



# WORLD SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT 2023

MAINSTREAMING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

February 22-24, 2023  
New Delhi



## Media Colloquium: Shaping Public and Political Attitudes, Driving Sustainable Development

### PLENARY SESSION SUMMARY

Venue: Stein Auditorium

Date: 24 February 2023

Time: 10:00 am – 11:00 am (IST)

#### Suggested Citation

World Sustainable Development Summit (2023), Media Colloquium: Shaping Public and Political Attitudes, Driving Sustainable Development. Plenary Session Summary (Rapporteur: Rashmi Murali), New Delhi: The Energy and Resources Institute.

## Actionable Messages

**Message 1:** The media coverage of climate issues should be comprehensive and consistent; not event based. This would create better awareness among the public about the issues around sustainability and climate crises.

**Message 2:** The COVID-19 pandemic has increased vulnerabilities during disasters. So, there needs to be a national crisis communication policy or protocol in place to educate people on disaster preparedness and guide them during the events of disaster by keeping them informed.

**Message 3:** Media's illiteracy in issues of climate change and sustainable development hampers reportage. So, media schools should tweak their curricula to include these concepts as well.

**Message 4:** Climate journalism should be solution-based, to provide some hope to the public, and climate journalists have to play a significant role in shifting focus from stories of doom and gloom to that of hope.

**Message 5:** It is important to initiate climate talks and discussions around sustainable development at the regional levels and politicians have a significant role to play in this.

**Message 6:** The media and communications sector should adopt a PPP (partnerships for public purpose) model to foster innovation.

**Message 7:** Climate impacts every aspect of human existence. So, there is a need for availability of credible data to study the efficacies of various policies and plans.

## Narrative

The session titled, “Media Colloquium: Shaping Public and Political Attitudes, Driving Sustainable Development,” was organized as part of the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) 2023. The plenary invoked dialogue and discussions around pertinent issues regarding the role of the media in driving climate action, especially using communication tools and new platforms to initiate a continuous coverage of everyday climate change experiences, whose impact can be felt by and related to the general public. Deliberations were also made on the need for change in the storytelling methods, shifting the focus from event-based reporting to raising awareness and changing thought processes, for action, mitigation and intervention, which demands a different lens to see, understand, and communicate. At this media colloquium, seasoned practitioners across realms of communications who have covered climate change disasters and the environment at large discussed ways to shape dialogues on climate action in the public and political arena. **Ms P. Anima, Media and Communications Lead, TERI** presided over the discussions.

The first panellist, **Ms Jayashree Nandi, Assistant Editor, Hindustan Times**, described climate crisis as the biggest story of today’s times, and that reporters and media houses recognized the urgency and importance of reporting on climate change issues, and are taking action on it. It is even more important in the context of the Global South as southern countries are more vulnerable to environmental impacts of climate change. Ms Nandi emphasized on the complexity of reporting climate and environment stories, and the need for nuance where geopolitics is reported. Ms Nandi also highlighted the need for consistency in reporting climate stories, shifting from the peak reportage of extreme climate events. Additionally, media coverage of climate and environment must seek justice for the vulnerable communities.

**Mr Himanshu Shekhar Mishra, Senior Editor, New Delhi Television Ltd** highlighted some of the key challenges being faced by the world today, which includes hunger, climate change and natural disasters, which have impacted the vulnerable population severely, and that the media must bring back the focus on these key challenges. Mr Mishra called for an urgent change in the media culture to one that is more sensitive to issues like climate change, with a need to increase the frequency, intensity, and scale of coverage. Strategies need to be devised to bring these issues into the mainstream conscience. Mr Mishra pointed out the lacuna in political interest in focusing on climate change, especially as an election agenda, although climate change is now debated in the Parliament. Voters should also be asking tough questions to their potential leaders. Another significant challenge highlighted by Mr Mishra was the lack of a national crisis communication policy, which is needed to sensitize people and provide proper awareness and education in a sustainable way. Mr Mishra concluded by reminding the media to focus on five sustainable development goals: Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being), Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and Goal 13 (Climate Action).

The third panellist, **Mr Rajiv Tikoo, Consulting Editor (Sustainability), Outlook Group**, highlighted some of the challenges being faced by the media in reporting sustainable development stories, including limited resources and competition. Mr Tikoo raised the need to understand sustainable development in a nuanced manner to mainstream it, and too much of event or disaster-based reporting could lead to news avoidance among the audience which would be counterproductive to the cause. The media also needs to be sensitized on the processes involved in sustainable development and climate change issues, which require upgrading their skill sets and building capacity. Mr Tikoo suggested media schools could include these themes in their course curriculum. Demystifying sustainable development to domain experts and building their communication skills is also important. According to Mr Tikoo, the media is also in a better position to facilitate partnerships around sustainable development.

**Ms Bahar Dutt, Environment Journalist and Conservation Biologist** shared her experiences with reporting on environmental issues and pitching stories on sustainable development. Ms Dutt displayed a brief presentation on one of her investigative stories and the lessons learnt. According to Ms Dutt, oftentimes, it is possible to report on sustainable development without even using the term. Moreover, social media has widened the scope and coverage of climate change reporting. Digressing from her fellow panellists, Ms Dutt said, reporters need to take advantage of climate events to pitch relevant stories regarding climate change and sustainability. Reporters must also figure out how to bring sustainability to the everyday life of the audience. Ms Dutt highlighted the need for 'solutions journalism' where there is a call to action and policy change. Further, just transition should also address power structures, especially in contexts like the informal sector.

Ms Anima invited **Mr Rajiv Chhibber, Vice President – External Affairs, Sahajanand Medical Technologies Ltd.** to share his views on the discussion topic. Mr Chhibber shared his observations on the changes that have happened in the last decade wherein development issues in national politics have begun addressing climate change and sustainable development. However, we still need more stories. Mr Chhibber stressed on the need to move to a PPP (partnership for public purpose) model between media houses, reporters, and the industry to ensure more coverage of climate change issues in the interest of the public good. Another pertinent observation by Mr Chhibber was that local media coverage of climate change, other than disaster reportage, was still limited, but essential as it can drive greater political demand on such matters. Finally, Mr Chhibber emphasized on the need to build capacities for more effective communication, which is less jargonized.

The final speaker, **Ms Aarti Khosla, Founder and Director, Climate Trends** opined that people's awareness regarding climate change and sustainability is much more than it used to be earlier, and that the public must be empowered to ask questions. As many of the jargons in the mainstream are 'elite play', the understanding of climate change as a lived experience with people and its local impacts on lives and livelihoods must be highlighted. Ms Khosla noted that there is a lot of intersectionality to the aspects surrounding climate change and journalists must be trained to understand and report on this intersectionality. She also mentioned how the digital space has become a big destructor with both good and bad aspects, and sometimes, facts and evidence get overridden by emotions and bias. Ms Khosla mentioned that alarmism on climate issues will not work and it will only lead to fatigue in reporting. There is a need to make climate change a domestically important issue, which requires systemic changes and policy recognition.

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“ The climate crisis needs to be covered consistently. We have to move away from those peaks such as air pollution, extreme heat, and the end-of-the-year COPs. And we are getting there because now, there are lots of things happening throughout the year, and we also try to identify the stories being covered.

**Ms Jayashree Nandi**

**Assistant Editor, Hindustan Times**

“ It is only when there is a crisis that we start reporting extensively. In the pre-disaster phase and the post-disaster phase, there is not much attention. We need to recalibrate our priorities. It needs a new approach, a new strategy, and a new focus to bring all such challenges to mainstream consciousness. To educate people, we need crisis communication protocols at various levels.

**Mr Himanshu Shekhar Mishra**

**Senior Editor, New Delhi Television Ltd**

“ There has to be a skill-set development in the media. There are no trained SDG reporters as per my knowledge. Media schools must also look at their curriculum to integrate courses on sustainable development.

**Mr Rajiv Tikoo**

**Consulting Editor (Sustainability), Outlook Group**

“ Sustainability is an economic story, it is a political story, it is an investigative story and that is how we should be talking to our editor. Good journalism must question power structures. And if we are not doing that, we are failing as journalists.

**Ms Bahar Dutt**

**Environmental Journalist and Conservation Biologist**

“ We have seen a change in national politics in the last 15–17 years, where the Honourable Prime Minister talks about sustainability on various platforms. Also, I feel, it is time we move to a PPP (partnerships for a public purpose) model even when we talk of communication and media.

**Mr Rajiv Chhibber**

**Vice President- External Affairs, Sahajanand Medical Technologies Ltd.**

“ The research community has only sparsely looked at how media is shaping public opinion on climate and sustainable development. It feels that there is some kind of connection between people's awareness and climate conversations.

**Ms Aarti Khosla**

**Founder and Director, Climate Trends**