

MEDIATION



Biannual
publication
of Fondation
Hirondelle

UNDERSTANDING THROUGH INFORMATION AND DIALOGUE

Our responsibility in face of the environment crisis

The ecological emergency, a global phenomenon with local consequences, has become a major media issue in the countries where Fondation Hirondelle works: floods in the Central African Republic and in the Sahel this autumn, drought in the Sahelian region, pollution of urban centres full of outdated thermal vehicles, scarcity of natural resources including water, and migration of populations in danger. How should we cover this ecological issue that involves so many angles?

As is often the case, it is by listening to the populations concerned that we can cover the ecological emergency – allowing testimony on the difficulties created because of climate change but also on concrete, human-friendly solutions being developed. There is also the training of journalists so that they master the issues, can explain the data and what is at stake in a transparent way without being taken in by false studies or manipulated by certain interests. Improving relations between the scientific and journalistic worlds is an editorial objective of Fondation Hirondelle. The social responsibility of our media in the face of the ecological crisis is thus immense: to inform, to explain, and make the voices of the most vulnerable heard, so that decisions can be taken to promote a sustainable world.

Caroline Vuillemin
General Director

A journalist from Studio Yafa, Fondation Hirondelle's programme in Burkina Faso, reports from the drought-stricken Mogtedo dam in the center of the country © Studio Yafa / Fondation Hirondelle

INFORMING EFFECTIVELY ON THE ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY

Climate change and the collapse of biodiversity, caused by human activity, are already leading to a major crisis of the world's ecosystems. Accused of inertia, playing Cassandra in announcing catastrophe, or of having played into the hands of the lobbies for too long, the media have a crucial role to play in bearing witness to this crisis and highlighting mitigation and adaptation solutions.

Year after year, from COP to COP, from IPCC report to IPCC report, the alarming data are piling up: average global warming tending at best towards 2.6°C, at least 100,000 additional deaths each year due to rising temperatures, 30 million people displaced every year due to extreme weather events, 69% loss of wild vertebrate animals over the last 50 years. Nothing seems to stop humanity's march towards a major ecosystem catastrophe, induced since the industrial era by the way it produces and consumes. Following a trend that appeared in the United States in 2019, the past year has seen

several European benchmark media declare the global ecological crisis as one of their priorities. Faced with the global emergency, journalists are getting involved, and intend to directly mobilize citizens.

This effort of media action against climate change is based on the belief that journalism can raise awareness as fast as the climate is going crazy. However, nothing is less certain at a time when more than half of Americans, Australians and even Germans, three of the best informed peoples on the planet, have yet to be convinced of the human origin of climate change.

Landscape gardener Gilles Clément, author of a ground-breaking text in 1999 on the inextricable link between all living species on a finite planet*, used to say that "we must do as much as possible with as little as possible to combat (this crisis)". Given the current data - the average global temperature has already risen by 1.1°C compared to pre-industrial times - and inertia on the greenhouse effect, climate change is already here for decades. Perhaps it is time for the media to deal with it as well, and to teach their audiences to live with it: to understand it, to adapt as it manifests more or less dramatically, to understand it not only in terms of resistance but also of opportunities. Faced with the seriousness of the geophysical upheavals underway, this issue of "Mediation" identifies and salutes media initiatives that alert, inform and point to solutions. Together with their audience, they contribute to inventing the world of tomorrow. ■

* Gilles Clément, *Le Jardin planétaire – Réconcilier l'homme et la nature* (Albin Michel, Paris 1999).

Interview



INFORMING
TO IMAGINE
THE WORLD
OF TOMORROW

Journalists watch US President Joe Biden's speech at the COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, 11 November 2022 © Mohammed Abed / AFP

© Anthony Ravera



For 14 years, Anne-Cécile Bras has been producing the environmental programme “C’est pas du vent” (“It’s not hot air”) on RFI. She says it’s important to train journalists in the field of ecology, so as to thwart the influence of lobbies, inform the public about scientific facts and report on possible solutions.

For fourteen years, your programme “C’est pas du vent” on Radio France Internationale (RFI) has been dealing with environmental issues. What are the considerations for the media in this field?

Anne-Cécile Bras : The specific challenge of environmental issues, in my opinion, is their complexity: they have both a local and global dimension, technical, economic, geopolitical. Take deforestation. Trees are cut down in the Amazon to plant soya beans and feed cattle for beef that will be eaten in Europe. Trees are

cut down in Africa to cook food with firewood, or to gain agricultural land for population growth. Trees are cut down in southeast Asia to make oil used in food products. Once this state of affairs has been established, how can we effectively fight against deforestation? Dealing with this subject means opening a vast box of intertwined questions. That’s why educating the public is important, especially in a programme with a large audience like “C’est pas du vent” which has some five million listeners.

With this in mind, our typical programme combines a field report with a scientific perspective. The November 11 programme coinciding with COP27 in Egypt highlighted the way in which young Fijians are re-appropriating the practices of their ancestors in agriculture, fishing or sociability in order to face the constraints of the present world. Then we gave the floor to a geography expert, who put this report into the perspective of island states facing climate change. I think we must give a scientific account of the catastrophic state of the planet but at the

same time this must not paralyze us: we must also shine a light on partial solutions that are emerging everywhere. Afterwards, it’s up to the listeners to ask themselves: “What can I do?”

So you think that the media can push citizens to take up ecological issues?

If only information could automatically lead to action! In my opinion, the media’s main job is to inform, and they are doing that more and more on environmental matters. In the last four years, many journalists have been trained on these subjects. Since summer 2022, with its intense droughts and fires, the big French media - AFP, France Télévisions, Radio France - have made the environment and the climate a priority. Today, it even seems that the public service media are starting to take charge of raising public awareness on environmental issues, with dedicated programmes in the early evening.

But this was not always the case. For a long time, the media were subject to the influence of the fossil fuel and other industries that tried to deny climate change or its human origin. And to some extent that influence continues today. Other industrial lobbies, those of electric cars for example, con-

Dealing with environmental issues means opening a vast box of intertwined questions

tinue to push their PR to all circles of power, including the media. To resist this pressure and realize that there are not enough natural resources to replace all thermal vehicles with electric ones, journalists need to be educated. Let's take another example, the collapse of biodiversity. This subject gets much less media coverage than climate change, although it is just as worrying. But the economic actors are less concerned about it than about climate change because there are fewer economic interests at stake, for example in the energy or transport sectors. And media coverage is affected. It is up to journalists, not industrial lobbies, to choose and present to the public what is important in environmental matters.

It is up to journalists, not industrial lobbies, to present to the public what is important

Along with 1,200 journalists and dozens of media outlets in France, including RFI, you recently signed a "Charter for a journalism worthy of the ecological emergency"*. Why did you do this?

I think two articles are essential in this Charter, which was published in Paris last September: Article 7, which invites journalists and media to "reveal the strategies that sow doubt in the public mind» about the risks of climate change. And Article 9, which invites them to «train continuously" on these subjects. We had a case recently at RFI: an interview with a minister broadcast on our airwaves seemed too conciliatory to the ears of four journalists who were more sensitive to environmental issues. We then went to see the management and told them that according to Article 7 of the Charter signed by RFI, our media could not let such remarks pass without the interviewer strongly questioning them. This Charter is therefore a powerful monitoring tool. If these two articles are applied, it will no longer be possible to broadcast as we did recently a speech celebrating the discovery of oil off the coast of Côte d'Ivoire without questioning whether this oil should be exploited or not. This prospect seems exciting to me because... it is not the end of the world, but it is the end of a world. And how do we invent the next world? That's what's exciting to look at as a journalist! ■

* <https://chartejournalismeeecologie.fr>

Initiatives for green journalism

"The media is complacent while the world burns," wrote Mark Hertsgaard, environmental reporter at New York media outlet The Nation, and Kyle Pope, editor of the Columbia Journalism Review, in April 2019. Their finding? Ten months after California's deadliest summer of wildfires, several editors at major US media outlets were still expressing reluctance to cover climate change because of the small audience the topic attracted. "The role of the press is to inform people and hold the powerful to account," they continued, noting that in the face of the climate situation, this responsibility was becoming a "requirement for our collective survival".

How can this be done? Drawing on approaches such as those of British newspaper The Guardian, Heertsgaard and Pope drew up a list of principles for covering climate issues in a way that would "engage the public": Establish a scientific watch, treat the climate issue in a transversal way with other sections of the media, resist the influence of climate change sceptic speeches, listen to what the public - and in particular young people - have to say, and pay attention to regions particularly affected, offer reports suggesting solutions, and don't hesitate to name those responsible for these disasters. In the wake of this founding text, they created Covering Climate Now, a self-help network of more than 500 English-language media outlets "large and small" covering a total audience of 2 billion people in 57 countries, in order to "cover the [climate] issue with the rigour and urgency it deserves", and to "mobilize the public". Three years later, Heertsgaard and Pope's approach was emulated in the German-speaking world, with the publication in April 2022 of the "Charter of Climate Journalism Networks" signed by over 300 media professionals in Germany and Austria. And then in September 2022 in the French-speaking world, with the "Charter for a journalism that meets the ecological emergency" signed in France by more than 1,200 journalists and dozens of media*.

Wolfgang Blau, co-founder of the Oxford Climate Journalism Network at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, is equally aware of the seriousness of the situation, and advocates a less emergency-oriented attitude. "Climate change is journalism's greatest challenge," he says in a February 2022 paper. But it is made up of so many complex geophysical phenomena, in so many places and over such a long period of time, that the event-driven logic of the media has difficulty reporting on it. Journalism will have to adapt to this "long and chaotic journey" that our societies will face in the decades to come. This means learning every day to "read" climate change, to understand it better, to see it as an opportunity to transform ourselves as media, so that journalism can "help us navigate this journey and keep our societies together".

* See interview with Anne-Cécile Bras opposite.

An immense, unresolved global challenge



+100 000
Rise in number of global deaths due to extremely high temperatures between 2000 and 2019

Source: The Lancet.

30 millions
Number of people displaced within their own country because of extreme weather in 2021

Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Center.

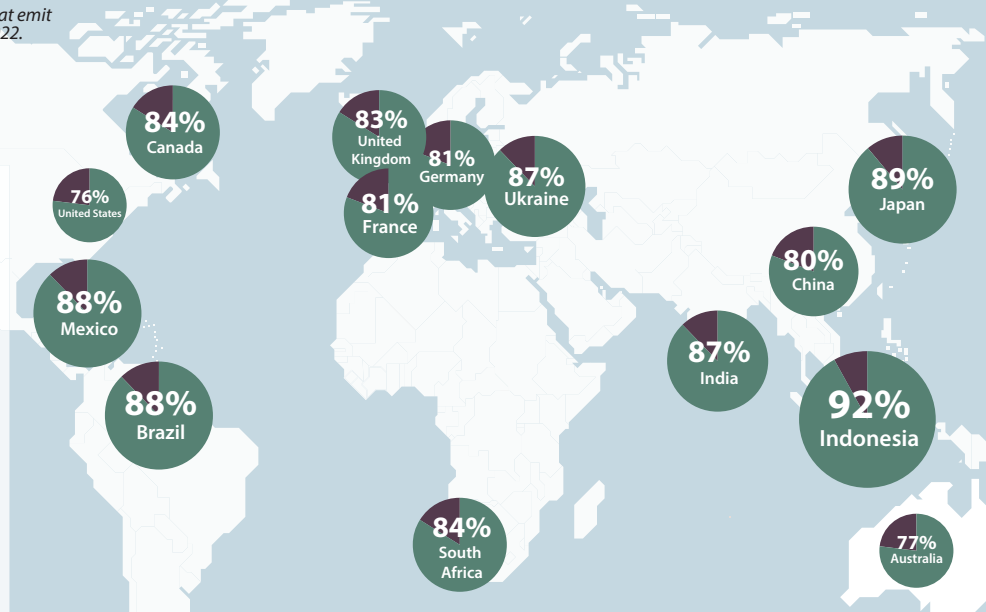
- 69 %
Average decline in population of wild vertebrate animals between 1970 and 2018

Source: WWF.

Big Data

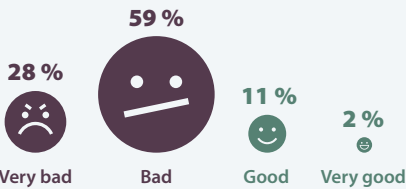
Proportion of people who consider that climate change is a big problem

Source: OECD, sample of 40,000 people in the 20 countries that emit the most CO2 and represent 72 % of global emissions, July 2022.



World's population is aware of environmental problems

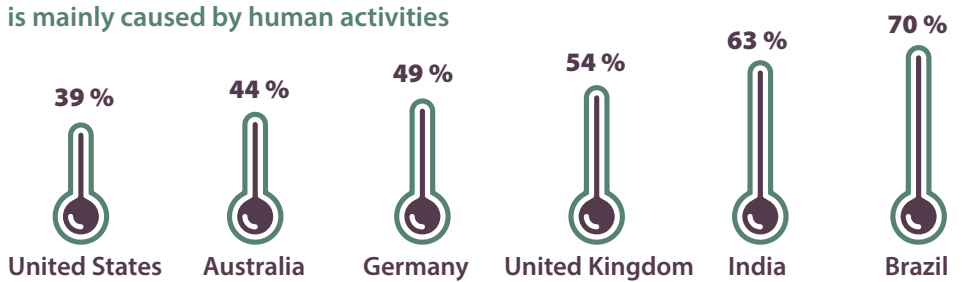
Appreciation of the quality of their environment by the global population



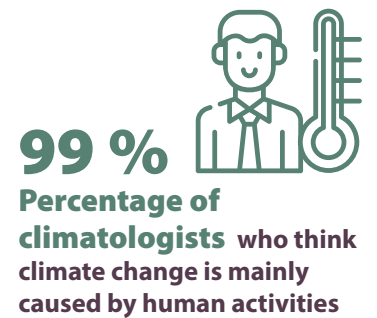
Source: Federal Statistical Office, Switzerland, 2019.

People still to be convinced on human origin of climate change

Percentage of climatologists who think climate change is mainly caused by human activities



Source: Climate Action Against Disinformation, samples of 1,026 to 2,396 individuals aged 18 and over in each country, October 2022.



Source: AFP Factuel.

Media increasingly concerned by climate change

Number of news items on climate change in November, in the run-up to COP, by 4 benchmark news agencies*



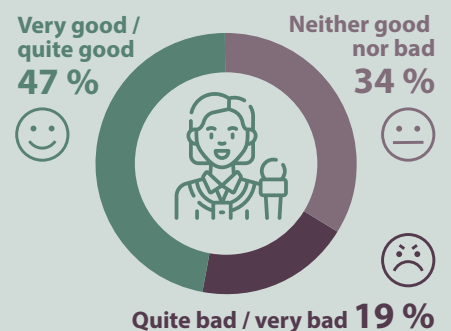
* Associated Press, United Press International, Canadian Press, Agence France Presse
Source: Media and Climate Change Observatory (University of Colorado), October 2022.

Number of articles written on global climate change



Source: IPCC, October 2022.

Degree of public satisfaction on media coverage of climate change



Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2020.

Our experience



LISTENING MORE TO INFORM BETTER

A journalist from Studio Tamani interviews a former tourist guide from Segou on the banks of the Niger © Florent Vergnes / Fondation Hirondele



Mouhamadou Touré is editor-in-chief of Studio Tamani, the Fondation Hirondele media in Mali. He thinks that on environmental issues the media must listen more to the needs of the public and so contribute to the search for relevant solutions in Mali.

Maliens are suffering a lot from the effects of climate change although they contribute very little to carbon pollution. What do you think are their information needs on environmental issues?

Mouhamadou Touré : Today, Malians live and see the dramatic effects of climate change on a daily basis, with rising temperatures, advancing desert, soil degradation, and disappearance of animal species, including elephants. What they want is for the media is to explain the causes and the responsibilities, which are also shared. Of course, the carbon emissions of rich countries are the main source of the problem, but Malians also contribute to it, for example through abusive cutting of wood to heat their

food, lack of maintenance of tree plantations to compensate for this cutting. The media can help raise awareness of these issues in Mali by focusing on solutions.

But with the multiple crises facing the country, there are other issues of concern in Mali. Is the public interested in environmental issues?

It depends on how the subject is covered. Climate change is like terrorism in one respect: the media talk about it a lot, and yet the situation gets so much worse that the population ends up not believing there's a solution and turning away from the issue. At the same time, the solutions proposed in Mali often follow the European model (thermally insulated concrete buildings, walking or cycling in the city...), whereas these solutions are not efficient here. In this context, the media have the power to organize a real debate on the specific way in which Mali could adapt to climate change. This requires an analysis of people's needs. To do this, we must move away from fast paced news where we cover the latest events day after day, and take time to listen to the population.

The "Women's Rights" project, conducted jointly by Studio Tamani and the Institut Malien de Recherche Action pour la Paix (IMRAP), gave us the opportunity to do this. Divided into several themes including "Women and Climate Change", this project allowed journalists and researchers to listen to focus groups of Malian women for several weeks, first alone and then

in the presence of men. Then from these discussions we produced several journalistic formats – testimonies, portraits, documentaries, motion design, debates – and we broadcast them on several channels: radio, television, social networks. We saw that this method allows dialogue for even the most reluctant of Malians.

How can information on environmental issues meet this need for solutions?

When it comes to the climate and the environment, Malians are not so much looking to 2030 or 2050, they are expressing their concerns of today: cutting wood to make food, putting fertilizer in the fields to improve the harvest. And they are much more interested in local, Malian or regional solutions than in solutions from the North. That's why it's interesting to co-produce programmes on the subject with Fondation Hirondele's media in neighbouring countries: Studio Yafa in Burkina Faso and Studio Kalangou in Niger. Above all, we need to talk about the ecological crisis also in terms of opportunities. Is there an unemployment problem in Mali? It is obvious that waste recycling is a sector that can develop and bring a lot of work. In short, the media have a role to play in highlighting local solutions that can respond to today's local problems. ■

We need to talk about the ecological crisis also in terms of opportunities

Eyewitness

MEDIA MUST MAKE UP FOR THEIR MISTAKES

Julia Steinberger, a professor of environmental economics at the **University of Lausanne** and co-author of the latest IPCC report, is an active campaigner on biodiversity and climate issues. What is her relationship with the media?

You are one of the main authors of the latest report from IPCC, which has been warning about the human origin of climate change since 1990. What do you expect of the media?

Julia Steinberger : The media have a lot of catching up to do. They also need to assess their own role and responsibility in climate inaction. On the catching-up side, it's essential to deal with the climate and ecological crises in a cross-cutting way, in all sections of news and culture, even sports. Journalists therefore need basic training on climate and ecological issues. The media must also assess their own role in the decades of inaction from 1990 to the present. They have allowed themselves to be manipulated by misinformation and scientific denial from the fossil fuel industry lobbies, and have often insisted, until very recently, on presenting "both sides" of the climate issue - although the scientific consensus was long established. In the UK, for example, until 2018, BBC rules insisted that a climate sceptic had to be given the floor if a climate scientist was interviewed! This has contributed to sewing doubt in the minds of citizens and politicians, with the consequences we see all around us...

In addition to your scientific activities, you are involved in politics and in environmental movements. Why are you involved?

For me it's a question of full participation in citizenship. I am convinced that the last decades of



Julia Steinberger © Felix Imhof

It's essential to deal with the climate and ecological crises in a cross-cutting way

climate and ecological inaction reflect the failure of a science model isolated from society. If we are holders of knowledge that has vital and urgent consequences for the rest of humanity, we cannot limit ourselves to writing reports and whispering to a few politicians that the house is burning down. We must participate in putting out the fire, by all possible non-violent and democratic means. For me, the question should be reversed: if one is a scientist, how can one not participate in citizen movements that take science seriously?

We must participate in putting out the fire

How do you think scientific knowledge, journalistic information and activism can work together so that citizens can grasp ecological issues?

Power games, misinformation and corruption are our main obstacles. The most important thing is to be honest and transparent. Of course, we may disagree about the best strategies and tactics, and debate them. But we absolutely must be together on the most important thing: our roles and responsibilities in ensuring that our planet is still liveable. We may disagree on the forms of action, but we all have an absolute duty to act. ■

Fondation Hironnelle is a Swiss non-profit organization which provides information to populations faced with crisis, empowering them in their daily lives and as citizens. Through our work, millions of people in war-affected countries, post-conflict areas, humanitarian crisis and societies in democratic transition have access to media that speak to them and give them a voice.

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