



# MEDIA AS CATALYST FOR PROMOTING GREEN & INCLUSIVE ENERGY SYSTEMS

*Learning paper*

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# INTRODUCTION

Hivos' mission is to facilitate innovation for social change. We currently have a strategic partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, called the Citizen Agency Consortium. The consortium consists of three partners: the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), Article19 and Hivos. There are four programs under the Citizen Agency Consortium, one of which is the Green & Inclusive Energy program. The four programs share two pillars: Lobby and Advocacy (L&A) to influence decision-makers at local, national and international level; and capacity development to strengthen the L&A capacity of civil society actors.

## THE GREEN & INCLUSIVE ENERGY PROGRAM

Hivos is implementing the [Green & Inclusive Energy program](#) with ENERGIA, IIED and civil society organizations in Indonesia, Nepal, Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Guatemala, in partnership with the Dutch Government. The program strives to make energy systems sustainable and fair: from policy and regulation, to energy providers, businesses, financial institutions and consumers. Our ultimate goal is to 'meet people's energy needs through green and inclusive energy systems that create economic opportunities for women and men while mitigating climate change.'

We do this by influencing energy policies at international, regional and national level to the benefit of decentralized renewable energy solutions for universal energy access.

## ADVOCACY APPROACH: COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Our approach to lobby and advocacy is multi-sided and as such includes several strategies such as conducting collaborative advocacy rather than confrontational, using evidence and research, and seizing windows of opportunities. It also includes putting great emphasis on communication, as changing perceptions and narratives is core to advocacy. Strong narratives and convincing images usually have more impact than mere facts. Therefore, the program puts a lot of emphasis on the way of communicating and making sure that the communication responds to the world view of the different audiences.

Engaging with media, including individual journalists, is another important strategy because e.g. journalists put topics on the agenda (see next chapter for further analysis).

This paper provides an overview of our work with media and independent journalists and consolidates best practices and lessons learned. It is structured into four parts. Part 1 describes the rationale behind this work. Part 2 outlines activities undertaken in countries and on international level. Part 3 describes results and provides insights and lessons with regard to the results and challenges encountered. This analysis is made on the basis of the Green & Inclusive Energy team's experience and feedback from journalists and trainers. Part 4 brings everything together and concludes with follow-up opportunities and ideas.

# WHY WE WORK WITH JOURNALISTS

We believe changing perceptions and narratives is vital for achieving our lobby and advocacy objectives. For instance, if policy makers perceive decentralized renewable energy solutions as small-scale, unable to reach many energy users, policy will not be favorable to these solutions. Communication is indispensable to this process since it refers to a practice where facts, images and messages are used strategically to convince and/or persuade audiences to get on your side and ultimately act accordingly.

## OUR LIMITATIONS

Sometimes situations ask for a strong push from the outside to move things forward. Besides, sometimes it is not the content of the message but the one conveying the message that is decisive for lobby successes. As Hivos is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) and will always be perceived as such, our messaging can be diluted by that very fact. A recent study we commissioned and outsourced to Climate Outreach taught us that often NGOs are perceived as biased, voicing their "own" agenda. The study also gave us insights in how audiences want to be spoken to and, equally important, who should be the sender of a certain message. All audiences in our research scope are motivated by inspiring stories told by authentic communicators, speaking from their own experience. In short, having other messengers that articulate similar concerns as we have, and are able to push from the outside is a welcoming addition to our lobby and might even partly determine success.



# ROLE OF MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS

## Setting and steering the agenda

Media plays an instrumental role in creating traction for a specific topic. With the choice to report on an issue or not, journalists co-decide the topic of conversation in society. They put things on the societal agenda, often also influencing the focus of the political debate.

Apart from determining the subject, media and opinion makers also steer the debates. They not only raise public awareness, they also influence public opinion. As we have seen in the last 10 years, increased reporting on climate change has contributed to the public's acceptance of the issue and spurred citizen action worldwide (e.g. global climate marches and school strikes). This public opinion and subsequent action can be the final tipping point or even a driving force for decision makers to take action. It has boosted, for instance, pressure on governments, international institutions and businesses to invest in climate action.

"My idea of journalism completely shifted the day I started covering climate change. I always thought journalists needed to be unbiased. But with topics like this one, you can't. I am a feminist and a climate activist and I am intentionally using my role, as Editor-in-Chief of a publication, to encourage behavioral change through awareness raising."

[Anne-Sophie Garrigou, The BEAM](#)

## Enhancing transparency and accountability

### Media as a watchdog

Media also enhances the two-way communication between policy-makers and citizens. On the one hand, they play the role of watchdog. This means that they translate policy and practice of governments, private sector and international institutions into understandable reports that inform citizens about these policies and practices. For instance, they shed light on government's investment in fossil fuels. This way they contribute to transparency. This in turn may motivate citizens to demand their government to change course, and in any case forces governments to explain its choices and take responsibility for the consequences. Without oversight by dedicated journalists, policy makers are free to disclose only the information they want. And even if they are transparent, the information they provide often times needs to be translated into layman's language.

"For us, journalism is about trust. Not what you might see advertised on the New York Times though. It is about whether or not governments trust their people enough to learn about, and have a say in the decisions they are making. I believe the biggest hindrance to good governance and appropriate development is that sense of trust. Without it, governments inevitably end up in a vicious feedback loop of an uninformed public, who they would say, "don't care about the environment". But with that trust, and informed, investigative journalism, we see community-led energy solutions, city-driven development and citizen-led policy. And I believe this contribution to the process of better governance is the unique value that informative journalism brings to any public."

[Chris Wright](#), Managing Director at [Climate Tracker](#)

### Media telling people's stories

On the other hand, media can enlighten policy-makers about the situation citizens are in and what effect their decisions have on people's lives. As these are often based on numbers while people's real concerns are overlooked or dismissed, journalists can put the challenges we face on a human scale. They report, for instance, on the threats climate change poses to real individuals and their livelihoods and tell stories about how access to renewable energy have improved peoples' health, livelihood or empowered women entrepreneurs.

## "data tells, stories count"

These stories are not one-off. Journalists can follow up on stories over longer time frames and report on setbacks and progress. In the case of energy access, they can cover progress in health, economic development and international goals such as Sustainable Development Goals 7 (energy access for all).

To conclude, there is a great desire for informed, balanced and well researched journalism, both to report on policies and how these and societal challenges influence citizens. Although independent, journalists are never impartial and can as such influence debates and become advocates of their own, their reports contributing a great deal to a knowledgeable society. The potential to stimulate reporting on renewable energy and energy access is something the Green & Inclusive Energy program wants to tap into and support.

## SUPPRESSED MEDIA LANDSCAPES

Going forward, we should recognize that only one in seven countries has a free media environment. Governments are increasingly suppressing independent groups that share alternative views. This situation has a profound impact on the space for dialogue and debate.

Till recently, energy has not been a politicized or controversial topic. Hence, reporting on it has been less risky than reporting on human rights, for example. However, we also see more and more repression and, especially when journalists write about the exploitation of resources, we receive feedback that journalists are threatened and discussions, especially online, are getting harsher.

Furthermore, the rise of 'fake news' and a strong distinction between left and right wing media continue to sharpen every debate.

As Hivos we try to countervail these developments and strive for an open society in which all people can freely, safely, and independently exercise their right to information, freedom of expression and self-determination. To contribute to this vision, we aim for civil society organizations and "infomediaries" (e.g. independent journalists, hacktivists, data nerds, artists, cultural producers, academics and civic watchdogs) to make wide-ranging information accessible and usable for citizens who wish to hold governments and companies accountable. In this regard, we support frontrunners such as artists, bloggers, journalists, techies, activists and creative entrepreneurs so they have safe and sustainable spaces to express themselves and invite others to join the debate.

Linking the journalism work of the Green & Inclusive Energy Program and our Open Society programs is, and will continue to be, top priority.

# HOW WE SUPPORT JOURNALISTS

We invest in independent journalism by enabling journalists to become critical investigators and storytellers of the impact that climate change and actions, and renewable energy solutions for energy access have on real people. All of our country teams have slightly different approaches since media landscapes differ and journalists face different challenges and opportunities. However, all activities address criticism on development journalism as being too technical or abstract. Hence, we focus on putting a human face to energy access.

## TRAININGS & FELLOWSHIPS

In collaboration with universities, media partners and an international organization [Climate Tracker](#), we provide several trainings for freelance journalists. The trainings have so far focused on both skills and content as well as understanding the role of journalists in reporting on renewable energy issues.

### Content

Building the capacity of journalists' skills focuses on interview- and reporting techniques as well as obtaining the right information. It includes, amongst others, judging news worthiness, the difference between straight news reports and investigative or interpretative reports, and how to structure a story. Furthermore, it also includes tips and tricks on how to source data on renewable energy, and how to use this in reporting, and how to avoid jargon.

With regards to content, from experience and feedback we know that journalists struggle with making sense of the technical aspects of renewable energy. The topic is often approached from that side, diving into the details of how windmills or geothermal energy works and how many kilowatts can be generated with a mini-grid. With regards to climate change, it is the scientific measurements of global warming.

Although time is scheduled to explain the different forms of renewable energy, a large part of the trainings focus on how to make an article less about techniques and more about the impact on people's lives. A typical question answered in the training is 'why are climate action and access to energy important for people?'

### Trainings so far

Trainings have been organized as one-offs (either one day or over the course of a couple of days), or as fellowships that run a certain period of time with several contact moments. It gives the participants the time to digest information, put it into practice and come back with real time cases for which they want advice.

So far, trainings have been held in Zimbabwe and Malawi (together with Climate Tracker and the media partner [Media Institute of Southern Africa](#) (MISA)), Kenya (with University of Nairobi's School of Journalism and Mass Communication (SOJ) and local partner [CUTS](#)), Tanzania (initially with the Tanzania Media Foundation, currently with [Nukta Africa](#)) and in Nepal (with media partner [Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists](#), NEFEJ).

## FIELD VISITS, LEARNING JOURNEYS & SAFARIS

Field visits, but more importantly, learning journeys or safaris, have been instrumental in understanding the renewable energy landscape and are as such much more valuable than explaining the topic in theoretical concepts.

A field visit is "just" a site visit in which journalist can view a certain practice with their own eyes. A learning journey or safari goes one step further and should as such not be confused with a field visit. It is an intense immersion learning track lasting a couple of days. It follows a defined process, where groups of – in this case journalists – explore a topic in depth. The core principle of a Safari is to send people out into the field where they can talk to the 'end-user' of energy and others involved in the problem. Most importantly, participants are asked to suspend their judgment and try to forget what they have previously learned. Viewing and experiencing something with new eyes allows you to be amazed and listen more carefully to the people you meet.

We have organized safaris in Tanzania. We have followed them up with a debriefing and sense-making conversation to be able to put it in a bigger picture and write about it.

## INFORMAL (BREAKFAST) MEETINGS

As we realize time is often limited, short meetings are sometimes more suitable than longer trainings. Informal meetings also invite participants to talk freely about challenges they face in reporting and to share lessons. This is why we have organized several breakfast meetings in Kenya, Tanzania and Nepal. In these meetings we have introduced the topic of renewable energy and energy access to journalists and invited them to ask questions. The topic of conversation often shifted to trends and development in the renewable energy sector.

In other meetings we have invited editors to secure interest in their journalists participating in the fellowships and in publishing stories.

**"The training was a milestone and eye opener for the Homa Bay County Journalists' Association in terms of Renewable Energy reporting."**

James Latano, Citizen TV (participant of journalists training in Kenya)

# INVITING JOURNALISTS TO (INTERNATIONAL) CONFERENCES

Next to activities at national level, Hivos is well-positioned to introduce journalists to international networks, platforms and conferences, thereby providing opportunities to broaden their perspective and enlarge their reach.

So far we have invited (and funded) journalists to attend four international conferences; the High Level Political Forum on SDG 7 (access to sustainable, affordable and reliable energy for all) (July 2018), the 24<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP24) (December 2018), the African Climate Week in Ghana (March 2019), and the Scaling up energy access and finance conference in Beijing (May 2019).

The journalists selected were either outstanding participants of earlier trainings, were awarded the visit after participating in a competition (call for articles), or were specifically chosen because of their ability to speak at the conference.

Journalists invited from Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Nepal have 1) reported back to their media houses with outcomes of the conferences, 2) voiced stories from their countries to the international audiences at the conference (in formal panel discussions), and 3) increased their understanding of the global discussions on climate and energy.

“It has been invaluable for the journalists to have access to such an important forum. Not only have they been able to expand their understanding of renewable energy issues, they have been able to share information and learnings from a critical regional forum with their audiences back in their countries.”

[Maimuna Kabatesi](#), Advocacy Lead, Green & Inclusive Energy Program Kenya



Award-winning, Hivos' trained journalist James Chavula with part of the Hivos team at the High Level Political Forum in New York.

## MEDIA PARTNERS

In the Green & Inclusive Energy program we collaborate with several national organizations, among them media partners such as journalist networks and media houses. These partners implement their own activities, either in cooperation with us or by themselves, and are financially supported by Hivos.

The activities are various. In Latin America, we work together with [El Intercambio](#), a journalist and producer network. With our financial support they map the lack of energy and the successes and failures of decentralized energy projects (both government and independent owned).

In Zimbabwe and Malawi, the program's implementing partner MISA advances media freedom and freedom of expression across the region. MISA has been involved in the trainings in Zimbabwe and Malawi. Together, we have also initiated participatory discussions on the radio about energy access.

In Nepal, partner NEFEJ, has helped in organizing several trainings and produces documentaries, audio programs, write ups and other materials to raise awareness among the wider audience about environmental issues and renewable energy.

In Kenya, the School of Journalism and Mass Communication has been instrumental in organizing trainings. They are not an official partner in the program but are brought in as a consultant when the need arises. A similar partnership is established with Nukta Africa in Tanzania.

In Indonesia, we currently do not have "official" media partners in our partnership. However, an extensive media mapping in the beginning of the program resulted in a list of media organizations of potential interest. These include Jakarta Post, Kompas and Tempo. Further activities to formalize partnerships will be undertaken.

## OTHER

Next to organizing and supporting journalists and media, we always keep an eye on emerging opportunities such as:

- introducing them to competitions to enlarge their reach; e.g. [Voices of a Brighter Future](#) (UNOHRLLS/SEforAll competition)
- connecting journalists to international media outlets; e.g. BEAM Magazine, [Sun Connect newsletter](#)

Also, to highlight our work in the media we map media outlets in the countries we work and occasionally pitch articles and opinion pieces and give interviews to be published in these (social) media outlets.

## PARTICIPANTS' MOTIVATIONS

The participants of the trainings are a diverse group of environmental and investigative journalists, independent or working for a media house/news agency, and students majoring in journalism. An even balance between male and female participants has been secured.

Journalists have indicated several reasons to participate. They include:

- The realization that renewable energy is an important component of livelihoods and the economy;
- The need to gain more knowledge on renewable energy reporting;
- To understand all types of challenges facing the energy sector (from technical to social);
- To widen scope of reporting, beyond reporting on lifestyle, entertainment and current affairs;
- Interest in environmental issues and the role of renewable energy in addressing them;

- To expand perspective on qualitative coverage of renewable energy issues with a view to becoming an effective contributor to conversations on energy;
- Passion for human interest stories;
- To learn more about Hivos and their work in development;
- Formal and informal learning from experienced journalists.

# INSIGHTS AND LESSONS

## RESULTS

The results have been promising, also taking into account the limited space and funding for journalists in many countries. Our collaboration with Climate Tracker to train journalists in Zimbabwe and Malawi has led to a marked increase in quality reporting and radio stations discussing renewable energy and energy access issues in these countries. This also encouraged wider discussion and interaction with the general public. During live programs, people had an opportunity to call in and ask questions and get more information about energy related issues to help them better understand energy poverty impact and available solutions for households and communities. To complement the reach and enhance the quality of the dialogue, radio stations cross-post the live programs on their social media platforms as the emergence of social media live streaming is gaining ground in the southern African countries. This has enriched the dialogue with both live phone-ins and online social media participants.

We also encouraged our journalist trainees to enroll in UNOHRLLS' 'Voices of a Brighter Future' competition. One of them, James Chavula, was among the seven award winners with a piece on the effects of indoor pollution from traditional cooking habits on women and children. His report shook things up in Malawi to the point of being discussed in parliament. After winning the Voices of a Brighter Future award, James has been received several other awards, including the best environmental journalist in Malawi.

In Kenya, we have also witnessed an increase in media coverage of renewable energy and energy access, especially at County level. Furthermore, the trainings had a rollout effect as we have seen trained journalists training other journalists outside of the Hivos program, thereby enhancing the effect on increased reporting. Apart from trainings, journalists have also established a community of practice where they continue to engage with each other and with Hivos and partners, and share their renewable energy stories and challenges long after trainings are done.

In Nepal, Radio Sagarmatha, an FM community radio station that broadcasts nation-wide to more than 2.5 million listeners, has, with our support, broadcasted a weekly episodes of a radio drama entitled "Juneli", on different aspects of the interlinkages between renewable energy and gender and social inclusion. This is important in Nepal where barriers for scaling up renewable energy solutions consist of a) the lack of awareness among rural and remote communities about the negative impacts of poor energy access, b) questions about costs and affordability, and c) social norms and cultural bias meaning that consumers and entrepreneurs often may not view renewable energy business as an occupation in which women could typically engage.

Also in Nepal, sensitizing government to share data with journalists has contributed to transparency of government plans with regards to the implementation of energy access programs.

In Indonesia we have also seen an increase in media coverage. Metro TV, one of the leading news channel in Indonesia, has dedicated air-time for decentralized renewable energy, specifically in Sumba, in their TV program '360'. This was managed by Hivos.

In Latin America, we have successfully lobbied for a separate energy portal on one of the main climate journalists' platforms (LatinClima). Journalists writing for the platform now include energy as one of the main topics to investigate and report on.

## CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

Results are promising, but challenges also exist. Below we describe the most common ones shared by the teams in the countries.

### Willingness and interest

#### *Editors/media houses*

Several times we received feedback from journalists that it was difficult for them to "sell" their articles about climate and renewable energy to media houses. They said editors are not interested in the topic and prioritize politics. Even though journalists are increasingly interested in the topic, their superiors might not be. This, and because most journalists are paid per piece, has caused several trained journalists to only sporadically report on the issue. It is simply too tricky for them to invest time in writing the articles.

Learning: sensitizing media houses and editors about the importance of climate and energy might be as important as sensitizing individual journalists. Including the superiors in future trainings is therefore one of the recommendations made by team members and journalists to follow up on.

#### *Journalists*

On different occasions we have unfortunately also noticed that journalists seemed interested at first, but are less interested once they realize there will be no monetary benefit to participating in the training such as per diem/DSA. This can lead to journalists dropping out, or not continuing with the topic once the training is over.

Learning: Clearly communicating expectations upfront (before enrolling in trainings) is vital, as well as agreeing on concrete commitments.

### Data availability and accuracy

Lack of available and understandable data hampers quality and independent reporting and is an issue everywhere. One of the things we have focused on in this regard is sharing data that came to us with our network of journalists. Moreover, we have had conversations with government officials to sensitize them about the importance of transparency and cooperation with journalists.

Learning: Sharing data more frequently and sensitizing our target audiences to be open and transparent could help increase the availability of data.

### Skills

Some of the journalists have indicated that they lack certain skills or want to build their capacity. Issues raised are language – especially in the case of Tanzania and Indonesia –, network building – especially internationally, and digital outreach, e.g. using social media. Opening doors for journalists from developing countries to established international media outlets proved to be difficult. The support through our Strategic Partnership program is not sufficient to use the full potential. Having closer connections with international media outlets would therefore be helpful.

Learning: Need for more specialized capacity building on the raised issues and collaboratively build our international network to increase international coverage.

# CONCLUSIONS AND FOLLOW UP

The trainings and fellowships, learning journeys and safaris, informal meetings, connecting journalists to international conferences and platforms, and collaboration with media in formal partnerships have proven to be effective lobby and advocacy tools. In all countries, the increase in media coverage and citizen engagement in energy as a topic demonstrates that the trained journalists now have a better understanding of how to report on renewable energy in a much more authoritative and gender balanced manner. Their stories help to raise awareness on the impact of renewable energy on climate change, global warming and socio-economic development.

Having stories written by journalists also created new and other ways of describing problems and opportunities – through stories of “outsiders” who are not necessarily experts. These stories are often authentic, from the people themselves, instead of colored by Hivos as an I-NGO or local partner organization.

Measuring impact with regards to awareness is, however, difficult. So is measuring impact in terms of policy change. Nevertheless, the example of Malawi - where an article has been discussed in parliament - strengthens us in our conviction that media and journalists play a meaningful role in shifting opinion.

## STRENGTHENING CURRENT WORK

To further strengthen our work with media, we will:

- look into the possibility to sensitize media houses and editors about the importance of climate and energy;
- more clearly communicate expectations upfront with journalists;
- look into the issue of more specialized capacity building on the raised issues;
- collaboratively build our international network to increase international coverage;
- in Indonesia we will follow the example of the African countries and start the first training for journalists;
- continue inviting journalists to international conferences;
- continue supporting capacity building and interacting with journalists at local/national level.

## DEVELOPING OUR WORK

To further develop our work, we will also look into new opportunities and ideas. These include:

- building a global network/platform of journalists reporting on energy issues;
- broadening our scope by including photo journalists. We will look into designing trainings, but also international competitions;
- collaborating with global media and photo journalism networks.

To conclude, this work has exceedingly contributed to our lobby and advocacy and has positioned us in a way that we had not foreseen in the beginning of the program. Results have strengthened our belief that independent reporting is vital in bringing about change. Hence, we will continue these efforts till energy and climate related issues get the attention they deserve.



Hive-trained journalists Haika and Wambui interviewing ECOWAS Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (ECREEE) Executive Director, Mahama Kappiah at Africa Climate Week, Accra.

## Colophon

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