



JOURNALISTS' TOOLKIT ON SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES

WITH INSPIRATIONS,
WRITING TIPS AND
VISUAL IDEAS

IN THIS TOOLKIT

INTRODUCTION	3
TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS	5
» A personal perspective on reporting on sustainable lifestyles	5
» Visualizing sustainable lifestyles	10
» Communicating sustainable lifestyles in campaigns	13
» Engaging faith audiences in sustainable lifestyles	16
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	19

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INTRODUCTION

This toolkit is for all journalists and communicators who would like to approach and delve into the topic of sustainable lifestyles. In here you will find advice from people working in the field who shared their perspective on finding the most compelling stories, visually representing them, and reaching out to editors. Additionally, professional communicators shared in this toolkit their experience on how to talk to broad audiences about sustainable lifestyles, how to catch their attention, and raise awareness.

This document was developed by CIDSE, the international family of Catholic social justice organizations, in the framework of the sustainable lifestyles campaign “Change for the Planet - Care for the People”. CIDSE has been involved in climate justice for years, but only more recently we started focusing more closely on sustainable lifestyles. It seemed more and more urgent to stress that, additionally to the changes needed at the political level, we also need to radically shift our behaviors and personify that change that we want to see and communication plays a crucial role in supporting and provoking such a shift. While still being active at global level and lobbying for justice in the political system managing climate, we also believe in the power of people to create massive change with their coordinated personal efforts.

Our campaign has been an amazing journey that allowed us to discover the innovations that people in different corners of the world have been courageously testing to live more sustainably. Hundreds of volunteers from different European countries have come together to train themselves and become ambassadors of change in their communities. We know that lifestyle change is already happening at the grassroots level, but it needs to be boosted and amplified. High-level journalistic reporting ought to take place around this: to show that alternatives exist and to unmask the false solutions that are too often proposed as quick fixes for all problems related to environment and climate change. We also believe in the need to overcome the myth that sustainable lifestyle is a matter of small changes, but it is also, and perhaps above all, a radical political act and that requires policy support.

To provide journalists with tools to report on these issues, CIDSE organized a [journalists' webinar](#) in November 2018 together with the [Global Catholic Climate Movement](#) and [Climate Tracker](#). This toolkit revisits and reports the interventions of the speakers of the webinar and adds additional resources.

We hope you will find this useful!

The CIDSE - Change for the Planet - Care for the People team

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON REPORTING ON SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES



There are vested interests everywhere you turn on this beat, so our job as journalists is to keep digging until we get at a nugget of truth.



JOEL BOURNE

Award-winner freelance journalist

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Joel has been an environmental journalist for more than three decades, covering the complex, co-dependent relationship between humans and the natural world. This includes energy, agriculture, aquaculture, water, wildlife, forestry, climate change and the human lifestyles that have an impact on these global issues, from our diets to demography. Most recently he has covered two regions at the polar ends of the climate where the changes are most rapid and acute: the Arctic and sub-Saharan Africa.

He synthesized much of his reporting over the years in his first book, *The End of Plenty: The Race to Feed a Crowded World* (W.W. Norton, Scribe, 2015), exploring the connection between agriculture and climate change. He is a former senior editor on the environment at National Geographic, where he covered environmental issues for nearly 20 years.

Covering the environment was always easy for Joel, since he grew up in rural eastern North Carolina and spent much of his childhood working on his grandfather's farm and fishing in their rivers and coastal waters. He was passionate about the outdoors and wildlife, and saw the natural resources diminishing before his eyes, often taking our communities with it.

According to Joel, the great nexus between humanity and climate involves energy, agriculture, and water. We all need food to eat, which requires the bulk of the available freshwater on the planet to produce. We all need energy to heat and cool our homes, and to get us to and from the work that sustains us. Yet producing that energy the way we have since the industrial revolution is making feeding ourselves much more problematic. To solve these problems will require the best technology we can invent, but also better education for people in both the developed and developing world. If everyone simply ate less meat, we could make a huge difference in our carbon footprint.

KEY STEPS TO PUTTING TOGETHER A GOOD REPORTAGE



1. Read everything you can about your topic, past news reports, magazine articles, scientific research.
2. Find experts on the subject and call them up, pick their brains, ask lots of questions, and write down the ideas and names that they give you.
3. Call local people on the ground who are involved or have direct knowledge of your story, whether it's an Inupiat whaling captain, or an NGO working in the local area.
4. Travel to local area(s) involved in your subject and spend every waking hour interviewing people and/or listening to them.
5. Go home and pour through notes, call people with any follow-up questions.
6. Write it up.
7. Rewrite it.
8. Fact check and annotate it.
9. Send it to your editor.
10. Make requested changes/edits.

OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES TO FOCUS ON SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES

There is a lot of resistance to change, whether you are a global oil company whose stock price and value depends on the continued burning of fossil fuels, or an individual who loves to eat meat and drives fuel-inefficient cars. The best-selling books each year are diet books. Why? Because changing behavior is hard. Joel firmly believes that humans are subject to Newton's First Law: "Every object persists in its state of rest or uniform motion in a straight line unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed upon it." Our mission, therefore, is to be that force that compels humanity to change. This often makes governments and powerful people and industries uncomfortable. There are vested interests everywhere you turn on this beat, so our job as journalists is to keep digging until we get at a nugget of truth. The great newspaper man Joseph Pulitzer reportedly said once that the job of a journalist is "to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable."

That seems about right.

SELECTING AND PITCHING YOUR STORY



Editors can't get enough stories about food, alternative energy, electric cars, and related issues. Hunt for stories that intrigue you, that haven't been reported in a lot of places, make a few calls to get the facts right, and then write up a half-dozen paragraph-length pitches. Find the editor who is in charge of assigning such stories at the publication, and send them to him or her in a polite, professional email, that includes who you are, what you've written before, and why you are the perfect writer for these assignments. Be brief. Spellcheck and rewrite profusely. Editors are busy and don't need the slightest excuse to send your query to the trash. Hook them immediately with your first line, so they will be compelled to read more. Don't put in the kitchen sink - leave them wanting more. If they do, they will contact you. Don't hound them for a response unless you don't want to work for them. Wait a few weeks, then send a kind reminder, asking if they are interested. Be polite and cultivate a thick skin.

Make rejection a badge of honor. And keep trying. For magazines like the National Geographic, stories need to be accompanied by a powerful and compelling visual story as well. Photography and video are now perhaps the most powerful medium we have as people watch more and read less.

VISUALIZING SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES



We need a more diverse, human-focused, more compelling visual language that really does justice to the fact that climate change is a human story.



ADAM CORNER

Research Director at
Climate Outreach

 @AJCorner

Climate Outreach is specialized in climate communications, applying social research to a range of practical challenges that climate change communicators face. One of their projects, “Climate Visuals”, reflects about imagery starting from the idea that “**climate change has an image problem**”. When you type “climate change” into Google for example, as a result you get polar bears, melting ice, the earth burning, etc. but what you don’t see much are images of people and what climate change means to them in their day to day life.

Given that climate change means something tangible and direct to so many people now, both in terms of impacts and solutions being developed everywhere, the starting point of Climate Visuals is that we need to see that reflected in the visual language of climate change. Journalists every day look for images to illustrate their stories and Climate Visuals is advocating for a more diverse, human-focused, more compelling visual language that really does justice to the fact that **climate change is a human story**. They carried out a research and got 7 principles out of it which give guidance to communicators when they use photographs. In short, they have to show authentic everyday people, ground climate change in people's everyday lives, tell local stories, evoke human emotions.



7 Principles



In particular, the most relatable images about sustainable behaviors illustrate:

How to show people doing positive things

People want to see other people doing normal things. Sustainable behavior should be shown in a way that's realistic and not too staged.

How to show the individual causes of climate change

When people see images of family driving or eating meat, people just think “that’s just a normal family thing to do, that’s not climate change”. But when they see the same thing but at scale, such as a busy, congested and dirty highway, or a factory farming that really shows the scale of meat eating, they have a very different reaction and people feel compelled to change their behavior as well.

Examples of non-staged images showing people engaged in sustainability



» Climate Visuals is a library of climate images built up by partnerships with photo agencies. Many journalists around the world are already using them and the library is freely accessible to all.

COMMUNICATING SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES IN CAMPAIGNS



You need to connect with your audience, be in their minds, know what they think, what they like and what they share on social media.



MARTA ISABEL GONZÁLEZ ÁLVAREZ

Lecturer, PhD in Journalism
and member of Communication
Department of Manos Unidas,¹
Spain

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Marta Isabel has been working on communicating sustainable lifestyles for years and from her experience she draws some tips on how to successfully engage with audiences.

¹ Manos Unidas is CIDSE's Spanish member organization.



» CONNECT WITH YOUR AUDIENCES

Communications units in NGOs (non governmental organizations) have a specific task: they need to be able to connect with their audiences. People working in NGOs often make the mistake to think from their own perspective, not from the one of the people who are receiving the information. They must work to connect with people and for this they should thoroughly research their audiences, be in their minds, know exactly what kind of interests they have and what kind of language they are using. They have to be where the people are and to know what they share on social media. By doing so, it is easy to realize that people are talking extensively about food, nature, and many other sustainable lifestyles issues.

» CONVERT INFORMATION INTO NEWS

Communicators have to work with journalists in media and for that, they have to “sell” them news. For example, Manos Unidas has been involved in the campaign “Change for the Planet - Care for the People” since 2015; as a part of this, they brought Spanish volunteers to events such as the climate change conference COP 21 in Paris and an international camp on sustainable lifestyles in Portugal. In the summer of 2018, they organized a sustainable camp for youth in Castellón. This event could have gone unnoticed by the media, but the volunteers managed to make it more relevant by launching a sustainability decalogue at the end of the camp. With this the comms team could write a press release that included something new to announce. The press release was indeed picked up by several news outlets.



Radio programme reporting about the campaign
Change for the Planet -
Care for the People

» PROVIDE MEDIA WITH STORIES

The media constantly need stories! Within the campaign “Change for the Planet - Chare for the People” a special effort was made to develop storytelling projects within the campaign and to develop stories of change about normal people who made small behavioral changes in their daily lives. These video clips proved to be interesting for mass media as well. The campaign also included a sustainable photography contest and Manos Unidas organized an exhibition and a media event around it in Spain.

» BE A RELIABLE AND CONSISTENT SOURCE OF INFORMATION FOR JOURNALISTS

To achieve this, communicators have to show that they are changing their lives as well. They can do so for example by sharing on social media a picture of themselves riding a bike or making other efforts in their day to be sustainable, showing that they walk the talk and that they are reliable. It's important to show commitment to climate change issues on Twitter as well by supporting different causes and reacting to news.

ENGAGING FAITH AUDIENCES IN SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES



To engage faith communities in sustainable lifestyles, storytelling is key. We should make stories personal, tangible and hopeful.

CAROLINE BADER

Director of Living the Change Initiative

 @Caro_Greenfaith

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Living the Change is a multi-faith sustainable living initiative that supports and celebrates people of faith who are making personal behavioral changes in transport, home energy and diet - daily activities which all have high carbon footprints. They are a coalition of religious and spiritual organizations and work together with spiritual leaders and experts on sustainable consumption. They have 9 implementing partners who in total represent 1.2 billion people of faith in 150 countries, including Hindu, Buddhists, Christian, Muslim, Jewish and multi-faith partners. The potential possibilities of outreach of such a network are enormous.



Different faiths
engaging for
sustainable
lifestyles

WHY WORK WITH SPIRITUAL COMMUNITIES ON SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES?

84% of the people on this planet identify with some faith or spiritual traditions and the values and models that they share actually support sustainable living. You have to dig into the different scriptures, values and traditions to make that more visible in the way we communicate. Houses of worship exist in nearly every part of the world and they are an opportunity for outreach to grassroots communities and an infrastructure that reaches billions. No other sector has greater potential for transforming consumption habits. Working with religions on this means to start with our values and to practice what we preach.

WHICH TO USE TO ENGAGE FAITH PEOPLE ON SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES?

Faith-based engagement is different than other perspectives for environmental engagement, because it always starts with our faith and the existential question of being human and being part of creation.

The language used should be different from that used in most environmental or political contexts. To achieve this, the Living the Change Initiative focusses on values and faith motivations behind lifestyle changes. The initiative also wants to uplift faith leaders that want to increase their commitments to sustainable living as they become influencers. **Sharing their commitments is really powerful in communicating sustainable lifestyles.** We work with religious communities and grassroots communities with the goal to celebrate sustainable living together as a community. In 2018 the initiative started the campaign “Time for Living the Change” which is actually an expression of this grassroots approach, holding 102 events in 26 countries.

The power of storytelling: storytelling is a big part of this engagement; we should make stories personal, tangible and hopeful. Living the Change tells stories that touch people and address them personally.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Please see our online version to access the resources.

[Recording of webinar](#)
on sustainable lifestyles,
19th November 2018

CIDSE paper: “[The Climate Urgency: Setting Sail for a New Paradigm](#)”

CIDSE in its engagement of journalists works closely with Climate Tracker who have developed several toolkits to help journalists in their work on climate change.

Here are some of their writing and research toolkits:

- » 7 ways to write a good introduction
- » 8 ways to improve your writing
- » 3 minutes guide to writing a news article
- » 6 things you need to know when using a quotation
- » 7 tips on doing research for your article
- » 11 punctuation marks you need to use correctly
- » How to conduct an interview
- » Writing an effective features article
- » Communicating climate jargons

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