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Elementary

manual on freshwater
Journalism in the Mediterranean

Mediterranean
Area
Journalism
Area



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Culture and Sustainable Development
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ISBN: 960-87842-6-3

This publication should be cited as:

Alawneh Z., Tomassini B., Scoullas M., "Elementary manual on freshwater Journalism in the Mediterranean",
GWP-Med & MIO-ECSDE, Athens, 2003.

Athens 2003

The Global Water Partnership - Mediterranean (GWP-Med)

The Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean (GWP-Med) is a Regional Water Partnership of the Global Water Partnership (GWP). GWP-Med, in its present form, was created in 2002 and it is the successor partnership to the Mediterranean Technical Advisory Committee of GWP (MEDTAC).

GWP-Med is a platform bringing together competent organisations working regularly on water issues in the Mediterranean region. GWP-Med's goal is to promote and exchange knowledge on IWRM for the sustainable use of the region's water resources.

To achieve its goal, GWP-Med:

- *Promotes and sustains a strong partnership in the Mediterranean among competent organisations that have an impact on water management.*
- *Makes the principles of sustainable use and integrated management of water resources (IWRM) widely known, recognised and applied by countries and all other stakeholders in the Mediterranean, through appropriate mechanisms for sharing information and experience.*
- *Supports exemplary actions at local, national and regional level that demonstrate the value applicability and positive impact of the above principles.*
- *Seeks and facilitates the appropriate international funding and involvement of international institutions for activities promoting IWRM.*
- *Introduces, helps to implement and adapts to the specificities of the Mediterranean region, global initiatives launched or adopted by the GWP.*

The present members of the Partnership Council are representatives of the following regional networks:

Blue Plan (MAP/UNEP)

CEDARE - Centre for Environment and Development in the Arab Region and Europe

CIHEAM - International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies

EIC - Euro-Mediterranean Irrigators Community

IME - Mediterranean Institute for Water

MedCities - The Mediterranean Cities Network

MedWet - The Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative

MENBO/REMOC- Mediterranean Network of Basin Organisations

MIO-ECSDE - Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development

MWN - Mediterranean Water Network

Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE)

The Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE) is a Federation of Mediterranean Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) for Environment and Development. MIO-ECSDE has since 1991 been acting as a technical and political platform for the intervention of NGOs in the Mediterranean scene. In co-operation with Governments, Intergovernmental and International Organisations, as well as other socio-economic partners, MIO-ECSDE plays an active role in protecting the environment and promoting the sustainable development of the Mediterranean region.

The main objective of MIO-ECSDE is to protect the natural environment and the cultural heritage and its ultimate goal is to promote sustainable development in a peaceful Mediterranean.

Major tools and methods used by MIO-ECSDE in order to achieve its objectives are the following:

- *Promotion of understanding and collaboration among the people of the Mediterranean, especially through their NGOs, between NGOs and Governments, Parliaments, Local Authorities, International Organizations and socio-economic actors of the Mediterranean region at all levels.*
- *Assistance for the establishment, strengthening, co-operation and co-ordination of Mediterranean NGOs and facilitation of their efforts by ensuring the flow of appropriate information among relevant bodies.*
- *Promotion of education, research and study on Mediterranean issues, by stimulating collaboration between NGOs and scientific and/or academic institutions.*
- *Raising public awareness on crucial Mediterranean environmental and social issues, through campaigns, publications, exhibitions, presentations, etc.*

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Water is a vital natural resource. People are more and more interested in its availability and management and journalists realize that too. An informed public opinion could help enormously in its good management and could also guide and encourage politicians on the proper decisions and investments to speed up the process for reaching the Millennium Development Goals and the World Summit on Sustainable Development targets (to secure by 2015 safe, clean drinking water and basic sanitation for at least half of those billions of people who do not have access today).

The national and regional mass-media (press, TV, radio, magazines) as well as local newspapers, journals and publications produced by local authorities, NGOs, schools etc., and journalists - both professional and volunteer - have a key role to play in properly informing people and formulating the public opinion on water.

However, environmental reporting and specifically water reporting is probably one of the complicated tasks for media professionals, particularly the least experienced ones. Water issues are per se very broad and intricate, often intertwined with political, cultural, social and economic aspects. In some cases they are very technical and require considerable 'decoding' efforts and a great commitment and perseverance to be adequately understood and communicated to the public. Journalists also have to cope with an audience that is often barely aware, not particularly interested or sometimes even unsympathetic to the issues presented. This means that water news, in order to be accessible and to gain the interest of a wider public, need to be reported in ways which require a certain degree of expertise by the journalist.

This publication should therefore be considered as a tool that facilitates environmental and water reporters - mainly beginner and volunteer journalists and NGO Communication Officers - in their difficult task of producing and communicating reliable and relevant information to their audiences.

Its main aim is to provide useful guidance and tips on basic reporting techniques while covering water issues. Other journalists, including press officers in local authorities etc., and editors, may also benefit from the tips and instructions included, by considering a different point of view on how to make such news clearer and more relevant to the public. They may also find useful information about Media networks and support material presented in the Annex.

It is also assumed that the journalist who is genuinely interested in water will be willing to go one step further and participate in the "mission" of promoting education and sensitization of the public for adopting appropriate behavior, and encouraging it to increased participation in water planning, decision-making and effective water governance. This assumption is arbitrary but (judging from the interest expressed until now) highly probable for the majority of cases known in the Mediterranean.



Environment

1. Environment and water issues in the Mediterranean

Environmental issues, among which water ranks high in importance, first captured broad attention in the 1970s when the Club of Rome advanced the view that there are natural limits to economic growth. In the 1980s, the concept of sustainable development emerged as one of the key notions in the debate about the management of environmental resources. It assimilates the idea mentioned in the Report "Our Common Future" (Brundtland Report) by the United Nations World Commission of Environment and Development (WCED 1987) that the needs of the present generations should be met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The Brundtland Report identifies both formal and non-formal environmental education as tools for achieving sustainable development and journalism is one part of these tools.

The environment in the Mediterranean Region is degrading at an alarming rate, mainly because of the considerable over-exploitation and pollution of its natural resources. This trend is prompted by inadequate institutional schemes and mechanisms, legislation and policies that are poorly implemented, low level of public awareness and limited involvement of major stakeholders groups, among which media and journalists.

Water in the Mediterranean is a critical, limited, fragile and threatened resource, the basic component for human welfare and socio-economic development and essential for the maintenance of the rich biological diversity of the region. Natural renewable water resources are shared unequally among countries and populations: 72% in the North, 23% in the East and 5% in the South.



The main dilemma the majority of Mediterranean countries are facing is how to balance demand and supply of water in order to ensure self-sufficiency in meeting agricultural, industrial and domestic water needs without damaging natural aquatic ecosystems and depleting the already scarce resources.

In fact, Mediterranean water resources are already intensely used, especially in the South and East coast, and they are often badly managed. Water stress has become a priority issue not only for nations who experience severe shortage in terms of quantity and quality, but also for nations who still have reserves. Demand for freshwater is rising dramatically, because of population growth in some parts of the Mediterranean and increasing economic activities in others. Meanwhile, the rapid spread of urbanization has changed the patterns of consumption, while the need to increase the area of productive land has caused greater demand for irrigation. Yet in most Mediterranean countries precious groundwater resources are being wasted through inefficient irrigation schemes. Drainage schemes, river engineering and dam construction continue to alter river and floodplain systems resulting not only in water mismanagement but also in loss of species and



AND STILL WE
DON'T UNDERSTAND
WHY WE DON'T HAVE
ENOUGH GOOD WATER...

habitats. Overgrazing, deforestation, mining and other factors influence the quality and quantity of water in rivers, streams and lakes causing extensive degradation of these freshwater ecosystems while weather patterns are becoming more unforeseeable and extreme weather phenomena more recurrent, with drought in some areas matched by severe flooding in others.

Beyond even considering the effect on human health and ecosystems, the scarcity of water already creates tensions between some states within the region. The main reason is that a large part of the Mediterranean freshwater resources are shared among two or more countries and water scarcity leads to conflicts of rights regarding control, abstraction and management of these resources.

2. Environmental and Water Journalism

The true potential of journalism, as a powerful instrument of dissemination of information and non-formal education to promote sustainable development is yet to be tapped in an organized way. This is particularly valid for environmental journalism, responsible for spreading awareness and sensitization about environmental matters and promoting in this way a change in currently dominating perceptions and behaviours to more viable ones. Awareness efforts about the degradation of the environment and its consequences on human health and well-being have been principally carried out by environmental NGOs and civil society organisations/associations. In the case of water and water management, for example, NGOs have been useful partners to governments, scientists and other stakeholders in determining root causes of the problems and in engaging themselves towards their solution. Civil Society, Institutions and Community Based Organisations have an important role in increasing "Water literacy", in raising the awareness and mobilizing local communities towards a deeper involvement in the management of local water resources, for example, in establishing rainwater harvesting programs and other water supply schemes, in sanitation issues as well as in promoting environmental protection and improving water practices for farmers. But these efforts cannot be completely productive unless they are transmitted to a wide audience so that educational messages can be magnified and multiplied. Journalism plays a major role towards this end, having the power to shorten the distance, multiply the impact and save time and resources.

Water journalism is part of environmental journalism, which could be considered as a relatively new phenomenon closely linked with the overall integration of the environment agenda in politics, economics etc. Some years ago, very few journalists wrote about these issues in any depth. Concern about water and environmental issues in general was not a grassroots issue. Today, most news organizations recognize that water issues represent a major topic.



Covering water issues is a multi-dimension story. Water issues have political, economic, social and public health implications, which transcend borders and receive equal importance in nations that witness scarcity in resources and in nations that experience good economic growth and even wealth in water resources. Timely and accurate reporting is becoming more necessary than ever.

Media coverage is of critical importance in moving water issues from conditions to policy concerns. Without journalism coverage, it is unlikely that a water issue will either enter into the arena of public discourse or become part of a political process. It offers the opportunity to link water concerns to current economic, social and political realities in a way that enables the simultaneous flow of information both to decision makers and the public at large. The transparency of information made possible by journalism, enables enhanced participative decision-making by applying the pressure of public attention and expectations on the decision makers.

One aspect of environmental and water journalism is to inform people on a particular incident, providing information on how to behave, react effectively and help solving it.

As such, journalists should strive to report a plurality of views on these threats, but also to follow up such threats and keep the public informed about developments.

Articles or documentaries on water are in fact the main sources of information for many people about water. Here, therefore, is the challenging role of journalism which can contribute effectively to the overall effort to educate, strengthen attitudes, values and actions that are compatible with sustainable development and good water governance. The safest way to obtain this is by gradually educating people and creating a shared vision through writings (comments, articles, etc.) over a period of time and use journalism to maintain and strengthen this vision. This will encourage further and broader stakeholder participation in water planning and decision-making.

Journalism

3. Journalism Constraints

Water stories are often complex and controversial with implications in many sectors and at different scales, from international, regional and national through to those that are of a smaller-scale, local or even personal.

Money is an overriding consideration in environmental and water stories- funds to clean water, supply water, funds invested in water saving devices and in motivating the community to use them.



Secrecy is another aspect of reporting complexity. In many instances, overriding political interests work to ensure that the public is kept in the dark on a number of vital details regarding certain environmental and/or water issues.

Sometimes reporting about water issues may involve the risk of creating panic among the public, thing that should be carefully avoided by the reporter.

In addition, long-term impacts of specific water related events are often not fully foreseeable at the time of writing and therefore stories are based on uncertainty. For example, for many years, scientists may not know the source of a particular pollutant or how dangerous it is for human health. Experts often disagree about, for example, what can be done to manage water resources through balancing the equation between the availability, nature's needs and demand for water and what tools to use. Reports from well-known organizations in the field of water may contradict each others based on different priorities or different assumptions.

The scientific process that contributes data to water issues may also include uncertainties. The very nature of scientific evidence and knowledge includes elements that might be tentative and/or uncertain. For example, for many years, scientists all over the world argued about the dangers of low-level radiation exposure. The basic argument relates to whether there is a level low enough so that no harm will occur or whether exposure to any level of radiation- no matter how low- is harmful. Many distinguished scientists believe there is a line below which there is no harm; other equally distinguished scientists say that this is not the case. Evidence to support either side is hard to come by since, if there were damage, it would appear only after a long period of time. This type of uncertainty affects governments, which need to set radiation safety standards, as well as the public who are exposed to these doses.

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The amount and type of information that comes from government officials can also lead to uncertainty, particularly in an emergency situation. During the Bhopal accident in India, according to many journalists, the government gave out limited and contradicting information and only added to the confusion. Officials said: *"the water is safe, but boil it before you drink it; the vegetables are safe, but wash them before you cook them"* while claiming fish safe, they closed the fish and meat markets and banned the slaughter of animals. Officials also refused to answer questions about what tests had been conducted and when. With such critical questions of public health at stake, a reporter is called upon to find valid answers to this uncertainty too.

Finally, one should consider that dealing with technical information is a difficult issue both for the reporter and the layman. Many scientists are reluctant to talk to journalists because they fear they will misunderstand, misinterpret and ultimately misquote in a manner that will make them look bad in the eyes of their scientific

peers. The scientific community does not reward its members for informing the public with misleading information. The difficulty arising is that scientists and technical experts want to control what will appear in print and do not accept to give information unless they have the right to review. Therefore it is very important that the journalist makes sure that the information presented is indeed accurate, by reviewing the final version with the expert at least on the technical information.

All these considerations make clear how complicate water reporting can be. In the next chapter we propose some simple techniques and tips to overcome possible arising difficulties and to promote a more appropriate and effective reporting on water issues.

4. Tips for appropriate water reporting

Educate yourself

In order to help readers understanding all the complex details that might be related with water stories journalists are required to understand themselves in depth the issues they cover and not just the “surface” facts.



To write more informed texts, the journalist will have to spend more time researching water stories.

Science and technology might be essential to a journalist to write a story on water, but there are few well-trained journalists that can report properly, based on adequate information. In many cases water news reporting in the press is based directly or indirectly on publications of research papers in scientific journals. Reading, understanding and using research papers for this purpose, requires specific skills that must be acquired.

In the 1998 case of the Jordan water pollution crisis when the incident happened, it was found that journalists were not able to differentiate between the various types of water pollution (microbial, oval and parasite). They did not know how a water treatment plant functions and how microbes, ova and

parasites are removed and hence lacked sufficient knowledge or background to cover the story properly.

Lack of background knowledge also does not help a journalist to formulate proper questions, which define the quality of the answers. A water journalist should be familiar with the basics of water chemistry, biology, microbiology and human health. All the know-how built by continuous learning and researching will help addressing institutions with proper questions and not be satisfied with uninformed or misleading answers.

Much of the research also strengthens one's background knowledge on specific parties involved in a particular event, on government agencies that should be monitoring it and on what actions are being taken and what are the further measures needed. In this sense, research also helps identifying good sources for interviews in governmental and non-governmental bodies, universities and research centers specialized in water issues. Official reports from these sources should all be considered as valuable.

While dealing with a national water issue, a journalist interested to know more about a particular incident could further investigate whether other countries ever had such incidents, how they handled it, what they did about it.

Writing about water issues should be a pleasant task through which the journalist constantly learns.

In the long run editors and readers will see the quality of the inputs collected and the efforts invested reflected in the journalist's work.

Such recognition could lead to satisfaction but also to upward professional mobility (eg. promotion to a better position even within another publication, etc).

Educate your readers

In addition to educating themselves, journalists need to educate their readers. They need to help them see how one small action could have a much greater effect. For example readers need to know that water pollution is the result of a collective "action" or "inaction" and small tiny things can add up to cause serious pollution phenomena. People need to be informed so that they can take



EDUCATE YOUR READERS

the right decisions about proper actions. Even if they do act following instructions, they need to understand the effect on themselves and other people so that they can make an informed choice even in every day issues. In the case of the Jordan water crisis, people were not instructed properly on how to make a choice. If journalists had informed them that the pollution was microbial, then their choice could have been e.g. either to boil water to kill the germs or buy bottled water for drinking purposes.

There are so many opportunities to educate readers. For example, a story covering a flood can represent a good occasion to provide other information such as the environmental factors related to the flood e.g. deforestation, or the impacts it has on desertification, health, excess erosion, etc. or even more indirect effects e.g. on fisheries.

Journalists should try to keep water issues in their readers' mind even when such issues are not in the headlines. Water issues are of long term; they do not disappear overnight; yet people tend to forget about them quickly when there is no news coverage. A chemical spill in a water body, for example, can produce damage to the ecosystem that goes unreported because the damage takes place over a long time and most editors don't see it as a news item. Yet a follow-up story on impacts or in search of impacts, etc., done some time after the incident will help to keep the people alert on the issue. People should understand that they have to pay attention to water issues since the latter do not go away - they will affect not only themselves, but also their children and the generations to come.

Build

Build good information sources

Considering the complexity of water issues journalists should keep a list of reliable experts in the various fields related to water, with their telephones, positions etc., and communicate frequently with them avoiding though to overload them with questions and work. A well covered story is the one that has adequately included simple explanations for the complicated parts and has also utilized many informed sources. Journalists can borrow the directory of their colleagues covering the water issues area. Following up their colleagues' stories and reports they will also discover sources and this will trigger them to come up with ideas for new stories. Academic institutions are good places for getting



the names and addresses of reliable researchers. Government officials, legislators, non-governmental and independent organizations can also be sources of information or direct journalists to other sources. One of the common questions a journalist should ask when interviewing a researcher is *"Can you recommend others with whom I should speak?"* As a journalist's reputation and credibility is very important, he/she needs to evaluate the sources for being cooperative, trustworthy and respected by his/her colleagues.

Journalists should also be selective and choose the expert who knows how best to explain technical information in a clear and simple language.

Maintain good information sources

Once good sources are identified, one should sustain an ongoing relationship, as they are extremely valuable. Sources should not only be called upon when there is a need, but rather the journalist should get in the habit of continuously exchanging information on issues of interest.

Journalists must treat their sources justly. They should be open about the nature of the story they are writing. When quoting, exactly the same wording should be used. Sources need to be treated with great respect. This does not mean that journalists should not ask hard questions openly and in a frank way. They should have a ground rule with their sources such as either the agreement of quoting the source name, position etc., or without reference to the source. Journalists must at the same time never report stories with the goal to "please" or "expose" their sources. Journalists' commitment and responsibility are principally toward their readers.

Prepare in advance

Preparation helps journalists to develop a certain degree of expertise in water issues and is one of the keys to good journalism. As a beginner journalist one should not be afraid to ask clarifications on unclear issues. The most important trait of a journalist is to have the ability to ask effective questions. Journalists can attend workshops and seminars, take an introductory course in ecology or water issues, read books and reports to strengthen their background information. The best thing for the journalist who has no time, money or access to a university is to discuss issues as he/she understands them clearly and concisely with a reliable source. Self-education will have a rewarding impact, as this will quickly be reflected on the quality of the story, which is more likely to be accurate and will better contribute to public awareness. The key for this success is *"Do your homework!"*.

Background research is particularly important when journalists are covering a breaking story. They need to find out if the person they are interviewing has written anything about the issue or given any speeches. If so, they should get hold of them as this will help asking better and more precise questions. If the person is an important official, the newspaper library might contain a file on him or her. If

journalists are unaware of the source's background, they will not be able to detect inconsistencies or half the truth in what the official has to say. To prepare themselves on an issue, they need to gather information from many different perspectives.

Finally, if the journalist is planning to report on a water issue that relates to a specific site, then visiting the site will help to build a more complete picture and might assist in formulating appropriate questions to information sources. Furthermore, this will make the journalist more alert to conflicting and misleading comments during interviews.

Guidelines for successful interviews

A journalist should consider the following points when interviewing:

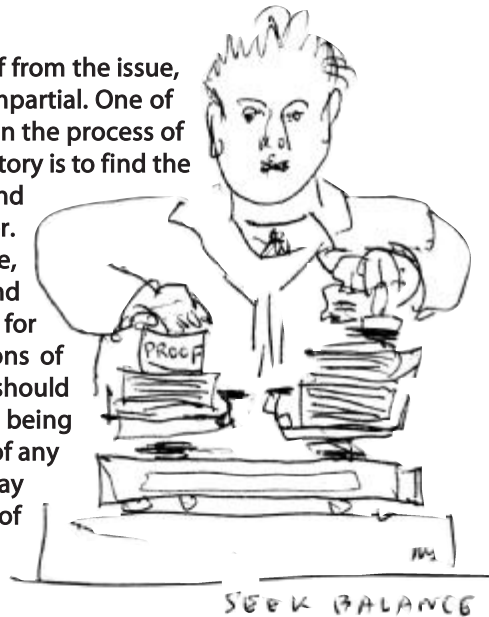
- Have a clear plan about how the interview is to proceed.
- Summarize to the interviewee the problem that is going to be discussed and explain why it is of interest.
- Choose and phrase questions with care and present them in an organized manner.
- Ask always just one question at a time, not one with two or more parts, and keep it short.
- Make sure questions are very clear.
- Decide how many general and specific questions should be asked.
- Avoid constructing "leading questions" that steer the interviewee towards a predetermined answer.
- Ask always basic, fundamental questions about technical information. Even when background preparation on technical subjects has been done properly, journalists cannot know everything. If an expert says something they do not understand, they should stop him or her and get an explanation in simple terms.
- Not be afraid to ask tough questions that cause a person to think, reflect and search. As some questions could be embarrassing to the interviewee the discomfort could be minimized by attributing the question to other people who are interested in having information, easing the question gently and waiting to ask tough questions till the end of the interview when a proper atmosphere is established. Tough questions could be then followed by a few easy ones to end the interview and leave the interviewee in a better frame of mind.
- Keep on carefully going back over the technical, complicated or sensitive material.
- End an interview with a summarizing question that asks the interviewee whether anything important to the subject raised was missed.



Look for hidden interests and seek balance

Water journalism is effective when it maintains high standards of objectivity and balance and is not seen as being motivated by whatever visible or hidden interest. Journalists can be easily accused of being biased. In choosing water as a topic, journalists have already taken a stand when deciding who to interview and which perspectives to include. Also, a journalist should question who has funded a certain water project because the funding agency is the one in or against whose favour the report might be.

Though it is hard to alienate oneself from the issue, one needs to be fair, neutral and impartial. One of the basic challenges of a journalist in the process of seeking balance in writing his/her story is to find the facts on the one hand and verify and present them clearly on the other. Journalists should, therefore, depend on factual statements and evidence where usually facts speak for themselves and not on the opinions of the protagonists. Moreover, they should be very cautious to avoid being manipulated by interested parties of any type, in controversy. Only in this way a journalist can minimize the risk of losing credibility with readers and sources.



Think twice about statistics

Journalists have to pay special attention when reporting figures and citing references. Having a copy of the report is necessary to verify its accuracy. If you are reporting figures it is recommended to have comments on these numbers rather than having them as silent references. Journalists need to interpret figures to make out of them something with meaning.

In case a journalist wants to make a story from the results of a survey - a very popular practice nowadays - then he/she should always ask the following questions: "Why was it done? By whom? Who has an interest in the outcome?" Also a journalist should look at the number of people surveyed and what sort of sample was taken. This information should help journalists to differentiate a biased survey from a non-biased one, which means avoiding reporting on or writing a story about an inaccurate survey.

A survey conducted via the internet is often a biased one as the rule says that mostly middle and upper-class, urban populations have internet access and



therefore only they are the ones who were targeted. However, sometimes such surveys give interesting results. If you use it or report on it, it is necessary to present it for what it is, stating the source and, if necessary, commenting on it. It is well known that smaller samples lead to less accurate results. Wording of the survey questions also makes a difference in the end result of the survey since it determines the degree of comprehension. Journalists should consider this point when making a story on a water issue that includes reporting statistics.

Numbers can be used by journalists to demonstrate the seriousness of water problems, but they must be evaluated carefully before passing them to their readers in a “digestible” format.

Report science carefully

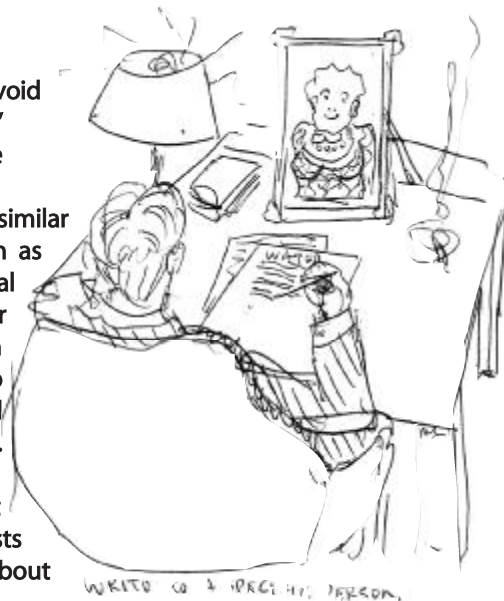
A story on water issues may reflect the richness in research within the field. The problem of reporting science is that the story should take into account the different approaches of journalists and scientists. A scientist reports on facts through the gradual accumulation of evidence, while journalists seek the truth combined with breakthrough dramatic news. Scientific work is usually not so dramatic to report, so water journalists spend much of their time transforming scientific findings on water into news. Scientists on the other hand often consider journalists to be preoccupied with conflicts while ignoring scientific accuracy. If seeking for scientific accuracy a journalist must address scientific institutions or universities.

Know what to say

Another important point that simplifies the reporting process is to know what to say. Water is a multi-faceted issue, which touches upon social, environmental, economic, political and health matters. Therefore, journalists need to decide on what major points they will focus in their story. Clear thinking is the way to clear writing. Keeping readers in mind while writing, planning out the story's major points and defining what to emphasize in each paragraph are key steps in producing successful stories.

Write to a specific person

A simple way for a journalist to avoid writing “over the heads of readers” is to pick out someone he/she knows well and has no background on the specific issue but is of a similar mentality and level of education as the readers. Having an actual person in mind is much better than writing for just any layperson and this will enable journalists to specifically evaluate how well readers will understand the article.



In any case the story should not assume that because journalists have background information about the topic, readers also do.

Make the story lively and relevant

Journalists may use clear language and yet their story does not capture the interest of the readers. To keep their stories lively and relevant these must tackle the issues that concern the wider public in order to attract attention i.e. link the issue to daily life, to the local economy and standards of living. Stories that touch on the sentiments of the readers usually make a significant impact e.g. the effects of polluted water on infant death rates etc.

Write successful press-releases

NGOs specialized on water issues are eager to get their reports, statements and press releases into the hands of journalists. There are many examples where excellent relationships have been created between water NGO officers and journalists.

Water NGO officers should however be reasonable and not overload journalists with lots of material that makes it difficult and impractical to report. Much of the excess materials forwarded to journalists will just end up in the trash bin having been characterized as useless information.

Press releases, in order to be successful, should manage to grab the journalists' attention already in the headline and first paragraph, for example quoting an arresting opinion or statistic. Only so they will stand out from the sea of other releases.

Moreover, for press releases to be considered by reporters, they should be written well and delivered accurately.

press-release

Well written press-releases have the following characteristics:

- a proper sentence construction
- correct tenses throughout, with company names in singular ('The BBC has' not "The BBC have")
- correct punctuation
- are written in an active, tight style or 'voice' by being direct and positive and making definite assertions
- are concise but not abrupt. Too many short sentences are difficult to read, but long sentences fail to hold the reader's attention
- are able to translate whatever it has to be said into the simplest words
- do spell things out and not assume that the journalist understands what it is talked about
- do not assume prior knowledge or experience on the issues discussed or presented.

The press releases should not use:

- typos or literals (spelling mistakes)
- repetition
- tame, colorless language
- clichés
- Techie-speak
- jargon
- hyperbole
- euphemisms
- a dry, academic style or be written like an essay
- empty, meaningless phrases or words
- self-praise
- exaggeration
- unnecessary drama
- rhetoric, marketing puff and jargon particularly in quotes
- Gobbledygook

Those who write press-releases should ensure that their database is accurate every time they use it since inaccuracy does not help credibility. They should also make sure that every journalist gets the press releases they need, how and when they want them.

The delivery of press-releases can be done through the following means:



Delivery

- by post
- by e-mail
- by fax
- by hand
- through news distribution agencies

Those working in an NGO should try to make their organization known as one of those, which send solid, comprehensive and manageable information and try to become a reliable source of information on water issues.

From their side journalists should avoid falling in the habit of rewriting press releases, which requires less work and no extra effort. This kind of journalism may result not only to "poor journalism" but also to a boring one. Also, they should be ready to publish an article after having understood and cross-checked the content of the press release, including the scientific terminologies.

Finally, a press release forwarded by a company or any other institution on a water issue requires a journalist to question and investigate if the local community views and the local water groups are incorporated.

Translate water technicalities

Turning obscure language into clear, familiar, concise language is a very important challenge that journalists face. Therefore, they need to exert efforts to find people, books and glossaries to help them understand the information. The next step is to explain to the readers this complex and technical information. Terms that either confuse or bore readers should be avoided.

Turbidity, for example, is an often recurring term relating to water quality, but it is meaningless to readers unless they know that it describes the degree of particulate matter floating in it. Apart from terms, readers should be assisted to understand technical concepts and ideas such as, for example, pH, which is a simple measurement of the acidity or alkalinity of liquids. To explain pH, a journalist would have to say that scientists measure it on a scale from 0-14 and that they consider 7 as "neutral". Ideally potable water should be around 7, but frequently it is more acidic than this. Natural rain, (not acid rain) is between 5 and 6. Rivers and lakes are around 6-7 while seawater is almost always between 7.5 to 8. Acid rain goes down to 3. If the measurement is from 1-6, the liquid being measured is considered as acidic; from 8-14, it is basic or alkaline. The most acidic solution in natural aquatic systems is around 1, while the most basic is 12. Since most readers would not easily relate to this information, it would be more appropriate to tell them that vinegar is an acid of pH around 3 and lemon juice is also an acid, with a pH around 2.

terms

Journalists must keep in mind that they write for the layman, therefore, their stories must be written in a very clear language and technical terms must be explained so as to be easily understood. Journalists repeat technical terms because they are afraid to make mistakes. Educating oneself and asking questions to clarify the meaning of certain technical vocabulary and in turn being able to translate and describe the concept to the readers in simple words should be the objective. If the source's comment is not clear journalists should ask to rephrase the statement in a different wording using everyday language. To avoid making a mistake and disappointing the source they could send the story to the source to verify if it is correct or not. Once the story is ready, journalists need to ask themselves the following: am I using "insider" language? Have I accurately and appropriately translated the scientific technicalities and terms? Have I educated my readers?

definitions

Use definitions and descriptions to help readers understand

A definition is the explanation of an object or idea that distinguishes it from all other objects or ideas. The expanded definition of an object or idea infers the use of examples, history, analysis or other methods for the purpose of explanation. The above explanation of pH is an expanded definition.

Description is another major technique that a journalist can use to help readers understand what he/she is trying to communicate. To write an effective description, one must be able to visualize clearly the issue or the process that is being described and have a good command of any term that may be involved. Journalists need to know the components involved in the process and how they interrelate. Journalists also must know the purpose of the term in question and what it serves.

Follow-up stories

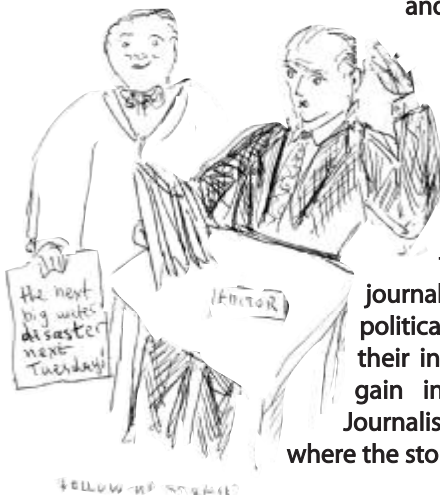
Journalists should know that even the best of stories would have a minimal impact if it were published only once. Water is an issue vital to sustainable development

and should therefore constantly be in the forefront of the news so the public doesn't lose sight of the problem.

Important stories should be revisited often to keep readers informed about developments. What is the government doing about it? What progress has been made? What do the latest scientific findings show? To keep the story alive,

journalists need to link the topic to related political, economical and social impacts letting their investigation go beyond the city limits and gain insight about the issue in other areas.

Journalists should also address questions such as where the story they are dealing with is leading.



In conclusion

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Once the water story is ready for publishing, a journalist needs to ask himself/herself the following questions:

- Is my story clear and concise?
- Have I added enough context and history for the reader to better understand the story?
- Are the most important aspects emphasized and the trivial ones compacted?
- Have I made the story local so that people can relate to it?
- Have I made people relate to the story and have I conveyed its significance?
- Do the descriptions and analogies explain the numbers?
- Are the technical terms clearly defined?
- Are sentences written in a simple and clear way?
- Am I asking and answering enough questions?
- Does my transition help readers moving on?
- Have I been fair to my sources and the subject?
- Have I added new sources to my list this week?
- What would make a good follow up story?



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ALGERIA

Algeria Daily - www.algeriadaily.com/

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CROATIA

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Drugi program, "Z kao Zemlja" and Obrazovni program. - www.hrt.hr/

Hina News Agency - www.hina.hr/nws-bin/ehot.cgi/

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Cyprus Mail - www.cyprus-mail.com/

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EGYPT

Al Ahram weekly - www.ahram.org.eg/

Cairo Live - www.cairolive.com/

Cairo Times - www.cairotimes.com/

FRANCE

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Le Monde - www.lemonde.fr/

Le Monde diplomatique - mondediplo.com/

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GREECE

Athens News Agency (ANA) - www.ana.gr/

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Independent Media Center (IndyMedia Israel)
www.indymedia.org.il/english/

ITALY

Il Manifesto - www.ilmanifesto.it/
La Repubblica - www.repubblica.it/
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JORDAN

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Alhilal - www.alhilal.com.jo
Al-Quds Al-Arabi Newspaper - www.alquds.co.uk
Jordan Times Daily Newspaper - www.jordantimes.com/
Petra News Agency - www.petra.gov.jo/
The Star Weekly Newspaper - www.star.arabia.com/

LEBANON

Albia waltanmia - envidev@mectat.com.lb
Almustaqbal - www.almustaqbal.com
An Nahar - www.annahar.com.lb
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MOROCCO

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Maghreb Arabe Presse - www.map.co.ma/mapeng/eng.htm/
Morocco Today - www.morocco-today.info/
Radio Morocco's International Channel's weekly - broadcast "Planete Verte"

PALESTINIAN NATIONAL AUTHORITY (PNA)

JMCC Jerusalem Media and Communications Center - www.jmcc.org/



PORTUGAL

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Linhas de Elvas (regional newspaper) - <http://linhas.elvas.net/>

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SLOVENIA

Radio-Television Slovenia - www.rtv slo.si/

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SYRIA

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Syria Times (weekly and daily news updates) - www.teshreen.com/syriatimes/

TUNISIA

Journal Le Renouveau - www.tunisieinfo.com/LeRenouveau/

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COUNTRIES



Water news

Water news

AQUANOVA-The new Network for Water Industry

www.aquanova.net/english/background.htm

Blue Planet Project

www.blueplanetproject.net/english/

CBC News-Water for Profit

www.cbc.ca/news/features/water/

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www.irn.org/index.html

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Sea-River Newsletter

www.sea-river-news.com/

WaterAid-Water for Life

www.wateraid.org.uk/

Water Observatory

www.waterobservatory.org

WaterWeb

www.waterweb.org

Further Environmental News, Media services and networks

Access to Information-Arab World

www.arabaccess.org

Development News Media Center

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,pagePK:34382~piPK:34439,00.html>

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ENVI-NEWS

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Environmental Journalists

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Environmental Media Services

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Environmental News Network

www.enn.com/

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www.rec.org/

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Water Media Network

www.worldbank.org/wmn

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FAO

www1.fao.org/media_user/_home.html

MAGNUM PHOTOS

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REUTERS

www.reuters.com/newsPhotosHome.jhtml

UNESCO

www.unesco.org/water

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WELL Image catalogue

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WORLD BANK

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