution, community gardens, construction or degradation of squares and green areas, agroecological production, public transport and waste treatment are just some examples of topics that illustrate the interlinkages between the environment and daily life.

5 • Environment and sport

Many sports put the athlete directly in contact with nature, such as triathlons, marathons, and surfing. Hence, covering the championships or sports practices in itself is also talking about environmental quality and healthy ecosystems.



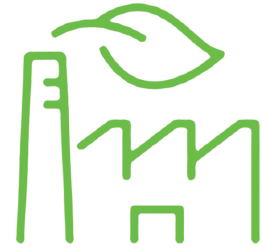
6 • Environment and tourism



Ecotourism is a model of tourism activity that supports the conservation of species and resilient communities in different parts of the world. If developed correctly, it brings benefits to local communities and reduces negative impacts, such as pollution and environmental degradation, caused by tourists and enterprises in the sector. Tourist taxes are also a resource for the survival of sanctuaries that are home to endangered animals.

7 • Environment, industry and market

Industrial waste management, reuse and recycling of materials, as well as water consumption and management are some issues that refer to the environment and industry. With respect to the market, green financing funds are an increasingly relevant reality in the financial market, as well as opportunities to generate positive impacts on the economy by adopting more sustainable and profitable consumption models and cheaper clean energy.



8 • Environment and transport

Global vehicle trade, green transition in transport infra-structure projects and urban mobility plans offer a range of approaches based on environment and transport. Another transversal agenda here is the fuels and energy matrix.

9 • Environment and fashion

The fashion industry is one of the most impactful. The fashion production and consumption model, mainly fast fashion, is unsustainable. Besides that, this industry is highly polluting, and the final products have low recyclability. The fashion industry also has links to issues relation to human rights. The appeal to a more sustainable fashion is urgent worldwide.



10 • Environment, culture and entertainment

Entertainment is a great ally of environmental causes. It has the potential to massively reach new audiences and offer important subsidies to raise the awareness of an audience that would not be reached by traditional journalism or even community communication.



Photo: TV Globo

ARUANAS: DEFENDERS OF THE FOREST

In 2019, the largest media group in Brazil, Globo, launched the *Aruanas* TV series. Co-produced by Maria Farinha Filmes, and supported by many civil society organizations and UNEP, it tells the story of four women's fight to protect the forest and indigenous lands from the ravages of illegal mining and corruption.

Aruanas is considered the first-ever production of an **environmental thriller** and was developed to reach millions of consumers of entertainment content who are disengaged from the environmental crisis facing the Amazon and many other parts of the planet, as well as the environmental defenders of these regions.

HUMANIZE THE STORY

The use of technical and scientific data and information are just as essential as humanizing the story. Creating empathy and humanizing the facts could often raise public awareness more than disclosing data from technical reports. One way, for example, is to look for characters who are affected by that fact and, from them, show the results and impacts caused by the event. Many times, the audience understands and identifies itself better when the information has a face and a name.

GET TO KNOW THE AUDIENCE

Getting to know the audience and talking to them is necessary. If your story or other content is intended for an audience with a high level of education or technical knowledge, it is not interesting to oversimplify the content or remove layers of complexity.

The opposite scenario also requires attention: if the general audience has difficulties understanding the subject, the best way can be translating the data into simpler forms or creating analogies that help them to understand.

8

VISUAL RESOURCES and the use of images, maps and graphics



WHY BEING VISUAL MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Scientific evidence suggests that the human brain processes visual information faster than textual information, retaining this type of content better. For this reason, using visual resources, such as photos and infographics, is excellent for telling a story. This goes for simple visual resources, like photos of a super fire in the forest, an impactful video of a polar glacier coming down, or a map of the expansion of deforestation in a region. On the other hand, it also goes for more complex narratives, when a report or a survey filled with data and analysis is converted into infographics or maps, static or interactive, making the audience not only interested in a subject that until then they might not have, but also absorbing more and better the information.

Interactivity, in fact, is another visual resource to consider. Fostering more active audience participation, by exploring information or browsing maps, questionnaires or other forms improves the audience experience and contributes to the dissemination of information. Furthermore, databases created by journalists work for public use, because they can facilitate the monitoring and inspection of public policies by civilian actors.

TELLING STORIES WITH FRAMEWORKS, LINES AND BARS

When there is a very large amount of information, especially numbers, as it is common when using scientific sources, visual resources such as charts and graphs, can help the audience to understand. The graphical presentation can also take the form of infographics, which help to summarize extensive information and facilitate its understanding. In other words, in addition to making the content more attractive, the infographic should represent technical information so that it can be interpreted in a short time. Other formats to be considered are graphs, tables and diagrams. The ideal use varies according to the volume and type of information available, as well as the audience.

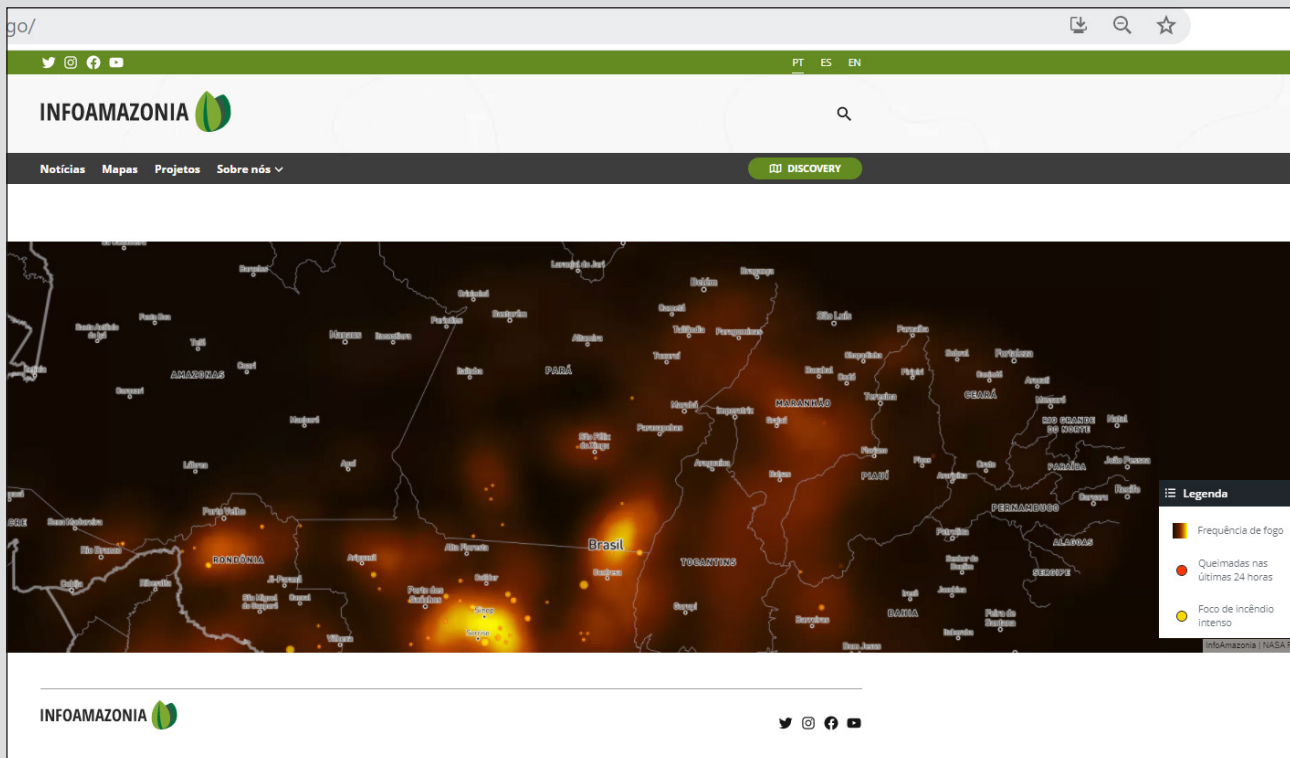


Photo: InfoAmazônia

INFOAMAZONIA: THE USE OF DATA IN JOURNALISM

InfoAmazonia is an online information tool that collects data, maps and news reports geolocalised in the Amazon region, the world's largest continuous tropical rainforest. The project is supported by a network of organizations and journalists from nine countries in the region, which offer constant updates to the platform.

The shared databases are crossed with news about the region, aiming at improving the perception about the challenges for forest conservation, such as the unsustainable exploitation of natural assets, fires and logging. This is an example of good practice on the use of data in journalism for environmental preservation.

To read more, please visit infoamazonia.org

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