

Regional Workshop on the Implementation
of Article 6 of the UNFCCC in Africa:
Banjul , The Gambia, 13-16 Sept 2010

Journalists' Training on Climate Change Reporting in Zambia

Tibaire Emmanuel
United Nations Volunteer
Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources
Lusaka, Zambia

Presentation outline

- Introduction
- Role of information and communication in climate change response
- The training: objectives, the process & outcomes
- Lessons learnt
- Challenges
- Way forward

Introduction

- UNDP, in partnership with the Norwegian and Finish governments are funding a project “*Support to the Immediate Initiatives on Climate Change and Establishment of the Climate Change Facilitation Unit (CCFU)*”
- Output 4 of the project is to develop a National Climate Change Communication and Advocacy Strategy and conduct climate change awareness activities
- Development of the Communication and Advocacy Strategy is at the stage of countrywide stakeholder consultations for them to input into and eventually own the strategy
- In the mean time, awareness activities are ongoing, and the government is engaging the media to communicate climate change awareness messages to the public

Role of information and communication in climate change response

- Timely and accurate communication is the first step towards developing coping strategies/mechanisms
- Communication is already a proven powerful tool in the war against HIV and management of other disasters
- Many disasters like flood, drought and disease are climate related. Awareness and timely information can help develop better intervention strategies
- Communication is crucial in guiding and informing the public, policy makers and other users of climate info.

The Training:

Why Journalists/Media?

- Professionally trained to gather and disseminate information. It is their job/trade
- They have the capacity to reach out to a wider and diverse cross section of the public
- Many of them often shy away from reporting on climate change, for various reasons
- Sometimes misrepresent facts/ideas on climate change to the public
- They enjoy significant public trust/confidence

Essentials of Good Climate Change Journalism

Accurate, effective and timely reporting

- Good understanding of science of climate change (no short cuts)
- Remaining up-to-date with latest developments
- Understanding significance of research findings
- Identifying most relevant information for peoples lives

Overall Objective of the training

The overall objective of the training was to catalyse the flow of relevant and accurate information about climate change in the country, thereby increasing awareness on the challenges faced in pursuit of sustainable development

Specific objectives

- To enhance journalists awareness, understanding and appreciation of key climate change issues, concepts and terminologies
- To increase appreciation and need among journalists for providing accurate and reliable information to raise public awareness and understanding of climate change
- To enhance capacity of the media to effectively disseminate climate change information to the general public.
- To guide journalists on reliable sources of information on scientific, technological and political developments related to climate change
- To equip journalists with skills for developing topical stories on climate change
- Facilitate the initiation of networking opportunities for journalists on climate change

Target group (s)

- Reporters and Editors from
 - ✓ Community radio stations across the country
 - ✓ The print media, especially newspapers
 - ✓ TV stations

Resource persons/Facilitators

- Climate science experts
- Experienced Climate negotiators
- Experts in Adaptation/Mitigation, REDD, CDM
- Experienced media practitioners and trainers from within the Southern African region

Topics discussed

- Climate change science basics, including simplified overview of recent IPCC research findings
- Vulnerability to climate change: characteristics and frameworks of vulnerability
- Finding the story in science (plenary discussions):
- The two-pronged Global approach to Climate Change response: Adaptation and Mitigation
- Zambia's Response to Climate Change
- The Politics of Climate Change; International Climate Change Regime and update on status of negotiations
- Introduction to REDD in Zambia
- Introduction to CDM in Zambia
- Introduction to National Communications: Zambia's Second National Communication
- Media Coverage of climate change – report of a survey conducted by Panos Southern Africa

Topics covered cont...

- Addressing the challenges to Climate Change reporting (getting editors interested; accessing and understanding information; making CC newsworthy)
- Characteristics of vulnerability to climate change
- Adaptation vs Development
- Finding the story, Picking angles, Identifying the issues of public interest, etc
- How journalists and media can make climate change and science newsworthy
- What makes good story telling with focus on story structures for issue-based CC reporting
- Broadening engagement:
 - ✓ Communicating climate change research through the media.
 - ✓ Bridging the media/science gap and creating effective relationships.

Topics covered cont....

- Sources of news and information on Climate Change: (Institutional Sources, Web-based sources, Individual sources, Research, etc)
- National, regional and international Initiatives to Support Climate Change media coverage and capacity building.

Partnership/participation in conducting training

- GRZ/IUCN/UNDP/Norwegian Government
(provided resources: technical and financial)
- Panos Southern Africa as lead media
consultant

Methodology

- Presentations by experts
- Question and answer sessions
- Case studies and plenary discussions

Experiences shared: What journalists and technocrats/researchers say about each other

What researchers /technocrats say about journalists

- Unprofessional
- Pushy – want information too quickly
- Always chasing news stories, not adding value
- Focus on own agenda
- ‘Bend’ research - focus on generalisation and something that will sell.
- Lack specialisation in science reporting
- Misrepresent facts

What Journalists say about researchers /technocrats

- Intellectual arrogance/Rude
- Seemingly too busy
- Too secretive – work in isolation
- Unavailable, Inaccessible, Secretive
- Too mistrusting
- Bureaucratic; never give feedback
- Their research not always well meaning

Lessons learnt

- Journalism is a business. Media houses prioritize what is sellable. Climate change news is not sellable in its raw form. It needs to be packaged according to the target audience for it to be attractive. Many journalists lack the skills and motivation to cover climate change activities/initiatives. It may require training, (specialization) provision of incentives (such as fellowships and awards) and minimizing red tape in government and technocrats' offices for prompt release of and access to information

Outcomes/ Achievements

- Trained over 54 journalists from different media houses across the country
- Enhanced understanding , appreciation and interest in climate change issues (some have shared articles they produced during and after the training)
- Strengthened partnership and collaboration (especially with IUCN)
- Climate change Journalists' network established
- Renewed political commitment and support (going by the PS' official opening speech)
- Provided an opportunity for journalists to interface with technocrats , expression of sentiments by either party and forge a way forward together

Challenges

- Staff turn-over (transfers, re-deployment, resignations) at media houses
- Red-tape in especially government offices, making it difficult for journalists to access information
- Nature of work of journalists: working against tight deadlines
- Short duration of training- needed more time, but difficult to keep journalists away from their work for a long time
- Inadequate resources- could afford only one participant per media house

Way forward

- Follow-up meetings/workshop to assess impact of training
- Organize training for journalists from the two provinces that were not represented
- Consider replicating training at provincial and district levels (to benefit more journalists)
- Consider putting in place incentives for climate change reporting (fellowships, awards, etc)
- Work on reducing the red-tape in government offices
- Facilitate and support the networking