



# WORLD SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT 2022

**TOWARDS A RESILIENT PLANET:  
ENSURING A SUSTAINABLE AND EQUITABLE FUTURE**

February 16-18, 2022 (Virtual)



## Communications as a Means for Shaping Public and Political Perceptions and Attitudes on Climate Action

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### PLENARY SESSION: SUMMARY

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# Inaugural Session

## About the Session

At the media colloquium, seasoned practitioners across realms of communications, who have covered climate change disasters and the environment at large, discussed ways to shape dialogues and narratives on climate action in the public as well as political arena. The discussion focused on how to break out of the echo chamber, and mobilize a larger audience to engage with issues related to environment and sustainability. The panelists also reiterated that it is important to use all forms of media, including mass media, social media and other forms of communication to put the point across to people and policymakers.

## Speakers

### Chair

- Mr Vikram Chandra, Founder, Editorji

### Panelists

- Ms Fiona Harvey, Environment Correspondent, The Guardian, London (Accepted)
- Ms Bahar Dutt, Environmental Journalist and Conservation Biologist (Accepted)
- Dr Rajiv Chhibber, Vice President – External Affairs, Sahajanand Medical Technologies. Ltd.
- Mr Himanshu Shekhar Mishra, Senior Editor, NDTV
- Ms Jayashree Nandi, Environment Journalist, The Hindustan Times

## Disclaimer

The text of the addresses is based on auto-generated transcript from YouTube. Minor edits were made on grammar and spelling. The exact wording of the discussion can be accessed from YouTube video: <https://youtu.be/7Mtpu0VnbQg>.

## Actionable Messages

**Message 1:** Media is very active only when certain incidents or disasters occur. Over the years, it is true that the number and intensity of coverage around particular incidents have increased. But there is also a need to do a post-disaster analysis, and media coverage on the relief measures and the actual impact of the disaster.

**Message 2:** No news is isolated, and every major issue in this world has some connection to environment issues. There is a need to break away from the isolated mainstream media coverage, and include the aspects related to climate change, environment and sustainability in every related issue, such as national security, health and overall economy. For this, environmental journalists need to work with their colleagues in other beats.

**Message 3:** While reporting on climate action and sustainability, there is a need to get out of the politics of developed versus developing, to really report on the issues that affect everyone, and especially the planet. That said, geopolitics is a reality and the western media and the Indian media, along with the media from the developing countries, should both refer to equity and justice as much as they can because we cannot wish away historical responsibility.

**Message 4:** Currently, reporting and communicating on issues related to sustainability and the environment is like preaching to the converted. There is a need to get out of the echo chamber, and reach out to a wider audience who might not necessarily be aware or paying attention to these issues. In this way, enough people can then be mobilized to put pressure on the politicians to do what needs to be done.

**Message 5:** Journalists need to start asking difficult questions to the policymakers and the decision makers, on issues related to sustainability, climate change and environment. Journalism is still very soft when it comes to reporting on environment.

**Message 6:** A good story should have good science but it should also tell the individual story and emotions, so a balance of emotion with good practical science will be essential for a good storytelling for the planet. It should not be just the hard-hitting stories, but with emotions as well as with hope.

## Making Words Count @WSDS 2022

“ We need to make sure that climate change, other biodiversity crisis and other environmental problems are being reflected across the board, in all of our stories, not just environment stories, and not just in one media. I think this has got to be an all-out effort.

**Ms Fiona Harvey**  
**Environment Correspondent, The Guardian, London**

“ A good story is about avoiding doom and gloom which typically happens in climate change and lastly, a good story should have good science yes but it should also tell the individual story, the individual emotions so a balance of emotion with good practical science i think makes for good storytelling for the planet.

**Ms Bahar Dutt**  
**Environmental Journalist and Conservation Biologist**

“ I am really a believer that media needs to take a pivotal role in disseminating information, following it up also diligently and also providing an analysis of many complex issues that are really impaired. So, it is not one solution that you have; we have to put all solutions in a bucket and have it thrown to everyone else.

**Dr Rajiv Chhibber**  
**Vice President – External Affairs, Sahajanand Medical Technologies Ltd**

“ India needs new politics. India needs a new political culture which is far more sensitive to the issues that we are discussing now. The political parties the governments, the state governments, parliament of India, the state assemblies, they all have to work in a very concerted way to actually create effective policy action on the ground.

**Mr Himanshu Shekhar Mishra**  
**Senior Editor, NDTV**

“ There is no dearth of scientific evidence that we are on the edge of collapse. The scientific community is very confident that we are going to see these impacts in the next few years and this would mean more severe events extreme weather events, very severe monsoon, extreme flooding all of that. Climate change has come home and it is no more a story that needs to be spelt out to people because people are feeling it. It is just that we are not connecting those dots.

**Ms Jayashree Nandi**  
**Environment Journalist, The Hindustan Times**

“ Whether you are on social media, whether you are on mass media, you seem to be spending a lot of your time on other issues, (such as) TRP-gathering issues, sensational issues, or issues that will drive engagement. (The real issue) tends to get drowned out by just so much irrelevant conversation that may seem irrelevant to us out here, but that is where engagement comes from, that is where TRPs come from.

**Mr Vikram Chandra,**  
**Founder, Editorji**

## Narrative

### Moderator

**Mr Vikram Chandra, Founder, Editorji**

Thank you so much and it is a pleasure to be here, and it is pleasure to be part of panel of such great luminaries in the environment communications field. I think it is almost a tautology, it is an obvious thing that, if the mass media, if in our communications, we could talk a little bit about the issues that really matter, if we could talk about climate change, sustainability, the destruction that human habits are doing to the planet, obviously there would be change: there would be faster change, there would be policy action, life would look up, the planet would probably be saved. But it is not always quite as easy as that. Although, I have to say things are starting to change: you are starting to see articles being written, programs being done, movies being made, which are starting to draw attention to some of the real issues, but by and large, it does get lost a little bit in the noise. Whether you are on social media, whether you are on mass media, you seem to be spending a lot of your time on other issues, (such as) TRP-gathering issues, sensational issues, or issues that will drive engagement. So one of the things that I would really like to ask the panel and that I will be throwing it over to them, is to try and get ideas as to how you can break out of this rut. I am sure we have all just seen the movie *Don't Look Up*. Actually, that almost summed it up really well, as to how when you are going on talking about a crisis and saying the world is about to come to an end, it is a really major issue, but it tends to get drowned out by just so much irrelevant conversation that may seem irrelevant to us out here, but that is where engagement comes from, that is where TRPs come from. So how do you get people to start paying attention to the issues that really matter and that includes climate change and the environment?

One of the learnings that I would like to place before all of you, as I toss it over to your individual comments is how do you ensure that the messaging that you are putting forward goes out of its own echo chamber. I used to spend a lot of time in my previous roles on television doing what I thought was great environment programming and we used to say, "Oh we're going to save the tiger and we are going to worry about plastic and we are going to do sustainability, and we must draw attention to water," and we would do all of that and you had a lot of people coming and saying, "That was such a wonderful program, I absolutely adored it," and then when you sat down and you scratched your head, you said, "Hang on. It was only watched by people who are already passionate about the environment, who are already concerned about climate change, who already want to save the tiger." That therefore is not necessarily very helpful. Yes, again, it is great in that echo chamber to be hearing back from so many people saying you did a wonderful program, but the idea is to take it to the people who are a broader audience. There is no point in preaching to the converted, they already believe. You have got to reach out to a broader audience. So one of the things that I had tried my hand at, about a decade or so ago, was to say, "Let us try and get in a little bit off that same popular culture, let's do things like telethons where you actually get film stars and you get in singing and dancing; maybe that attracted a broader audience than the audience that you are normally talking to, if you are an environment reporter. Is that the solution? I do not know. Is the solution just to make a lot more noise? I do not know the answer to that either. But these are just some thoughts that I am going to leave with the illustrious panelists. So why don't we start with you Ms. Fiona Harvey, Environment Correspondent at *The Guardian* in London, which is one of the most respected publications there is on the planet. What do you feel, what is the right way to take this forward?

### Panel Discussion

**Ms Fiona Harvey, Environment Correspondent, The Guardian, London**

Thank you very much indeed, and thank you for that very kind introduction. Can I just say, first of all, what a great pleasure and privilege it is to be here with so many distinguished journalists on the panel and moderating the panel. Thank you so much for inviting me.

I thought that was a great point that you just made actually. I would love to have more singing and dancing in this. I think that would be a great improvement and bring a lot of people to the audience. What I think we need to do is everything. All of the avenues that you just mentioned, we need to explore them all. There is no time left to try to just do one thing anymore. There is no time to try one method after another. We need to try all methods of reaching people at once and that encompasses every form of journalism and every form of human conversation really. Whether that is through creative industries in the media, like you mentioned the film *Don't Look Up*, I think that was a valuable contribution, whether that is in the more serious parts of journalism where people go read long essays and so on, whether that is on television, whether it is on social media where an awful lot of people now get their information from and some of it, I am afraid, is misinformation. We really need to be pushing this out across all forms of conversation, all forms of media, and not just environment journalists either.

Those of us who are environment journalists, we need to be educating our colleagues. For instance, when stories about health are in the media, we talk about some of the issues around the environment and health, write stories about the weather in the media. But also stories about national security, for instance, where climate change has a very big impact, food stories, the price of goods, the price of living, stories about people's lifestyles, stories about wealth and companies and money and businesses. We need to have an environmental component in all of these stories really. For instance, in the United Kingdom, I read stories about the rising cost of living, that do not mention the fact that food prices are affected by climate change and are being affected by climate change. That seems to be extraordinary. We need to make sure that climate change, other biodiversity crisis and other environmental problems are being reflected across the board, in all of our stories, not just environment stories, and not just in one media. I think this has got to be an all-out effort.

Thank you.

***Ms Bahar Dutt, Environmental Journalist and Conservation Biologist***

Vikram, firstly thank you so much for setting it up so well. These are the dilemmas we all face, whether as environment or I should say non-environment journalists, and as Fiona said, every story is important and I think, in every story, there is the question of how do you get it out to people, how do you tell your story better. I believe a good story has the power to change institutions, it has the power to make governments fall, and not that every story has to be that, but a bad story lulls you into a state of inertia. I see more and more of that happening and I would like to see environment journalism, which is hard hitting, which is impactful, which actually makes a difference to the crisis out there.

That said I feel journalism itself is in a state of crisis. While we have the access to social media, where you are your own editor, you can put out your stories there, you don't have to go through the filter of an editor, you don't have to wait for him or her to clear the story, but there are disadvantages to that as well. As Vikram pointed out that it ends up seeming like we are in these echo chambers. So I have divided these few minutes of what I am saying today into what is wrong and what can be done. So, I just wanted to share two slides, because I think they capture really what is happening to environment journalism very well and perhaps the dilemmas which each one of us faces while reporting. So if I can just request you to share the slides now. This is the story which was coming out of Glasgow which was the last big climate conference that was held. I happened to be there, Jayashree was there as well. Fiona, I do not know if you were there but I did see some of your stories as well. So, I think most people were familiar with what was happening on the ground. I wanted to share a slice of the headlines that were coming out of Glasgow, which was being touted to be the last chance to save planet earth, we say that in every conference incidentally, but look at the contrast in the two headlines. This was the BBC saying, did India betray the vulnerable nations, and here in India, our newspapers were carrying a headline saying, a major win for India and climate diplomacy as nations strike coal compromise.

Your news depends on which geographical region you were in and for me, this has been the dilemma. Do I report as an Indian journalist or do I just report for planet earth and the crisis facing us all today? And for me, the way out has been to focus on climate justice and I do believe that while the BBC carried this very provocative headline, that India betrayed vulnerable nations, there is the politics of the developed versus the developing world and willy-nilly, as environment journalists, we too fall into that trap and it has happened to me as well while tracking the story. What I am doing here is being absolutely honest, that how do we get out of this trap? How do we get out of the politics of developed versus developing, to really report on the issues that affect all of us and the planet?

The second slide I would like to just show here is how the media covers climate change. Now I've had the opportunity to look at this, first as a reporter, who's going out there to report and the second is in my avatar right now, where I teach communicating climate change to a bunch of university students. If you track, when does climate change reporting tend to spike, and this shows very clearly, typically around events. So the event could be a UN summit or it could be a cyclone which is hitting the coast of India. In this case, this is Maxwell Boykoff and his team, they basically document when the media reports on climate change, so they'll use certain keywords and they'll put that into their research and their data and they come out with these graphs. Typically, what you can see from here is the spike happened right before Copenhagen, where all the world leaders arrived, we had Obama coming, we had our own prime minister going and there was a lot of expectation that you know that that there will be a deal, and then there was 2015 in Paris. So I just wanted to share these two slides to just kind of set the context that these are sort of the dynamics one has to navigate, while reporting on climate change or perhaps the environment. I have a number of solutions but I will keep that for the second half of the conversation because I know there are other speakers as well.

**Dr Rajiv Chhibber, Vice President – External Affairs, Sahajanand Medical Technologies Ltd.**

Yeah thanks Vikram. In fact, both Bahar and Fiona touched on very important topics. It is not the case around beating the bush, it is the case around talking about the very relevant channels through all systematic methodologies that you have. So today, if I recall when green-a-thon was happening or when TERI did the Lighting a Billion Lives campaign or when there were other campaigns which were going on, the scenario was very different 10 to 12 years or 15 years back. Today if you look at it, there is a metamorphosis change that has happened. You have not got the old tools which were there. Today social media does not have to really filter through a lot of levels; it has to go very naturally and people need to be aligned to it.

Now if you look at the topic, which very pertinently talks about how we need to have a shaping of the public interest and how can that also make the policy makers talk about it. Today there are elections going on in India, are we actually seeing that anyone talking about maybe healthcare? We have got this entire COVID-19 crisis, which is going on followed by the two variants, or in the last three odd years, the floods which happened in Chennai or the Kerala floods or we've got devastations in Uttarakhand and mountains just falling like a pack of cards: we have not even demanded these in Uttarakhand. We have not even demanded these in states like UP, where we suddenly see these floods. So the entire summary needs to simmer down to the fact, that it needs to have a very coherent target audience and as Fiona said, let us use all channels, let us use all mediums but also try to simplify it to the fact that there is a coherent connect.

What is missing these days is we just talk about it and I am talking from a corporate communications perspective altogether, because most of you are from the media itself, and when we try to link it, we try to link it from an all pervasive setup. I would want to speak to a business journalist, I would want to speak to an environmental journalist, and I would want to speak to someone who's also covering health. You can actually see the impacts in all these sectors, but then again we understand that there is a limited space in newspapers, there's a limited space with the TV channels, there is a limited space also now with the social media itself, who would be talking about it and who would be listening about it. So we need to exactly split it in such a way that every medium is talking about the perils and imperils on a simultaneous basis, and that will majorly have to happen when it is going to have a political impact. It has been 15 years that we've been talking about it, it has been 20 years that the IPCC first report came out and people talked about the vulnerable being more hit by the climate crisis. We see it today again and again. There are promises again, there are coverages but nothing really is moving on.

So I feel messages right now that need to be very cohesively set up are: is there an infrastructure availability, which can really talk about it? Media can be a part of the active mainstream development to really imbibe such messages within the masses itself. There is a huge furor on a community - we talk about it, but we then don't really talk about the other impacts that are looking at mankind. So I think cohesively, from a communications point of view, I would like to put it on to each and every desk for them to report. Health is an example. I mean in environmental health, people would really not even understand the perils of environmental health. Thanks to Jayshree, and thanks to others, just couple of days back, we broke a news on how IPCC reported mental health as one of the imperils. People would not have even looked at it and look at the hindsight of it. A couple of weeks back, we had union budget where we talked about mental health. Today we have an IPCC report which talks about the environmental health impacts and mentioning mental health. Did we even have one parliamentarian tweeting about this particular fact, I did not see it. So that is the kind of level of information that we really need to now jump on to.

**Mr Himanshu Shekhar Mishra, Senior Editor, NDTV**

You know one point that you made that, NDTV did this, NDTV did that and it did lots of campaign, but were all other channels also doing that? See, the idea is that in India's democracy, there are four-five very important stakeholders, who have to work in a very concerted way to make an impact. Now, among media platforms, we all know there are hundreds of news channels, now how much coverage is being given to issues related with environment and climate change that NDTV has done. That is a culture we have tried to develop and it has had an impact. Remember the Save Tiger campaign led to a considerable impact and policy action on the ground and now that, as a discourse, does not exist.

As a journalist, who has covered politics for more than two decades, I have always been thinking that actually in Indian democracy, the most important stakeholder is the government, the political parties would come next to it, and then the common people on the ground, and of course media is there. When I was covering these assembly elections, I think Rajiv sir had made this point, I was amazed that in many assembly segments that I went in western Uttar Pradesh (UP), issues related with climate change environment are not part of the mainstream discourse. This is an issue which even voters are not talking about. Now, remember in Indian democracy an issue attracts a political party when they

think that there is a mass space which is receptive to it. For example in western UP is told that this is perhaps one of those elections where farmers have emerged as a factor in elections. Now in these elections, or any election that we have covered, we rarely debate or brainstorm that this is one environmental issue which needs to be addressed, which interests the voters or the political parties itself. In parliament, for example, in last two years, how many debates have happened on climate change for example, or on the disasters? I mean in terms of frequency I can tell you, I am covering parliament since 2001, and the frequency, of course, has increased. I remember, I was surprised that last session, the first debate, in fact, was on the flood incidence in Tamil Nadu, in Chennai and in Kerala. But largely what are the state assemblies doing? Do we even know what state assemblies are doing to deliberate on the challenges that exist on the ground in terms of the impact of climate change? Now remember we are living in a time of pandemic, there's still a shadow of pandemic on top of us and India has had to fight at least more than 10 cyclones, very high intensity cycles in 2020 and 2021. Now I was stunned when the NDRF DG in an interview told me that he had to issue instructions to his men when Amphan, super cyclone Amphan, the first in last two decades, hit West Bengal and Orissa in May 2020, this is just one month after the lockdown had been imposed in India, there was one crisis that India was fighting which is the COVID-19 pandemic and then another disaster started moving towards India, and instructions had to be issued that COVID protocol has to be followed on the ground, because the cyclone shelter could only house 50% of their strength for which they were created. So, we saw more than 2 million people affected, USD 14 billion in losses, at a time when the ability of the Indian state actually to dole out relief was very limited. So, remember, we were already fighting climate change and then the COVID-19 pandemic has actually aggravated the crisis at several levels, in terms of hunger. We do know that hundreds and millions of people in this world have become hungrier. In India, 230 million Indians fell below the minimum wage ceiling as per the Azim Premji University report which was deliberated and brainstormed in parliament as well.

So, we saw that there are several challenges: the humanitarian crisis is growing, and we are still not debating many of these issues that are happening on the ground. Now one point that Rajiv (Chhibber) made and I think you will appreciate it perhaps much better as being part of the media fraternity, is that media focuses more on incidents. If a disaster or an incident happens or when there are reports that the tigers are disappearing, the numbers are falling, then everyone starts doing the tiger story; when cyclone comes, we all jump on that and in terms of media coverage, they have done fantastic work in terms of covering disaster incidents. When Chennai goes underwater, when Kashmir goes underwater, when Kerala goes underwater, and there's a landslide in Kerala, very extensive coverage is happening. Now that is one very positive change in media's outlook in the last four to five years. The frequency, the scale, intensity of media coverage has increased. Now but there's one missing line. I think which Rajiv sir has also mentioned about the fact that when the disaster is over, how much coverage we do on what has happened, what is the damage it has done. It often happens when the tsunami waters go back, then we know that what the extent of the damage is. But in the post-disaster incidents whether it is a climate change impact, or a COVID-19 pandemic impact, the focus is not relatively that much on the post-disaster phase or as it was during the disaster. For example, in Amphan, more than two million of these poor people living along coastal areas had to be evacuated. Now these are poor people, many of them were daily wage laborers. Now they were living in relief camps after the super cyclone phase was over, how many stories did the national media do in terms of reporting on what are these two million people who were evacuated from their homes - have they come back? Because there was one report, I saw in 2021, more than 10 million Indians were affected from disaster incidents, and three lakh houses were destroyed. How many houses have been reconstructed? What is the state of rehabilitation? Are they getting compensation?

Remember this debate in the Supreme Court about compensating those who died during COVID-19. It was a very acrimonious debate with similar work in progress and when I covered Kashmir floods, I had prepared a research paper calling for a legal right to compensation to disaster victims, on the line of right to education, right to food security. So, there should also be a right to compensation especially to poor people. We do not have data on victims, as to how many people who suffer from disasters every year in India get compensation. Remember when a flood comes, it destroys the poor people's home the most, they get washed away first. It is not the concrete buildings. There was a home ministry report and I am still researching on this that how disasters are actually perpetuating poverty in the world. In the sense that in my village in Bihar, I was told I had met large number of people. Every year, the rivers flowing from Nepal flood the bordering districts, including my district in Bihar, and every year before the monsoon starts picking up, villagers will start packing their bags and to try and move away to the safer places and whatever meagre income they have, they make these kucha homes in my village and every year the monsoon floods come, they wash away their homes. When they come back, they again have to rebuild those homes because many of them don't have even land to make their own homes. So, there is a vicious cycle the disasters are actually are putting in place.

I propose that India needs new politics. India needs a new political culture which is far more sensitive to the issues that we are discussing now. The political parties the governments, the state governments, parliament of India, the state assemblies, they all have to work in a very concerted way to actually create effective policy action on the ground.

NDTV has always shown the way and we also do mobile journalism, and we have always tried to innovate in terms of issues, in terms of processes of news gathering, but i think it's high time that media institutions have to collectively work together, government has to be far more sensitive and of course political parties, political culture has to change and people's voices need to be heard.

***Ms Jayashree Nandi, Environment Journalist, The Hindustan Times***

I have actually made a few points and I will touch on some of the points that Bahar also referred to. So the climate crisis story has three dimensions: one is that climate impacts are very severe now and they are touching our lives almost regularly through the monsoon, even other times of the year; the other aspect of the climate crisis story is the global negotiations, the geopolitics side of the climate crisis, and the third dimension is what is being done at home to make India resilient to climate crisis to make the poor people in India resilient to climate crisis. Now on the first issue on how the impacts of climate change are becoming more and more severe. There is no dearth of scientific evidence that we are on the edge of collapse. If you look at the IPCC reports, there are many high confidence findings. What does high confidence findings mean? It means that the scientific community is very confident that we are going to see these impacts in the next few years and this would mean more severe events extreme weather events, very severe monsoon, extreme flooding all of that. The more recent working group two report of the IPCC report, which is expected on the 28th of February, that is actually going to talk about tipping points which is extremely worrying because it is actually talking about how various ecosystems including the amazon, the monsoons all of these are approaching tipping points and if they do tip over in a 1.5-degree scenario then it is catastrophe for many, many communities across the globe including India. So, this is the science side of it. Climate change has come home and it is no more a story that needs to be spelt out to people because people are feeling it. It is just that we are not connecting those dots.

The second issue is of equity and climate justice which Bahar referred to. My personal experience has been that the reporting on climate crisis is very skewed. If you look at the developing countries, they talk about climate justice and historical responsibility more often than the western media does. So i remember just top of my head, some headlines. For example, how India watered down the Glasgow Pact by introducing phase-down text and all of that, but then later we found out that the 'phase-down' text was actually from the US-China agreement, which had happened earlier and the parties were aware of that and that India would read out this this part of the text. So, geopolitics is a reality and this is a personal opinion, I think that the western media and the Indian media, along with the media from the developing countries should both refer to equity and justice as much as they can because we cannot wish away historical responsibility. If you look at the graphs, they are very clear that emissions are rising. China's emissions are also rising but US, EU, the western nations have been polluting for very long, which is why we have ended up in this scenario. So while we want to wish away it is not something that we should wish away because it would be a great injustice to poor people, if you do not mention these issues.

The third aspect is doing a reality check on what is happening at home in India. Are we doing a reality check of whether we are making these communities resilient or not? They may not understand that this is a climate crisis impact but I think that story of joining the dots is what we can do and I am hoping that i can do that in the coming days. I just would like to end my points with this story is also about how climate crisis impacts agriculture, the forest dwellers, the fisheries, our coastal communities. So, in every story if we can go back to who the protagonists are, that would also be great. So these are just some of my thoughts.

**Panel Discussion**

***Mr Vikram Chandra***

Thank you, thank you so much for that Jayashree. You have written a book, for example, after the Uttarakhand floods on how you can use that as a metaphor for some of the changes that can then be brought forward after a disaster; maybe that's the sort of communication that we actually need to be able to make a difference. In the next 20-25 minutes that we have, we can discuss what our job is as storytellers, as communicators, as the media. Now obviously the governments will do what governments have to do, they will debate, they will negotiate and discuss, and say equity, and that it's not our fault and it is your fault and the differentiated responsibility and all the stuff that the government does. Even the fact that all of us are speaking on this panel and perhaps the people who are watching a sustainability summit also tends to be people who therefore feel strongly about the subject, it is not everyone else out there. So, part of our job and our responsibility is to take that message to make sure enough people are hearing the message so that they can then start putting pressure on the politicians to do what needs to be done. That is how the change that Himanshu was talking about, would actually happen if enough people think it is a big enough issue that, suddenly everyone realizes that we better do something about it.

Again coming back to *Don't Look Up*, it is one thing, when you were talking about a comet that was somewhere out there and people were not paying attention when you could actually see the comet in the night sky, it becomes a little more difficult to just brush it under the carpet and pretend that it does not exist. So what many of the speakers did speak about: we're now starting to see the impact on the ground, look at the number of disasters that we are seeing almost every year and in virtually every single country. It is there in India, we are seeing these floods and the cyclones. It is there every year in the United States, where you are having major storms one after the other. Obviously, the most vulnerable countries have been confronting it all along but now everyone is seeing it, everyone has seen that there seems to be something strange that is happening and the media does pick that up, and the media cannot help but talk about it. If there is a cyclone or there is flooding or if there is a major storm somewhere. How can that momentary attention that comes during a climate disaster be used to try and push through lasting change?

### **Ms Fiona Harvey**

I think the most important thing there is to start from the science, because I started covering this subject 17 years ago and at that point it was not possible scientifically to tie particular weather events to climate change we didn't have sufficient knowledge, the science was just not sufficiently advanced at that point to be able to say here's a storm here's a flood it's because of climate change. This science which we call attribution is now much more advanced and it is now possible to say that the extreme weather that we're seeing in many cases around the world is linked to climate change, the frequency is increasing owing to climate change, and the intensity or the extremity of some of these events is increasing because of climate change.

What Jayashree mentioned earlier, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) produced a report last year and a follow-up report part two of that report this year, and there'll be another report later in the year synthesizing all of this, which will show very clearly that we can attribute these impacts to climate change? So this is a really important point to come from anyone who's covering an extreme weather event, whether that is a cyclone or floods or droughts, should be drawing that connection very clearly because we can, with the science, draw that connection very clearly and say very definitely, these are happening because of climate change. Climate change is making this extreme weather worse and will continue to make it worse in the future, if we don't act with urgency. So the very first thing we need to do in any of this reporting is to draw that connection and I am afraid that sometimes that still is not happening which is a surprise. But if we can do that, then people do pay attention to disaster stories, and if people are then being shown that the connection is a matter of scientific evidence and scientific proof, then I think that will start to make a change in people's minds.

### **Mr Vikram Chandra**

Alright, let me turn to somebody who's actually tried their hand at that. Jayashree, when you wrote *Saving Raini*, it's aimed at children four to six years old, using the Uttarakhand floods to tell the story what can be done. The fact that you were using a disaster which affected so many people, do you think it is easier to spread that message then and to put out the lessons that you would otherwise have struggled to have communicate?

### **Ms Jayashree Nandi**

Yes, I actually ended up writing this very tiny book because I wanted to introduce my daughter to climate change because she asked me why I went to Uttarakhand and what was happening there, when the disaster happened. So I was actually trying to see the protagonist in the story as a five-year-old girl from Uttarakhand who was affected by the flood and I realized that when you connect it with people, the communication becomes much easier, because they are the protagonists of the story, they are experiencing it themselves. Having said that, I think there are two sides of the stories: one is that climate crisis is clearly having an effect on people's lives, the other side is that our infrastructure. Because of various reasons, be it corruption or local governance issues, (our infrastructure) is not up to the mark to deal with disasters. So if you look at for example, there are various projects like the Chardham project which is now going on in Uttarakhand, and it could make many stretches more and more vulnerable, when there is a disaster related to climate crisis. So like this climate scientist Friederike Otto recently tweeted that it is easy to blame climate change on many things, but we also have to understand that our local failures also make us very vulnerable. For example, this village, Raini is located very close to the two hydroelectric plants which were washed away. So if those hydropower projects were not close to this heritage village, where the Chipko Movement started, maybe the village would have survived. Now they are considering relocating the village, which is quite a shame considering that Chipko Movement started there. So I think both things need to go hand in hand, and when we report, we also need to report on whether there are issues with infrastructure, what is the infrastructure like in these areas.

### **Mr Vikram Chandra**

All right, Himanshu, you were talking about the need to have a change in the mindset of governments in state actors and politicians and political parties, national governments, the media. Do you think that it is going to change almost by

itself, because as we all fear if there are going to be more climate-related events taking place, it becomes more and more difficult to ignore these things.

**Mr Himanshu Shekhar Mishra**

That is right. It is a complex question to answer. Actually this is a work in progress. Remember we have to see that five years back, the issues that we are deliberating now, there was far less focus on these issues. What is also important to keep in mind is that, now we are gradually move towards the post-COVID world which I hope and pray that it is emerging finally, the challenge has become many-fold. Remember we will now be moving into a world where hundreds and millions of people have become poorer, hundreds and millions of people have become hungrier and the entire global effort to actually combat poverty and hunger has considerably weakened in this phase. Media has to re-prioritize its focus.

Remember, during the COVID period, the revenue generation was severely affected not only in India, but the world at large, and there has been an unprecedented economic contraction that has happened. We saw a significant fall in the GST collection. So the ability of the state to dole out relief and rehabilitation measures to fight the impact of climate change, to fight the growing poverty and hunger has considerably weakened during the last two years. So what we need to do is once we move out of the shadow of COVID-19 pandemic, the media, the government institutions, the political parties, and the government at large has to create a new national discourse towards addressing these big challenges that now lie before us, because the challenge on the ground continues to rise. If you remember in June, an unprecedented order by Department Of Expenditure was released, which said that we are freezing the implementation of all new schemes announced in 2020. Remember the budget 2020 announcements were frozen by the government because they do not have money to do that. When I was researching, I found that the former Minister of State, Mahesh Sharma, was repeatedly asked the question in Parliament, as to how much money does India need actually to fight the impact of climate change.

Now for first couple of years, there was no response. Finally, two years back, one reply came which said that our assessment is that India needs USD 2.5 trillion to actually help attain the targets that we have set for ourselves. Now USD 2.5 trillion is the fund that India needs, this is the government data that former Minister of State had tabled in parliament. This is a huge sum for a country like India and from where the fund is going to come, we need to brainstorm on all these issues. Remember when India needs more money, India needs a new politics and a new political culture. We have to sensitize the political parties. Media has to re-prioritize its focus and most importantly common people have to be mobilized, to create that national discourse and because we have to act at several levels.

**Mr Vikram Chandra**

I am going to start moving towards possible solutions. So Bahar, we all know what we would like to happen. We would like the media and governments and politicians and everyone else to be worrying about how you are changing and how are you looking after the global commons, the global good, and how can you have meaningful community interventions and how can you have adaptation, that's what we'd like. Am I being cynical if I say that it is not likely to happen by itself, because while the disasters and others will draw headlines while they are happening, as soon as that is over, you go back to getting your TRPs and your algorithmic engagement from other things, which has nothing to do with this, so you have got to find another solution.

**Ms Bahar Dutt**

Well, we put too much of an onus on journalists to change the world. I think we have to be realistic, we like to think that but it doesn't always happen. But on a more serious note, within the realms of journalism, what needs to be done and I have three suggestions, one is please start asking the difficult questions and I feel we do not do enough of that. We are still doing soft namby-pamby journalism. We are not doing enough of that and what do I mean by that? We do not question the kind of growth that we are going for, and before I get branded as a left activist, but here's the thing: 50 percent of India's infrastructure is yet to be built. Now that is an opportunity to do things right. It is also going to be disastrous in many ways for our mountains, our rivers and our natural resources. It is going to be absolutely disastrous and we are already seeing it. We are going to have forests and habitats being diverted for big projects. Can we do this the right way? I want to end on a note of optimism which is that we are one of the few countries in the world which has fantastic institutions, whether it is research-based or it is our judiciary. We are the only ones which have a national green tribunal, which is dedicated to listening to green issues and giving good decisions on it. I hope they give more and more good decisions on it.

Here is my problem, with the green-a-thons, which is that, it is very good to get actors and do the song and the dance, it is great, we need that but how do we make behaviour change accessible? If behavioural changes are what we are looking at so that our forests are protected, our biodiversity is protected, how do we make that behaviour change

accessible? That is the kind of information which was not provided. Behavioural change does not mean the individual using a cloth bag instead of a plastic bag? How do we design our cities better, how do we make waste management imperative? How do we make sure that composting is made mandatory for every household in the city? So, I feel that if we can do all these things, if we can make systemic change possible, then we will make some headway.

Lastly, there is a survey I do when I teach my students. So I make them go through something called the solutions week where I give them solutions to climate change, here is what can be done, here is what the mayor of Bogota did to tackle air pollution, here is how cities are redesigning to make it more accessible for cyclists and to get individual cars off the street, and even after weeks of pounding them with positive information, I polled them and I asked them, now tell me, "Do you think the world is now ready for climate action? Do you think we will be able to tackle it in our lifetime?" 80 percent of them said no. So, this is after you are giving people the option. So, there is a climate fatigue which is setting in and that is what we need to counter with our stories.

### ***Mr Vikram Chandra***

So, let me just take that a little bit. Part of what you are saying and I agree with you that the real question is around solutions. Part of the problem is when talking about the climate or about the environment, there is a lot of hand-wringing that, "Oh it is a problem and this is terrible and it is awful that is happening." This is great but people switch off saying it is a terrible problem and something horrible is about to happen, and there is nothing much I can do about it, I will switch off. The minute you convert that into active steps that can be taken, and active steps are not necessarily, just switch off your tap and do not bathe for two weeks, because that is not really the solution to a water problem, there are realistic solutions which can be put out in an accessible manner, and make sure enough people are seeing that. Perhaps, that is the way you are most likely to get a solution.

So, Dr. Chhibber, let me just throw it at you now, from the point of view of constructing, whether it is corporates who are communicating their own communications. The good news today is that you no longer need to be going through the mass media route or convincing mass media today as to why aren't you, as a major television channel or a major newspaper or a major media behemoth, you need to do something; that is not necessary. If you are constructing the solutions, you do it cleverly enough, it can be disseminated to people and policy makers through multiple means, because you do have the multiple means, that same social media and other things that we keep trashing, and those can be used as a force multiplier, once the message is clearly understood and that is how you can get information to people. Would you agree with that? That corporates also need to say that if I have to put my money behind something, let us try and find intelligent, new, 21st century methods of communicating?

### ***Dr Rajiv Chhibber***

This is something which is very imperative to do in this day and there are corporates who are looking at not only the regular solutions to it, but more innovative solutions to it, in terms of also going down to the last mile. If you look at the ideation, just see how the entire narration around COVID-19 really went and because that is something which is being talked about persistently, and media has been covering it consistently, just see the manner how the scrutiny of clinical trials happened, scrutiny of people trying to understand the entire ambit around how vaccines are going to be developed. One day there is a corporate who is trying to come up with a solution through a wonder drug and the media calls it, "Oh wow, they've got a wonder drug," and the day there is a mishap or there is something like an adverse effect of a drug, the same would be termed back to you as something like it is a killer drug. So, there are numerous instances how corporates are actually looking at it.

Why only see the environment? Look at the entire environmental health paradigm itself. Over the last two years the consistent reporting around COVID-19, even when it was at a peak or when it is dilly-dallying at the moment, there is still a consistent reporting on each and every channel, each and every publication, and each and every website. We have never had an instance in a country or globally when people were looking avidly to their TV sets or their mobile phones and trying to hear the CDC chief, the NHS or in India here, the ICMR or AIIMS chiefs talking about how health would have an impact on it, people glued into it in a very diligent way. People went to social media and that is where we need to have a behavior change, to really look at it, look at how people showed their vaccine certificates on social media. It was something which took them by thrill and that is where we need to really take the entire debate and discourse on climate change also.

From a corporate angle and from a corporate communications angle, we do understand that there is enough information around it the information is also tabulated through various dialogues that are created, there are stakeholder roundtables, there are green tables which are now being set up which are talking about how green solutions can actually be coming up, one to ones are happening. So, it is not that somebody is lacking information, it is the consistency be talked about over and over again. So, I am really a believer that media needs to take a pivotal role

in disseminating information, following it up also diligently and also providing an analysis of many complex issues that are really impaired. So, it is not one solution that you have; we have to put all solutions in a bucket and have it thrown to everyone else.

**Mr Vikram Chandra**

Some of the major campaigns whether it is 'Save The Tiger' or the green-a-thons or Swachh Bharat, or many of them, where part of them were very effective is when it came down to the specific solutions that individuals can do, here is what you can do, here is what a state government can do if you want to save the tiger, this is what you as the Chief Minister of Uttarakhand can do or what you as the Chief Minister of Karnataka can do. When it comes down to those action points, that is sometimes the way in which that message is the most effective. Would you agree with that?

**Mr Himanshu Shekhar Mishra**

Remember, when there was a national debate and there was concern all around, that the number of tigers is gradually declining, we saw media houses across the spectrum highlighting these issues and that is the time when you did series of campaigns and I remember, even as a political journalist, I myself went to at least two sanctuaries and we shot at least three-four documentaries there, talking to people the role people living in jungles in sanctuaries and how gradually that created lots of policy action. I remember interviewing Jairam Ramesh during those days several times and every day he would be meeting with state environment ministers giving directives, issuing circulars, advisories. There was a national effort to save the tiger and that got reflected in media very appropriately. We need to have such targeted and focused media coverage on issues. We have to deconstruct how climate change is affecting our lives and let's say, you can focus on the coastal districts, for example. Now the NASA data shows that the sea levels are rising with global warming, the glaciers are melting; so how far those areas which are believed to have reported a rise, let us say, in surface temperature of the sea or even the rise in sea levels how are the islands disappearing. For instance, the impact the global impact on the ocean needs to have specific targeted responses from people because it is a long effort and we need to keep working hard for many years to create that discourse, create new policies and laws, to engage more and more people in every part of the world. But the beginning has to be made and the more targeted and focused the media's attention on an issue is, I think better desired result will come, and you can engage more people in that process.

**Mr Vikram Chandra**

All right final quick thought from you, Jayashree, how are we going to win the communication battle and hence save the planet?

**Ms Jayashree Nandi**

I am going to report on hard stories and I think a lot of things are going wrong in terms of policy within India. When you say ease of doing business is more important than the way clearances are issued, I think that should worry all of us and I think more sort of doing hard stories doing a reality check of how mining is affecting the forest in central India, and how infrastructure projects are affecting, say Himalayas. All these stories will be very important in ensuring that we are able to deal with some of the impacts of climate change right now.

**Ms Fiona Harvey**

What we need to do is reassure people that actually saving the planet is a good thing and worth doing because sometimes people are worried the economy will collapse if we try to save the planet. Some people are worried that if we do not continue to base our economy on fossil fuels, then it will be incredibly expensive to move to other forms of energy and so on. It will not be because we do have the technology. We can have a green future and it will be cheap. We have seen the cost of renewable energy come down massively over the past two decades, and to an extent that no one would have predicted. We have seen India embrace renewable energy to an extent that no one would have predicted and other countries all around the world doing so. We have seen how health can be improved by moving to cleaner forms of energy and by reducing air pollution, and so on. Health can be improved by eating a better diet, that is based on healthier food and that is kinder to the climate. So, we can actually have a cleaner, brighter, healthier, cheaper, more just, more equitable future, if we wanted without destroying the things that people enjoy in their lifestyles at the moment and without destroying people's aspirations to leave poverty. So, we can do all of these things but we need to do them incredibly quickly because we have been moving far too slowly up till now and I am afraid the climate cannot wait.

**Ms Bahar Dutt**

A good story is about avoiding doom and gloom which typically happens in climate change and lastly, a good story should have good science yes but it should also tell the individual story, the individual emotions so a balance of emotion with good practical science I think makes for good storytelling for the planet.

**Dr Rajiv Chhibber**

From a communications point of view, I would say that a goal is needed to create headlines, not to have an immediate news story but it should be all created in a typically sound way, with sound scientific evidence, that media serves as change agents.

**Summary by Moderator**

We need to find a way of breaking out of the echo chambers; there's no point only talking to environmentalists, make sure that the message goes out to the public, governments, to policy makers.

Make sure that there are solutions that are actually provided so people know what it is that they can actually do to make a difference, to saving the planet instead of just saying there's a problem and nothing can be done about it. Tell them what the specific solutions are.

Let us recognize that it is the 21st century, it is 2022 and therefore there are other methods that can be used to make those communications, which are not the same or linear methods of having to rely on mass media to communicate. There are other equally or more exciting ways of doing it. Right now we must use every possible chance that we have.