

Covering the Climate Crisis from a Solutions Lens

- A perspective from the UK

This report was written following a virtual workshop that allowed scientists, activists and journalists to discuss what they thought were the key barriers to making solutions more prevalent in the British news when it comes to reporting on the climate crisis.



ClimateVisuals
a Climate Outreach project





INKLINE is running a series of workshops throughout 2020 titled 'Covering the Climate Crisis from a Solutions Lens' as part of the Solutions Journalism Network's LEDE Fellowship.

The first of the series took place virtually for UK-based participants on April 30th and was organised in partnership with Conservation Optimism, Climate Visuals (a Climate Outreach project), the University of Oxford and Synchronicity Earth.

Often described as the biggest challenge of our generation, the climate crisis is already impacting many lives. As scary as this might sound, this reality is not all doom and gloom; movements are arising across the globe, pushing governments to take immediate action to prevent climate breakdown.

From apocalyptic headlines to photographs of forests burning down, the coverage of the climate crisis can, however, leave audiences feeling overwhelmed and prone to burnout. How can we move away from the doom and gloom narrative and embrace a solutions lens?

This workshop dived into this question by looking at how we can facilitate greater knowledge between activists, journalists and scientists to help make solutions more prevalent in the UK's media landscape.

The following delegates took part in the workshop:

Alex Chausson, University of Oxford
Cécile Girardin, University of Oxford
Cheli Sinclair, Conservation Optimism/Synchronicity Earth
Emily Kasriel, BBC
Helen Briggs, BBC
James Painter, Reuters Institute
Jane King, Extinction Rebellion
Joshua Ettinger, University of Oxford (co-organizer)
Julia Migné, INKLINE/Conservation Optimism (co-organizer)
Kaya Axelsson, Oxford University Student Union
Kristy Styles, Freelance Journalist
Martha Henriques, BBC Future Planet
Sophie Roland, Freelance Journalist
Toby Smith, Climate Visuals (co-organizer)
Veronique Mistiaen, Positive News Magazine

Special thanks to Portia Ladrido and Nina Seale for taking notes during the brainstorming session.





Why are climate change solutions not more prevalent in the news?

1. Challenges of covering solutions

Many solutions are systemic, have long development timelines, and often require high-level policy and/or institutional interventions. This makes it hard to find a fresh angle for coverage for average readers.

2. Limitations of the journalism system

Good news is often considered to be 'fluffy journalism'. The strong belief that news equals drama (supported by analytics) and that shock sells more than positive news makes it hard to push for solutions.

Journalists are also often trained to cover crises rather than solutions. There is limited awareness of solutions journalism and it is not yet embedded in the journalism system.

3. Issues of clarity

Climate scientists are working with many nuances and complexities so it is hard for them to simplify multifaceted issues into potential solutions for journalists to cover effectively. For example, the British media recently covered tree planting as a powerful climate change solution but scientists were concerned that the media failed to capture important nuances and caveats.

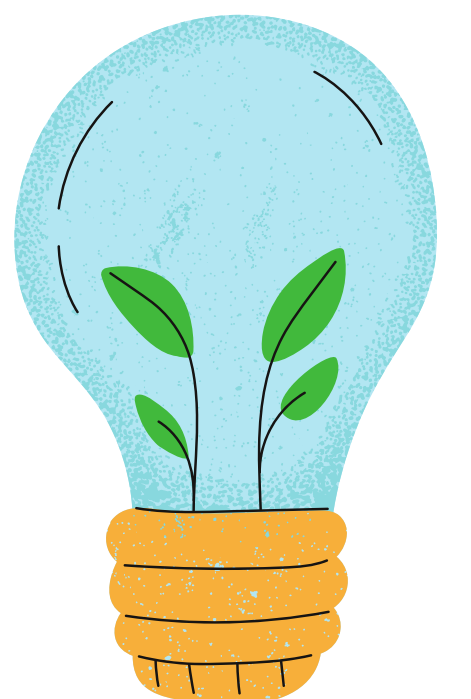
4. Academic system

Academics and scientists can be isolated in their research. They often do not have the time, skills, resources or connections to communicate to members of the media. There needs to be more engagement between researchers and journalists. Better training, incentives and more intermediary communication officer roles need to be made available to closely link these two groups.

5. Commercial aspects

From a commercial perspective, newsrooms/marketing teams often argue that solutions stories do not proliferate as well as other types of stories. Younger audiences are calling for more solutions stories and some media outlets have started offering more solutions stories but the shift is taking place slowly.

How do we solve some of these issues?

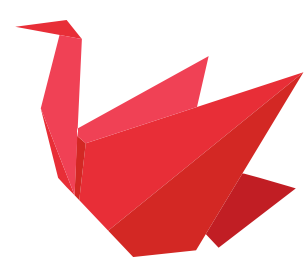


How can we make climate change solutions more prevalent in the news?

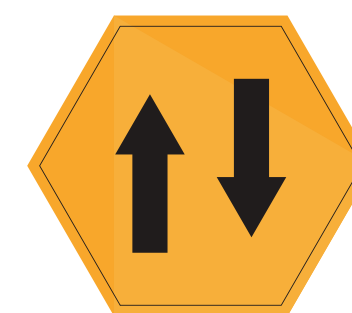
1. Overcoming challenges in covering solutions



It is hard to make positive, systemic or behavioural changes without some sort of human connection, so finding a human narrative to make connections from the individual to broader problems can be a powerful communication tool.

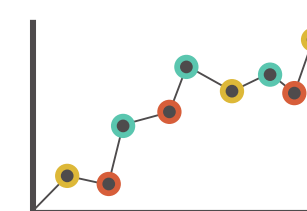


Scientists have the power to be creative with the information they share with journalists. Fostering more creativity and artistic collaboration to make scientific outputs more interactive is important but requires more funding and awareness.



Building and nurturing relationships between journalists, activists, scientists and science communicators can play a key role in building awareness of solutions stories and generating coverage.

Regular, ahead of the curve, knowledge exchange between scientists and communicators would help to ensure the information reaches journalists. Having a structure within research departments that helps connect researchers with solutions-related outputs to specific journalists can help promote greater knowledge exchange.



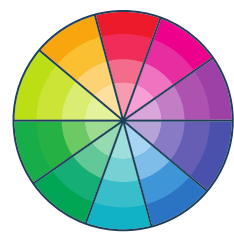
Journalists should work with experts on longer-term projects covering the development of climate change solutions. Those collaborations can produce exclusive data or interesting experiments so encouraging scientists or activists to pitch ideas for such longer-term projects would be helpful.



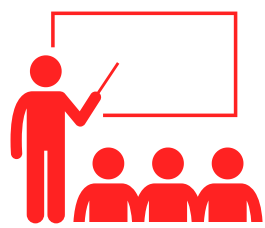
2. Improving the journalism system



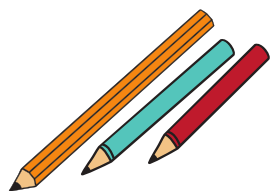
With COVID-19, news editors are increasingly searching for uplifting or optimistic content so there is now an opening to push for more solutions stories.



Introducing more complex solutions stories and having a strong fact-checking process will help journalists to be more careful with the subtleties of positive stories. It will also be useful to avoid falling into the trap of fake news or overtly promotional news items.



Newsrooms and freelancers should be provided with more training opportunities related to solutions journalism and climate change reporting. With more journalists trained, the newsroom mentality can then start shifting towards a more holistic, intersectional coverage of climate change challenges and solutions.



It can sometimes be difficult to identify appropriate visuals to accompany solutions stories. Narratives of climates causes or impacts, Images of disasters that generate shock or fear are often perceived to be more attention-grabbing and aesthetically powerful than more positive images. However, illustrations could be an effective substitute to photos, especially considering articles in the future-tense, so tapping into the creative community can be a good option to illustrate solutions stories.



MORE RESOURCES

Consolidating Positive Training

Academics doing comedy: brightclub.org/

Journalists doing comedy: standupforjournalism.com/

EBU: www.ebu.ch/academy/courses

Constructive Journalism Project: www.constructivejournalism.org/

Constructive Institute: constructiveinstitute.org/

Solutions Journalism Network: learninglab.solutionsjournalism.org/

SJN Story Tracker: storytracker.solutionsjournalism.org/

Climate Visuals: www.climatevisuals.org

Climate Outreach: www.climateoutreach.org

WordPress Photo: bit.ly/3eYJlb5

Constructive Voices: www.ncvo.org.uk/guide-to-constructive-journalism

BBC: bbc.in/3f3c92g

Journo Resources: bit.ly/3cIMvOD

Climate Solutions

Washington Post: www.washingtonpost.com/climate-solutions/

VICE: www.vice.com/en_uk/article/3kyp8y/an-optimists-guide-to-solving-climate-change-and-saving-the-world

Earth Journalism Network: earthjournalism.net/

Mongabay India: bit.ly/3dV853C

New York Times: nyti.ms/3h30PVr

Climate Visuals: bit.ly/3cKGEIq

Solutions Journalism Network: bit.ly/3dM1b0H

Solutions Journalism/Positive News

The Upside: www.theguardian.com/world/series/the-upside

Huff Post: www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/news/whats-working/?guccounter=1

INKLINE: the-inkline.com

Positive News Magazine: www.positive.news/

Science illustrators

Cécile Girardin: www.cecilegirardin.com

Rachel Hudson: rachelhudsonillustration.com/