

## **Written evidence submitted to the International Development Committee by Internews Europe: Climate Change inquiry ahead of COP26**

### **Introduction**

Internews is an international non-profit organisation set up in 1982, with headquarters in London (Internews Europe) and Washington DC (Internews Network). A media development organisation, Internews works in more than 80 countries worldwide to support media and other information providers to deliver trustworthy and accurate information.

As part of its work fostering independent media and access to information, Internews has developed special global programs in health journalism, environmental journalism, humanitarian media, information and communications technology, and governance and transparency.

Internews' flagship environmental project, the [Earth Journalism Network](#) (EJN) works to improve the quantity and quality of environmental and climate change reporting around the world. Initially developed in 2004 to enable journalists from lower-income countries to cover the environment more effectively, it is now a truly global network working with reporters and media outlets in virtually every region of the world.

In its mission to improve the quantity and quality of environmental reporting, EJN trains journalists to cover a wide variety of issues and supports the production of content for local media – including ground-breaking investigative reports. It does so through workshops and the development of training materials and by offering Fellowship programs, grants to media, story stipends, and support for story production and distribution. It also establishes networks of environmental journalists in countries where they do not exist, builds their capacity where they do, and develops innovative online environmental news sites in key regions.

EJN is also a professional community of journalists organised at the global, regional and local level and brought together by a commitment to environmental and climate reporting. EJN's staff manages global and regional initiatives and collaborates with network members on projects providing support to local journalists. Some of our current work looks at the intersection between [climate change and health](#), community resilience to climate change, [biodiversity](#) and the illegal wildlife trade, [ocean health](#), [conservation in East Africa](#) and a host of environmental challenges across the [Asia-Pacific region](#).

The network includes 14,000+ member journalists from 180+ countries. More than 12,000 journalists have been trained, producing 12,500+ stories on the environment and reaching an audience of millions.

Internews Europe has focused its response below on the potential of COP26 to address the remaining challenges effectively and the steps the government needs to take if COP26 is to succeed in tackling them.

## Introduction

Internews believes that the UK government, as a global leader on climate change, should establish mechanisms to provide more support for environmental reporting and increase media coverage on climate change.

In an era when the news media must fight for its very existence, when journalists come under verbal and physical attack and many places are turning into news deserts, it is important that we recognise and demonstrate the impact that good environmental and climate change reporting can have.

Our goal in supporting improved coverage of the environment, climate change and their impacts on the health of people and the planet is to inform the public and policymakers about the challenges facing society and the potential solutions to overcome them.

Whether it is fires in the Amazon or the shrinking glaciers in Greenland, life on our planet is facing environmental crises on a scale we have not seen since the birth of human civilisation. To meet this challenge, we need journalists to explore these challenges, investigate polluters and report on potential solutions.

The Guardian wrote in 2020 that “by reporting on issues across the world affecting climate crisis, the media can influence change” because they “serve as amplifiers that enable weak or remote voices to reach a wide audience and centres of decision making”<sup>1</sup>.

In the UK, several publishers carried out polls indicating that two thirds of the British population wanted the UK to lead the world on climate change<sup>2</sup> while in the United States a vast portion of the public still lacks basic understanding on the impact of global warming<sup>3</sup>.

Climate and environmental change is one of the most important issues of our time and journalists can help cover these issues as they overlap with nearly every other subject.

But environmental journalism has also become considerably more dangerous than it was the past, according to Peter Schwartzstein, author of the report *The Authoritarian War on Environmental Journalism*. Twenty environmental journalists have been killed in the past decade, ten in the past five years, and many more have to deal with threats and intimidation. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said that the number of murders may be as high as 29, making this field of journalism one of the most dangerous after war reporting.

This is happening at a time where independent media is also facing financial crisis. In the past decade, the United States lost more than 1,000 local news organisations and roughly 250 have been closed in the UK. The advertising revenue for news media has collapsed, creating thousands of job losses. Media organisations in countries outside of the G20 have

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<sup>1</sup> [Climate crisis: does journalism actually make a difference? | Jonathan Watts Global environment editor | The Guardian](#)

<sup>2</sup> [UK media and climate change: From denial to acceptance and now action \(pressgazette.co.uk\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [In media coverage of climate change, where are the facts? | Berkeley News](#)

seen even deeper cuts, with Internews partners reporting declines of 75 – 90%. The COVID pandemic has further exacerbated this situation.

As a result of this, journalists in lower income countries usually cannot afford to investigate and report on climate change stories effectively due to a lack of funding and training. Many of these journalists want to report on climate changes but struggle to convince their editors that such stories are worthwhile. There is often a misconception that climate change is an international story, or only about science and environment, when it can in fact lead to high-profile local stories focused on politics, security, health and the economy.

In understanding the correlation between media and climate change, we can draw on Internews' experience in various countries in support of environmental reporting, and the many impacts we have documented that our stories have had on public policy and debate.

## **Examples of impact achieved through reporting on environmental issues**

### **1. Coverage of Heatwaves in Pakistani Slums Forces Political Change**

In 2018, reporter Amar Guriro covered the impact of heatwaves on slum dwellers in Karachi, Pakistan. His story followed a severe 2015 heatwave in Karachi that killed an estimated 2,000 people, with temperatures as high as 49-degrees Celsius. The extreme conditions caused dehydration, heat fatigue and heatstroke in the hundreds of slums across the city of nearly 15 million people.

Since the 2015 event, Karachi's heatwaves have continually gotten worse due to a combination of climate change that is altering weather patterns and urban development that removes trees and other vegetation that keeps cities cool. The impact is felt the most in Karachi's slum areas, locally known as "Katchi Abadies." These are informal settlements that the government considers illegal because they lack land rights. As a result, settlers there often lack access to drinking water, electricity, or healthcare from the government.

Guriro wanted to explore in-depth how the heatwave continued to affect informally settled communities even years later and determine what was needed to prevent a re-occurrence.

Using EJN support and funding, Guriro produced [A Portrait of a Karachi Slum During a Heatwave](#) in May 2018. The story revealed the human face of the 2015 heatwave and showed how even as government officials and aid agencies disputed the number of deaths, those living in the city's slums were still being overlooked.

Guriro's story quickly started to gain attention. Within weeks, local TV channels contacted him seeking sources to interview, and a non-governmental organisation reached out about a project to help cool down tin roofs in slums. A few months later, Guriro received a message from the office of the Chief Minister of Sindh, Pakistan's second-largest province and home to Karachi.

Since Guriro's story brought the lives of slum dwellers into the foreground in 2018, the provincial government has formally recognized the legal status of about 36 slum areas, enabling them to obtain better access to public services.

## **2. EJN-Supported Investigation Triggers Dutch Parliamentary Inquiry**

In 2019, journalists Ingrid Gercama and Nathalie Bertrams completed a multi-country investigation of the international trade in tropical fish and coral with EJN funding. By interviewing fish and coral collectors in Kenya and Indonesia, international traders along the supply chain, and scientists and fish collectors in Europe, they exposed the scale of the trade and the risk that European buyers could be driving illegal and unsustainable harvesting.

After a months-long investigation, Bertrams and Gercama produced stories in German for *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Tages-Anzeiger*, in Dutch for the *Groene Amsterdammer* and *MO\**, and in English for the BBC website. These reports highlighted both environmental issues and social problems facing people supplying the trade.

The investigation also highlighted ways the tropical fish trade promotes unsustainable or illegal practices in Africa and Asia. It showed how illegal cyanide fishing and the overharvesting of desirable fish are harming the ecology of coral reefs. And it revealed how illegally collected wild corals from Indonesia are being smuggled to Singapore for onward trade to Europe.

By exposing these problems, the [article](#) in the *Groene Amsterdammer* highlighted the role that European hobbyists play in driving them, whether they realise it or not. The article led two Dutch members of parliament [to write to Government Ministers](#) seeking answers to 10 questions about the sustainability and legality of the trade in corals and fish from tropical seas to the Netherlands.

On 9 March 2020, Carola Schouten —deputy prime minister and the minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality — formally [replied in a letter](#), which acknowledged the government could only provide data on protected species for which trade is regulated under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), but that “the vast majority of tropical fish imported are not covered by the CITES Convention.”

According to the communication, the Dutch government now acknowledges “legitimate questions about the volume of trade in ornamental tropical fish and coral that are not protected by the CITES Convention and the potential negative impact on the conservation of these species in the wild and affected ecosystems.”

## **3. EJN-Supported Investigation Helps Halt Harmful Road Project Through the Amazon**

In 2017, Colombian journalist [Andrés Bermudez Lievano](#) received a grant through the EJN [Biodiversity Media Initiative](#) to report on the Marginal Jungle Road – a proposed infrastructure project that would bridge the 381 kilometers separating San Vicente del Caguan from San Jose del Guaviare in Central Colombia.

The road was part of Colombia's plan to boost regional trade by diagonally connecting Ecuador and Venezuela. But it would have cut through several important ecosystems, including Amazon forests, the Andes mountains, and Orinoquia savannahs.

Biologists told Bermudez it would threaten many species of flora and fauna, since seeds and animals rely on the ability to move between these diverse habitats in order to reproduce and enrich their genetic pools. If these ecosystems were to become islands in a sea of cattle ranching and oil palm plantations, significant biodiversity would be lost.

At the time of his reporting, the Marginal Jungle Road had yet to be green-lighted by the Colombian government, but the state had been promoting the project for more than 50 years.

During his reporting, Bermudez realised that several communities had come up with their own alternatives to the road that would also stimulate trade and economic growth while protecting the natural habitat, for instance through eco-tourism and birdwatching.

He included discussion of these proposed solutions in his series, which ran over a four-month period at the end of 2017.

In March 2018, three months after Bermudez's stories were published, Colombia's then-President Juan Manuel Santos surprised everyone by emphatically condemning the Marginal Jungle Road in an [interview for \*El Tiempo\*](#) – Colombia's largest newspaper. Asked by the reporter whether the project would continue given the controversy surrounding it, the president stated, the road "is not going to be done because from the environmental point of view it would be completely counterproductive."

Plans for the road were subsequently scrapped, and the project was cancelled.

## **Summary and recommendations**

It is imperative that countries like the United Kingdom support those from lower-income countries to be able to report freely on issues related to environment, including ensuring that journalists receive visas to attend conferences.

An example of a successful initiative to support journalists from lower income countries to attend conferences such as COP is the Climate Change Media Partnership (CCMP), of which EJN is a partner.

Since its launch in 2007, the CCMP has brought more than 350 journalists from lower income countries to attend and report on the annual UN climate talks. This has enabled journalists from all over the world to cover climate negotiations for their home audiences, while benefiting from working alongside knowledgeable climate journalists and gaining a multifaceted understanding of the actions countries are taking – nor not taking – to address climate change's global impact.

**Recommendations:**

1. Support training, grants and fellowships for environmental journalists worldwide
2. Support national networks of environment journalists to build the media's capacity in reporting on climate change and environmental issues
3. Enable journalists from developing countries to travel to international meetings to report on climate negotiations to their home audiences.
4. Develop strategies to engage with the media regularly on key climate change policy processes.
5. Increase protection mechanisms to provide emergency assistance and support to environmental journalists in danger.

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