



Communication practices and media reporting on climate change

A Pacific scoping study

ABC
INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

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About the study

This study comprised a literature review and 47 interviews with media practitioners (21) and knowledge brokers (26) across eight countries conducted by ABC International Development, and content analysis of 378 newspaper articles published in the Pacific (Dec 2016 – Mar 2019) conducted by the Monash Climate Change Communication Research Hub.

Media practitioners are working journalists and editors reporting for Pacific media organisations. Knowledge brokers are climate scientists, officials and staff of climate-focused government, non-governmental, educational, regional and intergovernmental organisations who are involved in the public sharing of information relating to climate change.

The study considers the communication practices adopted by both these groups in disseminating climate change information to Pacific audiences via Pacific media. It covers Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

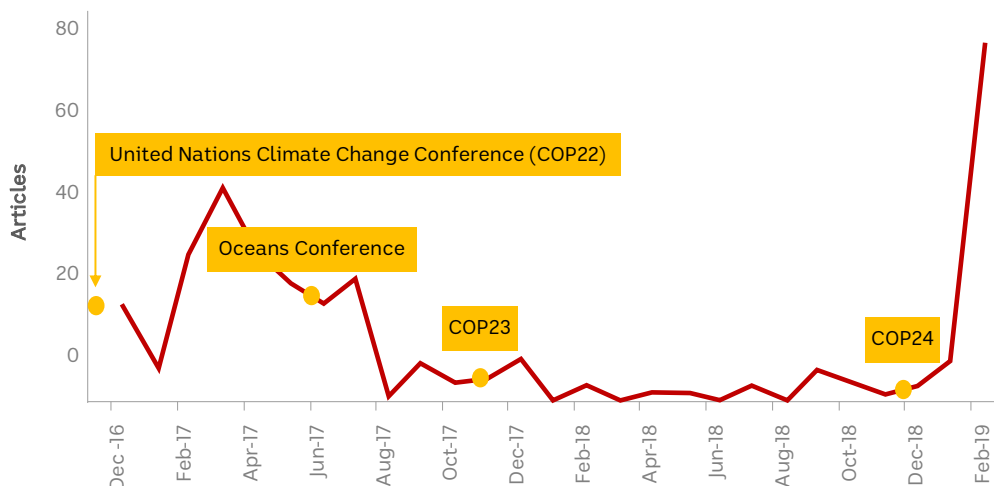


UNDP's Response to Cyclone Pam, Tuvalu. Image credit: CC UNDP

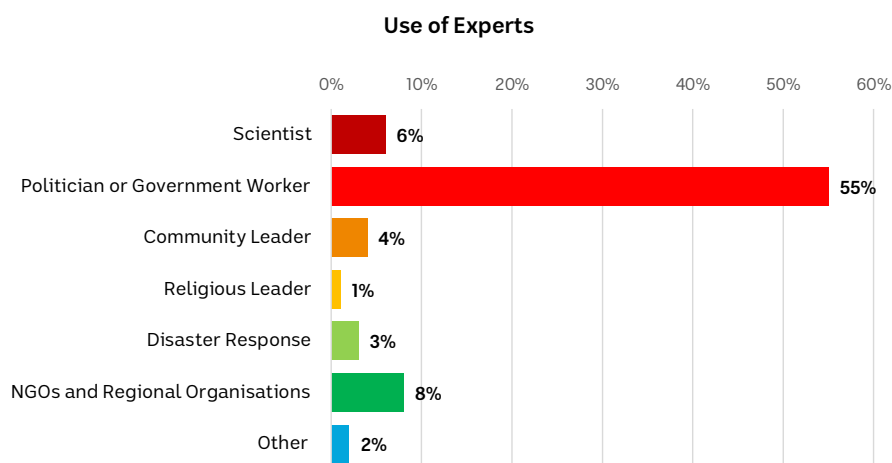
Key findings

1. Knowledge brokers and media practitioners agree that accurate, timely and accessible reporting by the media is critical to public understanding of climate change.
2. Knowledge brokers and journalists agree on the importance of contextualizing climate change impacts (with a focus on key facts, resilience and empowerment) through narrative storytelling.
3. Journalists and knowledge brokers acknowledge that the provision of accessible climate change information for marginalised groups (i.e. people with disability, members of LGBTQI+ communities and women) is necessary, but are unaware of any dedicated approaches in place to understand and address these information needs.
4. Journalists are at times compelled to make unsubstantiated links between disasters and climate change to meet editorial deadlines.
5. 94% of climate change newspaper reporting occurred around political events. This resulted in contrasting periods of very limited coverage of climate change and periods of extensive coverage of climate change.

Articles Published across Pacific Island Countries and Political Events



6. Overwhelmingly, politicians and government workers, rather than scientists, are the cited sources for climate change stories.



7. Media practitioners and knowledge brokers cited the same drivers for climate change reporting and communication:

- Political events
- Public awareness days
- Omnipresent impact (“Because it affects everyone”)

8. Both groups acknowledge a fundamental disconnect in how media practitioners and knowledge brokers work together to communicate climate change stories to the public.

9. The study identified several common barriers to effective communication of climate change:

a) Budgetary constraints

Media cited the cost of travelling to climate-affected communities as a key challenge and both groups acknowledged general budget constraints in Pacific newsrooms as a barrier.

b) Access to expert information

Timely comment from knowledge experts is often not available. Retention of journalists with climate knowledge in the media sector is also low.

c) Language and translation

The two-step translation process, from technical language to plain English to local language, is difficult to navigate while maintaining accuracy.

d) Access disparities between urban and rural populations

Climate change media reporting in rural areas is often limited to weather reports.

e) Access barriers for marginalized groups

There was no mention of LGBT+ people or people with disabilities in analysed climate change reporting. Only 4% of articles mentioned women.

Opportunities for improved media reporting of climate change

Journalists and knowledge brokers recognise that improved coordination, better understanding of each other's professional contexts and resourcing of joint communication initiatives would support stronger public understanding of climate change.

- Strengthening networks and relationships could encourage co-education of how the other “group” operates.
- Coordination of the public awareness activities of climate-focused organisations and media's planned reporting on climate change could promote wider public discussion of climate change.
- Pooling resources to source grass-roots climate change stories is possible: knowledge brokers regularly visit rural areas and journalists could accompany them.
- Collaborative content development – involving communities and audiences – could lead to more engaging and relatable climate change stories.
- Incorporation of traditional knowledge into climate change communication and disaster messaging could support better understanding of climate change risks and adaptation.
- Supporting scientists to talk to the media (and supporting politicians to communicate the latest science and climate information) would increase public access to accurate science.
- Refining and promoting terminology resources (lexicons) would help ensure that different communicators are using the same language to talk about climate change impacts and adaptation and reduce translation-related delays.
- Supporting journalists to access technical expertise and information in time to meet print and broadcast deadlines would lead to more accurate reporting.
- Encouraging dialogue on the science of attribution could lead to more accurate reporting.
- Adoption of a twin-track approach to socially-inclusive communication by making mainstream reporting more inclusive and providing targeted reporting for marginalised groups would support better public understanding of climate change.
- Capacity building on the job – mentoring, peer-learning etc. – is the preferred learning modality of most knowledge brokers and media practitioners.



Port Vila Vanuatu. Image credit: CC Salvation Army IHQ

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