

December 2010

OVERVIEW

IIED Communications Team

Project name:

Climate Change Media Partnership

Project leaders:

James Fahn (Internews), Mike Shanahan (IIED), Rod Harbinson (Panos)

Time frame:

2007–2011

Cost:

Approximately £1.5 million (£7,500 per fellowship)

Objective:

To boost the quality and quantity of media coverage of climate change in developing nations by supporting journalists to report on the UN negotiations and by providing training, editorial support and access to information and contacts to promote effective reporting in the years ahead.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Climate Change Media Partnership is an alliance formed by IIED, Internews and Panos. Between 2007 and 2010 it has provided 144 fellowships for journalists from developing countries to attend and report on the UN climate change negotiations and other relevant international conferences. As well as receiving training, field trip opportunities and other forms of support, the journalists produced thousands of stories at these events and reached an audience of many millions. This project has directly boosted the quantity and quality of media coverage of climate change in developing countries and continues to support the journalists to report effectively on this story as it develops.

THEORY OF CHANGE

The media is an effective channel for information that can empower people to effect change. In the case of climate change, journalists can promote actions that limit the scale of the threat. They can inform vulnerable communities of impacts and raise awareness of how they can adapt to them. They can give voice to

Improving climate change journalism

Fellowships for reporters strengthen climate change coverage and transfer new skills and knowledge to the developing world.

In the midst of long, busy weeks reporting on the bustling Bali conference on climate change in 2007, a young journalist from the Philippines decided she needed to convey what she was learning to her home country – and not just by writing about it. Imelda Abaño had come to Bali on a fellowship from the Climate Change Media Partnership (CCMP), which provided, she says, “the right tools, resources and motivation to tackle climate change by understanding the overview of the issues.” She wanted to organise a workshop for fellow Filipinos to improve the nation’s media coverage of climate change. After the conference, she raised US\$25,000 and the national event became an international workshop attended by journalists from across Asia. By 2010, with the support of CCMP partner Internews, she had founded the Philippines Network of Environment Journalists.

Such knock-on effects of the CCMP fellowships will likely continue to spread. Now in its fourth year, the programme has provided 144 fellowships to journalists from 49 developing countries to report on the UN climate negotiations in Bali, Poznan, Copenhagen and Cancun as well as key interim meetings. Their work has yielded nearly 2,000 stories, reaching an audience of many millions via TV, radio and print. The stream of stories is a start towards closing a troubling gap: at milestone summits that attract

hundreds or thousands of international journalists, media from low- and middle-income countries – especially those most threatened by climate impacts – are starkly under-represented.

In Bali, only 11 per cent of the 1,600 foreign journalists were from developing countries – nearly a quarter of them CCMP fellows. For the 2009 Copenhagen conference, developing-world journalists totalled about 600, or 15 per cent, and CCMP’s contribution was still evident, especially in bringing reporters from least developed countries. The lesson here: support for journalists can significantly boost climate coverage in poorer countries. That translates to reporting on local impacts and initiatives, from flooding to forest conservation, largely missed by media outlets focused on the interests of industrialised nations. But it also means that the actions of the most powerful nations are reported from the perspectives of the weakest.

Concepts and connections

CCMP’s support programme combines learning and doing. A one-day orientation session provides an overview of climate science, climate policy and the negotiations process. As journalists cover daily developments at the conference, a matchmaking service connects them with key sources for interviews: negotiators, scientists, NGO representatives, government ministers.

marginalised communities and hold policymakers to account. However, very few journalists in developing nations have the knowledge, skills and resources they need to report effectively on climate change. The Climate Change Media Partnership believes that an effective way to plug these gaps is to provide a diverse range of support with an opportunity to report daily on relevant news as it develops. The UNFCCC meetings are ideal places for this to happen because as well as the formal negotiations there are many side events and other sources of stories and expertise.

KEY LESSONS LEARNT & INNOVATIONS

- Supporting journalists from developing countries can boost media coverage of environmental issues and the global negotiations aimed at addressing them.
- As well as producing more and better climate stories, developing-country reporters immersed in major conferences can spread knowledge and skills to fellow journalists, policymakers and others in their home countries.
- Journalists in these countries still need more resources to report stories from remote areas and from the perspectives of marginalised groups such as women.
- Even knowledgeable and well-trained journalists face additional barriers in their newsrooms when reporting on climate change — in the form of unsupportive or poorly informed editors. Future efforts to boost the media coverage of climate change should engage with senior editors as well as reporting journalists.

PARTNERS' VIEW

The programme sharpened my focus and understanding on climate change, and most of all, the negotiations have opened my eyes to the reality beyond COP 15. After the summit, the real effects of climate change are now being seen, and these will make stories for my segment.

Rosalia Omungo
Journalist, Kenya

IIED COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

The Communications Team works to raise the profile of links between the environment and development among policymakers, academics, the media, the private sector and the general public to improve research uptake, encourage more accurate reporting, influence policy and support good governance and democracy.



Photo: James Fahn/Internews

Learning and doing: supporting journalists to report on UN climate conferences can boost media coverage in poor countries.

A day-long field trip lets participants investigate adaptation and mitigation efforts on the ground. And more insights come from CCMP-organised briefings and events: last year, for example, fellows interviewed a panel of government delegates from opposing sides of the negotiating divide — the first time such a group had gathered to field reporters' questions. In Copenhagen, many fellows managed to secure interviews with their heads of states, achieving a level of access that would be impossible back home.

Support beyond the conferences has helped Abaño and others leverage new knowledge and skills. Several have produced the first climate change series for their newspaper or show. Two fellows from India and Pakistan joined forces to put on a workshop for journalists from both countries on water issues that span the border. And in Nigeria, the government has asked CCMP fellows to assess the media's capacity to report on climate change. We have supported these efforts by helping former fellows develop proposals and connect with donors, and provided materials and speakers for events. We also maintain an online roster of expert sources and an email network where fellows can continue to share ideas, contacts and reporting tips.

Some stories still missing

While it has expanded coverage and diffused expertise, the programme has also brought into focus specific deficits in developing-world climate journalism. Media outlets in non-industrialised countries rarely cover the costs of journalists seeking stories in remote

areas, where climate-driven dangers may be acute. To address this, the CCMP commissions some fellows to report such stories as features for the partnership member Panos, providing them with funding and long-term editorial support. We've also surveyed fellows' awareness of how climate issues break down along gender lines. Though the journalists see a need to report women's perspectives, we found they often lack contacts and information to make it happen. We've offered meetings with specialists on gender and climate change to highlight what's missing.

In 2010, 35 new fellows faced other hurdles simply in getting to the climate conference in Cancun. Many needed US or European transit visas to complete their travel to Mexico — and some were not granted. Such barriers limit participation from the poorest and most vulnerable nations. If the CCMP is extended next year, fellows who were unable to join the Cancun conference will be able to reapply for a place at the 2011 conference in South Africa. For the meeting in Africa — a continent where the challenge of climate change is intense and its media coverage is especially weak — support for developing-country journalists could make a crucial difference.

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