

# Global Narratives of Climate Change

*A New Approach to Public Engagement Research*



## Climate Outreach

Climate Outreach is Europe's leading specialist in climate change communication, bridging the gap between research and practice. Our charity is focused on building cross-societal acceptance of the need to tackle climate change. We have over 12 years of experience helping our partners find their climate voice – talking and thinking about climate change in ways that reflect their individual values, interests and ways of seeing the world. We work with a wide range of partners including central, regional and local governments, charities, business, faith organisations and youth groups.

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## Climate Action Network International (CAN-I)

The Climate Action Network (CAN) is a worldwide network of over 1200 NGOs working in more than 120 countries to promote government and individual action to limit human-induced climate change to ecologically sustainable levels. CAN members work to achieve this goal through information exchange and the coordinated development of an NGO strategy on international, regional, and national climate issues. CAN members place a high priority on both a healthy environment and development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland Commission). CAN's vision is to protect the atmosphere while allowing for sustainable and equitable development worldwide.

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[www.minor-foundation.no](http://www.minor-foundation.no)

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# CONTENTS

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The need for the Global Narratives approach</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Global Narratives process</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>The Narrative Workshop methodology</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Recommendations from the India pilot project</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Key learnings from the Global Narratives pilot</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Next steps</b>	<b>11</b>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Global Narratives is a pioneering initiative launched jointly by Climate Outreach and Climate Action Network International (CAN-I) to test and develop climate change messaging and narratives. It pilots a new model of cooperative design that avoids the high cost of qualitative research by training national partners to conduct research themselves with their own audiences based on Climate Outreach's Narrative Workshop methodology. This academically-based qualitative method invests in the skills and capacity of national level organisations and makes high quality research affordable in low-income countries. Insights generated by this approach can be used in conjunction with quantitative approaches (surveys) and provide a level of understanding beyond the reach of such tools.

India was chosen to be the pilot country for the Global Narratives project due to its global importance in relation to climate change and its strong civil society sector. The project was conducted in collaboration with Climate Action Network South Asia (CANSAs) and focused on finding language around climate change in general, renewables and adaptation. The research findings are provided in the accompanying report: [Communicating climate change in India: a Global Narratives project](#) and are being shared within South Asia and internationally by CAN-I, CANSAs and Climate Outreach.

This report details the methodology used to build capacity in India to train local organisations in testing and developing effective climate change communications. It lays out the principles and learnings that have emerged from this process which are intended to be widely applicable to other countries and audiences. The key recommendations emerging from the India project that are included in this report are a snapshot of the full set of findings. They are included to illustrate the findings and insights that other potential Global Narrative partners can expect to achieve from this approach. However, this is not to ignore the challenges and learnings which remain as the Global Narratives project moves forward, and those are explored at the end of this report.

In addition to gaining particular new public engagement insights, this methodology generated a network of trained and motivated grassroots communicators with skills in qualitative message testing that will be applied to new issues and audiences. The India pilot also generated a package of materials including a detailed training manual that will be amended and adopted in future projects.

The ambition and novelty of this project must be stressed. This is, to the best of our knowledge, the first programme to train community level organisations to run rigorous qualitative research to a professional standard on a limited budget. It is also the first programme to design and test detailed climate change narratives in India. The feedback received from our national partners, combined with the powerful insights gleaned from the research, stand as proof of concept for this approach. The enthusiasm of our partners and the quality of their work in this pilot project convinces us that this co-design approach can be shared across all countries, and we intend to replicate this method and further develop this approach in other countries.

**Ultimately, our ambition is that all people, in every country, are able to relate to climate change through language that speaks to their distinct concerns, values, and cultural identity such that they can understand the issues and feel motivated to take action. This project is the first step towards that wider ambition.**



# THE NEED FOR THE GLOBAL NARRATIVES APPROACH

A large body of research<sup>1</sup> shows that people accept the challenge of climate change and become motivated to take action once they have understood it through the lens of their own values and culture. However surveys<sup>2</sup> show that climate communications have failed to speak well to values and cultures beyond a narrow demographic of environmentally-conscious people with progressive political values.

At present the majority of organisations actively engaged in the climate discourse are developing narratives and delivering messaging based on ad hoc intelligence and assumptions about target audiences – sometimes without identifying strategic target audiences at all. As a number of common core narratives emerge following the Paris Agreement,<sup>3</sup> there is a broad concern that we might fail to positively encourage delivery on the deal and even stronger ambition through messaging that misses its target or has a negative impact on key audiences.

What is more, almost all communications design has been conducted to find messages for the global North, the vast majority in the United States. Such messages are not appropriate or effective in the very different economies and cultures of Southern countries. Yet, to date, there has been little research into effective climate change communications for any Southern country.



Workers carrying sand filled geo bags to be pitched on the banks of the river Brahmaputra in Gumi village, Guwahati as part of the Assam Integrated Flood and Riverbank Erosion Risk Management Investment Program. Photo: [Rakesh Sahai for ADB](#)

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- 3 Common Paris Agreement messages include:
  - Progress on climate change
  - Collective ambition of the international community
  - We need to ratchet up ambition
  - We cannot get complacent on climate action
  - We need strong climate action

# THE GLOBAL NARRATIVES PROCESS

Global Narratives is a collaborative project with six key steps:

1. A **desk review** of existing research on the public's attitudes to climate change in the researched country, carried out by Climate Outreach.
2. A **national coordinator** (in the case of the India pilot, CANSA) reaches out to its network and identifies organisations to be **local partners** (6 partners for the India research).
3. The local partners and the national coordinator attend a two-day **training workshop** facilitated by Climate Outreach where they identify their target audiences and receive training on how to recruit participants from these target audiences. They are also trained to facilitate a two-hour **Narrative Workshop**.<sup>4</sup> They work together to build test **narratives**<sup>5</sup> to test in the Narrative Workshops.
4. The local partners then run **Narrative Workshops** with **participants** from their target audiences. They record the conversations and write them up in transcripts. The national coordinator has a key role in facilitating this process.
5. The local partners and national coordinator then meet again for a two-day **evaluation workshop** facilitated by Climate Outreach to share their transcripts and evaluate their findings.
6. A **recommendations report** is written in collaboration with the project partners by Climate Outreach and disseminated by the national partners to inform climate communications in their country.

Once funding and partners are secured, this process takes a minimum of 4 months.



The Global Narratives India project team at the training workshop in New Delhi, December 2016. Photo: CANSA

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4 Narrative Workshops are Climate Outreach's method of social research that follows a standardised script to explore values, identity and attitudes. This methodology will be presented in the forthcoming article: Shaw, C and Corner, A. 'Using a Narrative Workshop methodology to socialise the climate policy debate: lessons from two case studies.' *Energy Research & Social Science* (forthcoming).

5 Narratives are widely recognised as powerful tools of communication and the mechanism by which people create meaning. A basic definition of a narrative is: a simple story with recognisable actors that describe a problem, lay out its consequences and suggest (simple) solutions. Test narratives are short blocks of text exploring different themes.

# THE NARRATIVE WORKSHOP METHODOLOGY

Identifying the most appropriate language for different audiences is an important aspect of building an effective response to climate change, given that rhetorical skills and persuasive storylines significantly influence both the wider public and policy-makers.

The Narrative Workshop methodology developed by Climate Outreach is a form of qualitative research that explores language and narrative around climate change and its solutions. There are two aspects to the methodology which distinguish Narrative Workshops from other forms of focus group research:

- a. Use of a structure and format which promotes peer-to-peer dialogue
- b. Grounding the dialogue in participants' values and identity, which are the sources of their attitudes

This approach is designed to allow participants to engage in conversations about climate change and respond to the narratives provided in their own terms, with reference to the things that matter to them, rather than seek to generate a debate on the basis of complex and abstract science. Hence the process begins by exploring participants' own values, concerns and aspirations rather than a particular policy proposal or technological response. This makes the Narrative Workshop methodology applicable across diverse cultures and with all sections of the population.

Each Narrative Workshop is run to a standard script with strict timings, which allows the results to be cross compared. The first hour of the script creates values-based conversations based on a series of questions around personal and national identity. The facilitator then moves the conversation on to explore attitudes to change and to the future. Only then does the Narrative Workshop expressly focus on the core subjects (in this case climate change and renewables).

Each Narrative Workshop followed the same script, leading participants through six successive topics:

1. **Values** - What do you care about? What do you dislike? What makes you proud of who you are?
2. **National identity** - How do you feel about India and your place in it?
3. **Changes** - What changes have you noticed and what concerns do you have for the future?
4. **Climate change** - What does it mean to you and what do you think causes it?
5. **Climate change impacts** - What are the impacts and how will you and others cope?
6. **Renewables** - What do renewables mean to you and can they replace fossil fuels?

These conversations foreground the final activity of the Narrative Workshops, in which participants examine and discuss specific climate change narratives. Short prepared narratives are handed out to participants along with red and green highlighter pens. The facilitator reads out the first narrative to the group and asks them to then read through it themselves and highlight any words or passages they feel strongly positive about in green, and any they feel strongly negative about in red. Once all the narratives have been completed there is a plenary to discuss what people highlighted and why. In the later evaluation workshop, the marked narratives are analysed alongside transcripts from the discussions in order to generate recommendations on what messaging to use and what messaging to avoid.

Our Narrative Workshop methodology will be presented in the following forthcoming article: Shaw, C. and Corner, A. 'Using Narrative Workshops to socialise the climate debate: lessons from two case studies - centre-right audiences and the Scottish public.' *Energy Research & Social Science* (forthcoming).

# RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE INDIA PILOT PROJECT

The following recommendations illustrate the insights that can be generated from the Narrative Workshop methodology. The [Communicating climate change in India: a Global Narratives project](#) report provides a 45-page detailed account of these findings and recommendations.

## ➔ Keep it local.

Highlight impacts and solutions that relate to the family, community, region and language group. Where possible, create core terms in local languages.

## ➔ Reflect national pride in India as a country that is overcoming challenges and on a journey of improvement.

Show that India can take action without waiting for other countries. Stress the national values of togetherness, diversity and self-reliance, and highlight distinctly Indian solutions.

## ➔ Focus on youth.

Present a positive and aspirational vision that will bring a better and healthier future for youth and people's children.

## ➔ Highlight the impacts of climate change on food and health.

Pay particular attention to regional and seasonal foods, and the well-being and mental health of farmers.

## ➔ Present climate change as damaging our connection with nature.

Foreground the impacts on forests, other species and water supply.

## ➔ Show that changes need to come at all levels, which includes taking personal responsibility.

Present a narrative of cooperation between all sectors, including actions to reduce personal impacts as a way for people to perform a social duty or respect nature.

## ➔ Present climate change as a dramatic rift with the past that threatens natural and social harmony.

Highlight the shift in the monsoon and other weather patterns that are enshrined in cultural tradition. Present solutions as a means to restore that balance and harmony.

## ➔ Use concern about pollution as the key entry point for starting the public conversation.

Be careful, though, to stress the distinct role of *carbon* pollution in causing climate change.

## ➔ Present fossil fuels as polluting (rather than “dirty”), finite and imported.

By contrast, present renewable energy as clean, unlimited and a proof of Indian self-reliance.

## ➔ Place renewables within a wider narrative of Indian natural abundance and diversity.

Highlight that they offer flexible options reflecting the cultural and geographic diversity of modern India.

## ➔ Be wary of making grandiose claims about renewables.

Overcome scepticism by stressing that renewable technology is improving rapidly and becoming cheaper, more effective and reliable.



# KEY LEARNINGS FROM THE GLOBAL NARRATIVES PILOT

## *High quality audience research can be undertaken by non professionals affordably*

The primary feedback from all partners was that the pilot had provided proof of concept: that national level organisations could produce qualitative message testing to a high professional standard within their own networks at a low budget. Professional qualitative research is otherwise very expensive and far beyond the means of many organisations in Southern countries.

## *Research training can inform and empower local communicators long-term*

All partners stated that the project had generated new insights and created new skills that will be carried on to future projects. Climate Outreach gave our national partners the skills and confidence to produce transcripts and co-produce the findings. This cooperative process allowed the partner organisations control over design and content and has produced high quality findings at an affordable price.

## *Process and structure are key to delivery of high quality results at low cost*

The Narrative Workshop methodology supports and encourages peer-to-peer dialogue in a round table setting. This format encourages participants to speak to each other and recognise the core values they hold in common, which in turn creates an inclusive format which reduces the need to speak through the facilitator and the need for expert knowledge.

## *Learning how to listen is transformative for climate advocates*

In the evaluation workshop, our local partners repeatedly said that their greatest learning was breaking out of their usual role as campaigners and educators and learning the discipline of listening closely and attentively to people in their target audience.

## *Local coordination is essential*

The national coordinator (CANSA) played a vital role in two regards. Firstly in convening the local partners and organising the logistics for the training workshop and evaluation workshop. Secondly, and even more important, was the support CANSA provided for the local partners throughout the process. We found that sustained encouragement and gentle enforcement of deadlines was essential for maintaining commitment.

### Fully attending the training is essential

Although the training process is supported by a full manual, participants must attend the trainings in their entirety to fully understand the approach. The training workshop included a 'dry run' mock Narrative Workshop in which the local partners followed a shortened script and developed a feeling for the process. Delivering the training as a retreat away from all distractions is advised when possible.

### The role of analysing the findings and creating recommendations takes practice and cannot be delegated

The local partners participated in the co-design and the evaluation of the findings and did an excellent job running the Narrative Workshops. However we found that the involvement of specialised experts could not be replaced. In particular the design of the test narratives, the writing of the facilitator scripts, the detailed evaluation of the transcripts and test narratives and the preparation of the recommendations required expert involvement. Over time these skills can be transferred but the Narrative Workshop process will always require some form of expert oversight.

### Supporting the local partners to share the programme and train their colleagues

The local partners participating in the training workshop and evaluation workshop needed to justify the investment of time and resources within their organisations. In many cases they became powerful advocates for the Narrative Workshop model and shared our materials widely, sometimes running mock workshops for their colleagues. Future training will emphasise this role as advocates: supporting partners to deliver a presentation on the programme and run a mock Narrative Workshop with their colleagues.

### Representation is always a challenge

Research of this limited scale and quick turnaround cannot claim to provide a definitive guide to communicating climate change in a country with the size and diversity of India. This cultural diversity poses a challenge for climate communications, requiring the development of regional and local communications. The training workshop, evaluation workshop and most of the Narrative Workshops were run in English, a minority language in India. Although three workshops were run in Hindi there was no capacity to translate the materials into other regional languages.

The groups were recruited according to the priorities of the partner organisations. Within each group, partners strove to recruit a socially diverse range of participants. However, inevitably with limited resources, the sample was dominated by our partners' main target audiences and therefore could not be said to be fully representative of the population. The overall sample has a higher proportion of middle-class and better educated participants than the national population, a quarter of which is still illiterate. Youth is also overrepresented in the sample.

Yet the challenge of recruiting a representative sample is a feature of qualitative research across the world and is not insurmountable. The in-depth approach of the Narrative Workshop methodology, combined with the focus on patterns of human values which are repeated across all populations mean that, with expert analysis of the results, robust and reliable insights can be developed out of relatively small numbers of workshop participants.

## NEXT STEPS

We recommend that the Global Narratives project takes the following steps:

1. Evaluation is undertaken of the use and effectiveness of the key findings from the India pilot project. The existing training materials are expanded to include video and the direct experience of the Indian trainees.
2. The approach is delivered (taking on board the key learnings) in other nations or with specific audiences or specific campaigns to expand audience insights. The objective will be to maintain a consistent approach to both research and reporting so that projects can be cross compared.
3. Findings of future projects are collated and updated centrally to provide a global and sustainable resource to support climate communication initiatives internationally.
4. The synthesis and analysis of findings are interpreted through the lens of emerging academic research from the field of science communication to ensure best practice in Global Narratives activities.
5. A global network of trained climate communication researchers is established (with possible regional or audience grouping) to widen research, update findings and spread understanding within the sector.



Participants of a Narrative Workshop in Chamba facilitated, in Hindi, by local partner Integrated Sustainable Energy and Ecological Development Association (INSEDA). Photo: INSEDA