



Journalists



To: Journalists at United Nations World Climate Summit
Subject: Media Strategy Document

Goals

You are a journalist and have the responsibility of communicating the outcomes of the United Nations climate negotiations to the public. You understand the power and responsibility of your position – the stories you share can influence public opinion, political will, and even how well negotiators from one part of the world understand those from other regions.

- Your goal is to ask insightful questions, to inform society about the decisions that are being made at the summit, and to help shed light on the negotiating process and its implications for society at large. The ‘code of ethics’ for journalists dictates that your reporting upholds the principles of truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness, and public accountability.

Context

The scientific consensus is clear: over 97% of climate scientists agree that climate change is happening, that it is caused primarily by use of fossil fuels, and that its impacts could be devastating.¹ While climate change may eventually impact all sectors of society, reporting on it is currently relegated to science and environment desks, which are being cut across news organizations. Both the public and most news editors lack an understanding of the scale and urgency of climate change, making it difficult to get resources and attention for covering this issue.

Opportunities

Increasingly, a changing climate will signify a period of rapid societal change—whether because of climate impacts and damages, a rising social movement demanding action, or an economy shifting away from fossil fuels and towards renewables. For journalists, change and upheaval represent opportunities. The public needs to know about the science underlying the causes of climate change, how people are responding, and where there are opportunities and risks. While climate change is still under-reported, a few news organizations are realizing that it may be the next big story.

Public Opinion

The majority of people believe climate change is real and caused by human activity. Despite this majority view, climate change is still considered to be a controversial, or at least uncomfortable, topic and is rarely raised in casual conversation. It ranks near the bottom of most people’s priorities and is a long-term, slowly changing, and complex topic that does not fit conveniently into sound bites or entertaining stories. In today’s world of fast-paced world of 24-hour news, it is difficult to keep the public engaged with this issue.

Actions

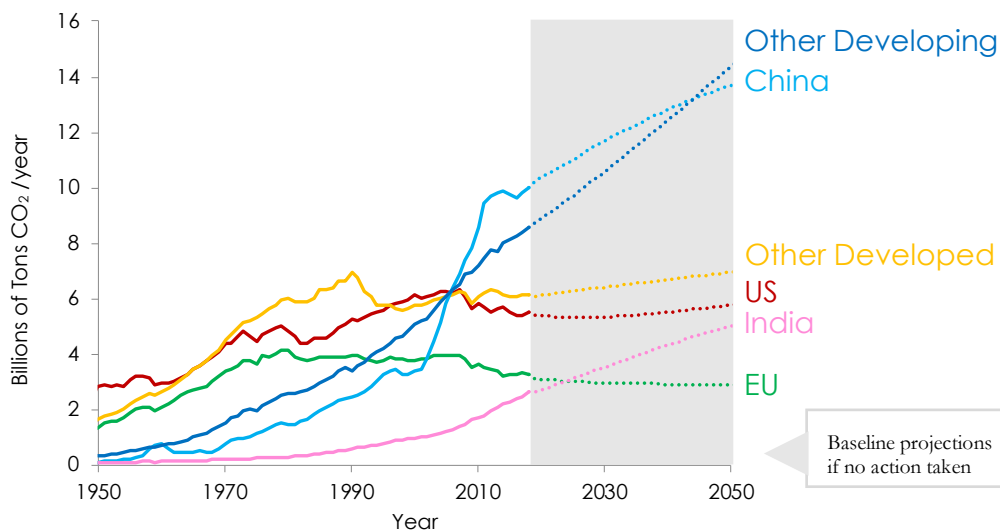
You will be responsible for speaking at live coverage events during the negotiations. Your role is to inform and engage, exposing controversy and exciting events that could be of interest to your audience, the public. While you don’t hold the power to make decisions, your power to influence decisions may be greater than any suspect. You should:

- Find ways to communicate key scientific points in engaging and interesting ways that people can relate to. Do your own research and ask the UN technical staff for help if needed.
- Keep a close ear to delegates’ conversations among each other, as well as their official public statements. Look for opportunities to expose questionable or controversial decisions, misinformation, or clear self-interest.
- Highlight and accentuate disagreements, drama, or displays of emotion to keep the interest of your viewers.

Good luck. How the story is told of who wins and loses is up to you.

(1) Cook J. 2013. The scientific consensus on climate change. Europhysics News 44:29-32.

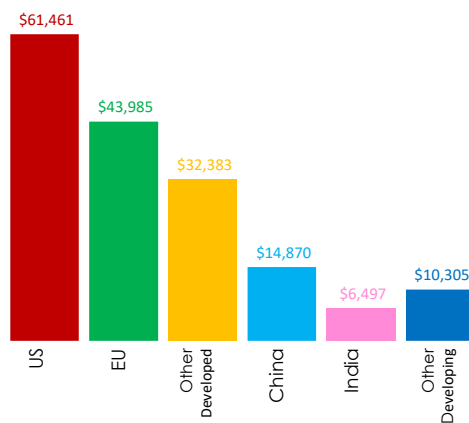
CO₂ Emissions from Energy Use



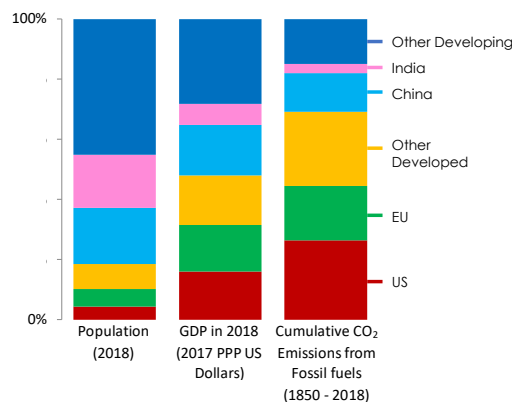
China is the world's largest emitter of CO₂. Without action, developing countries' emissions from fossil fuels are projected to double by 2100.

Sweden sustained annual CO₂ emissions reductions of 4.5% to reduce their dependence on oil (1976-1986). France and Belgium saw similar reductions around this time. Otherwise, most significant historical emission reductions have come from financial or political crises. More recently, the UK reduced emissions by an average 3.5% annually between 2007-2017.

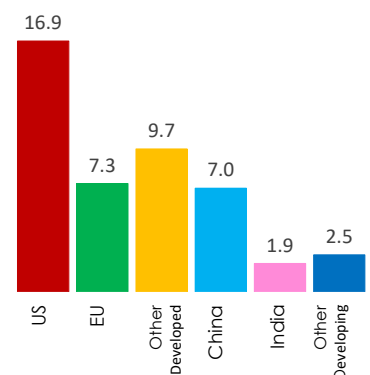
GDP per person in 2018 (2017 PPP US Dollars)



Population Wealth and Cumulative Emissions



Emissions from energy per person 2018 (tons CO₂ per year)



While cumulative emissions so far have been higher in the developed countries (i.e., the **US**, **EU**, and **other developed countries**), the growth of population, GDP per person, and emissions in the developing nations far outpaces growth in the developed countries. If no action is taken, cumulative emissions of all developed countries (**US**, **EU**, and **other developed**) are expected to fall to 42% of total by 2100.

Since 1980, emissions from energy per person have risen dramatically in **China** and **India** (by 380% and 360%, respectively) but have fallen in the **US** and **Europe** (by 20% and 28% respectively).