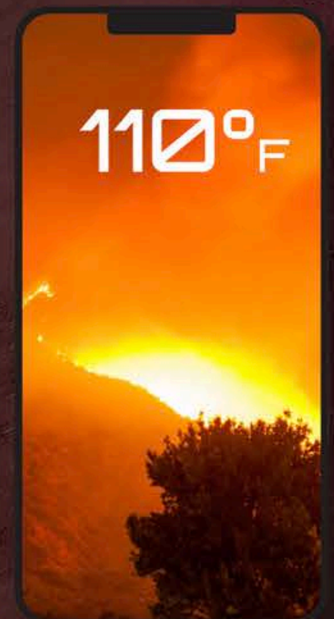
WACC

Media Development

1/2025

Climate Justice and Digital Inclusion



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The 2/2025 issue of *Media Development* will review the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society+20 taking place under the auspices of the United Nations and its International Telecommunications Union (ITU).

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EDITORIAL

The international humanitarian organization Concern Worldwide says that, "Climate justice is more than a concept. It's a movement to recognize that the effects of climate change are not felt equally – and that it's usually those who have done the least to cause climate change that suffer the most from these effects. Activists from many of the countries hit hardest by climate change (countries largely in the Global South) are calling for environmental inequities to be addressed, both to make up for the historical injustices of our current crisis and to create a safer world for all of us."

Few would argue with that. However, climate justice indisputably rests on people's ability to understand the issues, to express their concerns in public, to advocate for accountability, and to press for the political, economic, and social changes needed to tackle the climate emergency and its environmental and ecological impacts.

In the words of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Climate change threatens the effective enjoyment of a range of human rights including those to life, water and sanitation, food, health, housing, self-determination, culture and development. States have a human rights obligation to prevent the foreseeable adverse effects of climate change and ensure that those affected by it, particularly those in vulnerable situations, have access to effective remedies and means of adaptation to enjoy lives of human dignity."

The politics of censorship and silencing are nowhere more evident than in global climate debates. Media and press coverage have long been subject to government and industry pressure, and their misinformation and disinformation tactics. COP29, held in Baku, Azerbaijan (11-22 November 2024) – with its trendy theme "In Solidarity for a Green World" – was no different.

According to *The Guardian* (29 October 2024), in advance of the gathering large numbers of fake social media accounts promoted Azerbaijan's hosting of the climate summit: "The ac-

counts were mostly set up after July, at which time seven of the top 10 most engaged posts using the hashtags #COP29 and #COP29Azerbaijan were critical of Azerbaijan's role in the conflict with Armenia, using hashtags such as #stopgreenwashgenocide. By September this had changed, with all of the top 10 most engaged posts coming from the official Cop29 Azerbaijan account."

Global Witness, which carried out the study (above) reported by *The Guardian*, said "artificially inflating the reach of government posts was drowning out independent criticism of the country's record on the climate crisis and repression of human rights."

At the same time, partisan voices were given privileged access to COP29. Analysis by the Kick Big Polluters Out (KBPO) coalition showed that at least 1,773 coal, oil, and gas lobbyists were granted access to the United Nations climate talks in Baku, outnumbering the delegations of almost every country at the conference, with the only exceptions being this year's host country, Azerbaijan, next year's host Brazil, and Turkey.

Climate justice is now recognised as an existential threat that demands concerted action at many different levels. Excluding voices and alternative views is an affront to democratic freedoms and carries immense risk to people's lives and livelihoods and to the environment itself. It is vital for civil society to be seen and heard in public where climate-related issues affecting human rights and justice are under scrutiny. Equally important is access to independent and unbiased news and information about climate change.

As noted by Arthur Grimonpont, Head of RSF's global challenges desk Reporters Without Borders (30 October 2024): "The right to information about the exploitation of natural resources is vital to understanding the disastrous consequences of extraction, including the massive pollution of ecosystems, destruction of biodiversity, depletion of resources and exploitation of workers. Without journalists present to cover forest clearcutting, photograph giant open-cast mines or tell the stories of displaced and exploited populations, crimes against the environment and fundamental rights will take place in deadly silence. We urge the international community to pressure the countries concerned to remove these obstacles and to guarantee the protection of environmental journalists."

As writers in this issue of *Media Development* point out, in today's digitally mediated world we need to focus on marginalized peoples and communities; how to leverage digital technologies and tools for climate action; and how to mitigate the impact of digitalisation on climate. Digital inclusion and digital literacy will be key. ▪

Photo credit page 4: *Madrid, Spain, 6 December 2019. Shana Rose shouts her heart out in a cry for climate justice, as thousands upon thousands of people march through the streets of central Madrid as part of a public contribution to the United Nations climate meeting COP25, urging decision-makers to take action for climate justice. Copyright LWF/Albin Hillert.*

Recent issues of *Media Development*

4/2024 A Global Vision of Digital Justice

3/2024 Communication in Conflict Situations

2/2024 Weaving Communication in Solidarity

1/2024 Towards Democratic Governance of Digital Society

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Grassroots communities, climate change, and the Global Digital Compact

N. Ramakrishnan

In September 2024, the United Nations General Assembly unveiled the Global Digital Compact (GDC), a sweeping framework designed to shape the digital future.[1] Heralded as a cornerstone of global governance, the Compact's ambition is nothing short of revolutionary: to create a digital world that is inclusive, open, and secure for all. Yet, as is often the case with lofty ideals, the reality on the ground tells a more complex story.

What happens when those who are most impacted by policy decisions – the grassroots communities – are left out of the conversation? To answer that, we need to step back and examine the GDC not just as a policy document, but as a case study in how global governance can amplify, or suppress, the voices of the unheard.

The Grand Vision

The GDC is built on the promise of connectivity: "Connectivity is the lifeline of the digital era, and no one should be left behind," its authors proclaim. For the billions who remain on the margins of the digital revolution – disconnected, disenfranchised, and often disregarded – this message is a lifeline.

But is it, really? Promises of inclusion often mask deeper questions. Who gets to define what inclusion looks like? Who decides whose voices matter? Critics like Tim Unwin, an academic and digital policy expert, argue that the GDC's approach to inclusion is top-down, with little room for the grassroots communities whose lives it purports to transform. Writing on his blog, Unwin highlights the irony: "The Global Digital Compact is the latest example of a global initiative that promises inclusivity but struggles to deliver it."[2]

The Missing Voices

Imagine a village in a remote part of the world where internet access is a distant dream. Here, people navigate the challenges of climate change, education, and livelihoods with ingenuity born of necessity. They have stories to tell, ideas to share, and solutions that could inspire the world. Yet these voices rarely make it to the global stage.

Grassroots communities bring invaluable perspectives to global challenges, especially in addressing climate change and fostering digital inclusion. But systemic barriers – limited access to technology, language gaps, and digital illiteracy – make it nearly impossible for them to articulate their views. Worse, the GDC's focus on technological fixes often sidelines the human dimensions of these challenges.[3]

Climate Action and Community Empowerment

The GDC's performance in strengthening community actions to address climate change reveals both potential and pitfalls. On the one hand, the Compact emphasizes digital infrastructure as a catalyst for sustainable development. On the other hand, it does not sufficiently address how digital tools can be leveraged to empower communities in their environmental stewardship.[4]

Take, for example, the role of grassroots organizations in India's watershed management projects. Local communities have used simple digital mapping tools to identify water stress zones and collaboratively design rainwater harvesting systems. These efforts not only mitigate

the impacts of climate change but also restore degraded ecosystems.[5] Yet, such projects often operate without the systemic support the GDC could provide, such as funding mechanisms or open-access platforms for knowledge-sharing.

The Allure and Danger of Techno-Solutionism

Techno-solutionism is a term that has gained currency in recent years. It describes the belief that technology alone can solve complex social problems. The GDC's emphasis on connectivity and digital infrastructure embodies this mindset. For policymakers and tech giants, it's an appealing narrative: Build the networks, and the rest will follow.[6]

But as advocacy groups like Global Partners Digital caution, this approach can do more harm than good. "Technological solutions without human-centred policies can exacerbate existing inequalities rather than alleviate them," their joint statement warns.[7] In other words, technology is only as effective as the context in which it is deployed. For grassroots communities, whose needs and realities often defy one-size-fits-all solutions, the risks are especially high.

Platforms: The Paradox of Empowerment

Digital platforms hold immense promise for amplifying grassroots voices. A farmer in sub-Saharan Africa can share innovations with peers across the globe. An activist in a small town can mobilize support for a cause that transcends borders. Yet, these same platforms are fraught with challenges.

A report by Article 19, a global human rights organization, highlights a troubling paradox: "Offline rights must be protected online."[8] While platforms like Facebook and Twitter democratize access to information, they also serve as battlegrounds for misinformation, censorship, and algorithmic biases that can stifle marginalized voices.

Take, for instance, the issue of algorithmic bias. Studies show that social media algorithms often amplify content that aligns with mainstream narratives, sidelining dissenting or minority perspectives. For grassroots communities, this means their stories may never reach the audiences they need to influence.[9]

Communication Rights and Climate Justice

Communication rights are intrinsically tied to climate justice. The ability to share knowledge, express opinions, and participate in decision-making processes is critical for communities facing environmental crises. The GDC has a unique opportunity to enshrine these rights within its framework, yet it stops short of explicitly linking digital inclusion with climate justice.[10]

Consider the case of Indigenous communities in the Amazon rainforest, who use GPS and drones to monitor deforestation and illegal logging. These tools, coupled with social media platforms, have enabled them to share their findings with the world and demand accountability from governments and corporations. By safeguarding their communication rights, the GDC could strengthen such initiatives and ensure that local knowledge informs global climate strategies.[11]

Implementation: A Work in Progress

If the GDC's principles are to translate into meaningful change, its implementation must be deliberate and inclusive. This is where the Compact faces its greatest challenge. Critics argue that while the GDC excels in articulating aspirations, it falls short in providing a roadmap for action.[12]

Consider the issue of internet access. Connectivity alone is not enough; it must be affordable, accompanied by localized content, and supported by training programs that empower users. Without these elements, the digital divide may not just persist – it could deepen.[13] Tim Unwin puts it bluntly: "If the GDC is to succeed, it must move beyond rhetoric and invest in meaningful engagement with those it claims to represent."[14]

Lessons from the Margins

What can the GDC learn from the grassroots? First and foremost, that inclusion is not a box to tick; it's a process. Real inclusion means meeting communities where they are – not just physically, but culturally and socially. It means listening to their stories, understanding their challenges, and co-creating solutions that reflect their realities.

Policymakers must also recognize that grassroots communities are not passive beneficiaries; they are active agents of change. Their insights and innovations have the power to reshape global governance, but only if they are given the tools and platforms to do so.[15]

A Call to Action

So, what needs to change? The answer lies in a series of actionable steps:

1. Create Spaces for Participation: Grassroots communities need a seat at the table. This requires breaking down barriers like language, access, and representation. For example, in Kenya's Kitui County, local women's groups collaborated with NGOs to design water harvesting projects, leveraging digital platforms to share their successes and influence policy discussions.[16]

2. Prioritize Human Rights: The GDC must safeguard freedoms of expression and combat digital harms such as misinformation and censorship. Consider India's **Digital Empowerment Foundation**, which trains rural women to become **internet *saathis*** (digital companions). These women have not only gained a voice online but also helped counter local misinformation campaigns through trusted networks.[17]

3. Focus on Localization: Policies should be tailored to the unique needs of communities, moving away from one-size-fits-all solutions. In Bangladesh, the **Digital Krishi** (Digital Agriculture) project offers farmers region-specific weather updates and advice via SMS, demonstrating how localized content can address grassroots needs effectively.[18]

4. Demand Accountability: Platforms must be held accountable for their impact on marginalized voices. Transparency is key to building trust. In Brazil, grassroots activists used digital tools to monitor and report illegal logging in the Amazon, pressuring social media companies to act against fake accounts spreading misinformation about deforestation.[19]

5. Measure Impact: The GDC's success must be measured by tangible outcomes, not just rhetoric. This requires robust monitoring and a willingness to adapt. Take the example of Eco-Clubs in Argentina, where young people track local climate indicators using simple digital tools and report their findings to municipal authorities. The program has not only improved environmental monitoring but also arguably increased youth engagement in policymaking.[20]

The Road Ahead

The Global Digital Compact is an ambitious project with the potential to redefine digital governance. But ambition alone is not enough; and like many international agreements that have preceded it, it flatters to deceive. For the GDC to fulfil its promise, it must confront the uncomfortable truths about whose voices are heard and whose are silenced – both in the process of the construction and conception of the GDC itself, and in the vision for our common digital future it lays out.

In the end, the question is not just about bridging the digital divide; it's about ensuring that the bridge leads somewhere meaningful. Grassroots communities hold the keys to this future. The world must listen – not out of charity, but because their wisdom is indispensable. Only then can we build a digital world that truly be-longs to everyone.▪

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Communicating ways to cope with climate breakdown

Kunda Dixit

In democracies, communication is essential in prompting action to redress environmental damage. The public and policymakers in government need to know what the problems are, and which interventions have worked, before they can start addressing them.

In some authoritarian countries, a top-down approach on environmental regulation and implementation means mitigation measures are put into place impressively fast. And we can see in the less-developed parts of the Asia-Pacific region a certain attraction towards autocrats and efforts to emulate their methods.

In South Asia, we have tried strongman (and strong woman) rule before, and it was a disaster. We therefore have to make-do with a democratic system that is "the worst except for all the others" and make it more accountable. There can be no democracy without participation, and in an open society communication is essential for participation.

Nepal is an important case study to prove this point. Grassroots democracy has worked well because of the pre-Internet spread of community radio stations across the country. Unlike other parts of South Asia, Nepal's legislature decided that the radio spectrum is a common good and deregulated FM licenses.

And since many of the problems local communities face are related to the environment (deforestation, floods and landslides, ecotourism, balancing development with nature protection)

local radio has played a useful role in raising public awareness. In fact, just about everything that has worked well in Nepal since the transition from absolute monarchy to parliamentary democracy in 1990 has got the word "community" attached to it: community forestry, community radio, community-managed irrigation schemes, community-run health programs. It is at the national level that governance has not worked out as well.

The spread of social media platforms and re-centralised decision-making have eroded these gains somewhat, but even now political devolution has meant that municipal councils function better because local communication channels force them to be more accountable.

Exposing corruption and wrongdoing

Freedom of expression and an independent media are fundamental rights, and in Nepal they are critical in exposing corruption and wrongdoing in high places, illegal natural resource extraction, and practices that harm the environment. But a free media is also essential in spreading awareness about best practices and proven solutions for equitable development that does not irreparably damage the ecosystem.

This checks-and-balances role of the media in an open society is needed more than ever as our part of the world tries to cope with the impact of climate breakdown. The South Asia region has communities that are at high risk: the Maldives and coastal Bangladesh try to keep their head above the water as the ocean expands, Pakistan battles historic floods, hundreds of millions of people in northern India are affected by life-threatening heat stress, while Nepal and Bhutan adapt to Himalayan glaciers that are melting into dangerously large lakes.

I wrote about these future crises 28 years ago in my book, *Dateline Earth: Journalism As If the Planet Mattered*. Environmental journalists have been presenting scientific evidence about climate breakdown for decades, yet it has only been in the past five years that we have seen communication about climate issues starting to have an impact. Except for a few deniers and those in business-as-usual mode, there is now a realisation that communities, nation states and the world need to act.

I have been lecturing university students and journalists about communicating climate breakdown, mainly about how it is not just a story about the environment but one with political and economic roots. The factors leading to climate breakdown are a result of unsustainable economics that stress perpetual growth and consumerism that do not factor in the cost to nature.

Climate change is nothing new. Scientists have been warning about it for more than a century, and the first news item about the greenhouse effect was published as far back as 1902 in newspapers in Europe and the United States. In the 1960s, oil companies deliberately buried findings from their own internal scientific teams that accurately predicted what carbon dioxide buildup would do to the planet in 70 years' time.

There is no time left for such hide and seek, people all over the world in one way or other are feeling the impact of climate breakdown. There are still some flat-earthers who do not want to accept what is happening, but because of the important mediatory role that journalists have played to communicate scientific evidence to the public, there is now widespread awareness about what a 3.2 degree increase in average global temperatures will do to the planet in the coming years.

The challenge is to turn that awareness into action on mitigation, shutting down the fossil industry, helping national economies with their energy transition to renewables, and providing cleaner alternatives to households.

Communicating solutions

We have passed the critical mass in awareness generation through the mainstream press and social media, the remaining anti-science sceptics are those for whom facts do not matter. Reporting on whether a Himalayan glacier is receding by 35 metres per year, or 36 metres per year will not make that much difference, scientists must

Swayambhu Mahachaitya, Kathmandu, Nepal. The country's varied topography and social vulnerability make it particularly susceptible to geological and climate-related disasters. A general lack of effective response mechanisms and strategies for dealing with natural disasters exacerbates this vulnerability. An increase in soil erosion, landslides, flash floods, and droughts has been reported in recent years across the country, with increased intensity and impact on the lives and livelihoods of the Nepalese. Erratic weather patterns projected in climate models may exacerbate these problems in years to come. Source: World Bank. Photo: Philip Lee.

now also move to action research: for example, pilot schemes to see if it is feasible to generate electricity from expanding glacial lakes, or recharging groundwater by reviving indigenous knowledge about rainwater storage ponds.

And those solutions need to be communicated through appropriate channels to the larger public, planners and international agencies supporting climate adaptation measures.

Mass media is a way of communicating mainly to the adult population. Teaching is also a means of communication but to a future generation. Because journalists are hardwired to cover everything that is out of the ordinary, they tend to headline the sensational or ominous. The direst forecasts of the consequences of the build-up of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, or the failure of climate negotiations at COPs get the biggest headlines.

As a result, many of my students are already jaded, cynical or numbed into inaction. Climate anxiety is now a mental health syndrome. Communicating to the public ever more apocalyptic scenarios for the future is not going to help. We are already seeing younger audiences turning off, and scrolling down to escapist algorithm-amplified entertainment on their phones.

In my work as a journalist and educator, I have now consciously altered the content by highlighting positive trends around the world about how local communities and national governments are taking action to reduce emissions or adapt to the already-felt impacts. This is not to say that I gloss over the crises, but give examples

of how countries, agencies, private companies and communities are coming up with innovative ways to cope with climate breakdown. And this is mainly happening because of effective communication by the media in the past decades.

For example, there is now 40 times more solar energy generation compared to just ten years ago, and it is projected to overtake fossil fuel generation by 2030. There is now three times more wind power being generated than 15 years ago, and this will double in the next five. Nepal, Norway and other countries use 100% renewable energy; Bhutan is already carbon negative. Turning to electric vehicles also has health co-benefits by improving air quality in our cities.

The climate crisis is a water crisis. Springs across the Himalayan foothills are going dry because of erratic rainfall and over-extraction, but record-breaking rainfall is unleashing floods of biblical proportions. But there are plenty of examples of how national governments, municipalities and even neighbourhoods are learning to be more prepared.

Using new technologies to communicate information and stories

Stories about villagers who have found alternative sources of water can be communicated by journalists, disseminated through interesting multimedia posts on social networking sites so that communities in another corner of the country can also emulate the solution. Information technology allows us to leapfrog and use phones as a dissemination device.

In a way, there is now an over-hype of climate change by the global and national media in our countries so that problems that predate the climate crisis are being blamed on it. Western Nepal has always had a food deficit because of state neglect, lack of investment in irrigation and inadequate government support for small farmers. But it has now become a convenient excuse for politicians to blame food insecurity on the climate crisis.

Global climate breakdown has also coincided with a decline of democracy around the world and especially Asia, as well as the degradation of the mainstream media. At a time when we need independent journalism more than ever before to cover the political and economic policies needed to cope with the climate crisis, the media's voice is muted.

Legacy and linear media depend on advertising and subscriptions for revenue. But competition for eyeballs with digital content has meant that income from both sources has fallen. Many established media have closed shop, unable to compete with Google and Facebook for advertising.

In addition, corporate ownership and control by political cronies has made the formerly free media less independent, and worse, less inclined to do the investigative journalism needed to expose the greed and power that underlie inaction on addressing the climate crisis.

But digital media also provides us the power to reach users directly with messaging on coping mechanisms and alternative technologies. Us journalists also have to descend from our pedestals and engage more interactively with audiences. The story is the same, it just has to be communicated differently. Readers, viewers and listeners will not come to us; we have to go to them. ▪

Kunda Dixit is the former editor of *Nepali Times*, and the author of *Dateline Earth: Journalism As If the Planet Mattered* and a trilogy of photobooks on conflict.

What is said, what is not said, and the danger in between

Pie Mabanta-Fenomeno

Amid the lush and vibrant landscape of the Philippines, where natural resources abound and the scenery become a perfect background for heartfelt narratives, one story is often overlooked: the story of its marginalized and indigenous peoples in the face of climate change. At the edge of the imminent climate catastrophe, the chasm between what is said and what remains unspoken grows ever more dangerous. In these times, where walls grow taller, gaps become wider, chains become heavier, the need for communication justice emerges as a hope to allow diverse voices to soar and be heard for the sake of our planet.

Climate change is not a neutral phenomenon; it exacerbates existing social and economic inequalities. Vulnerable communities, often marginalized and historically disadvantaged, bear the brunt of its devastating effects. In the Philippines, a nation highly susceptible to climate-related disasters, the disparities are stark. Coastal communities, indigenous peoples, and rural farmers are disproportionately affected by typhoons, floods, and droughts. 2024, a year marked by climate's relentless assault, bore witness to the suffering of the nation's most fragile. From the searing heat to the devastating floods and the fury of the typhoons, the poor and marginalized were left exposed, their resilience tested to the breaking point.

The relentless heat pushed the Heat Index to boiling point during the first two quarters, prompting school closures to safeguard children. Families struggling to cope without air conditioning resorted to desperate measures, such as creating makeshift pools in the morning and relying on multiple fans in the evening. However, these efforts were far from sufficient, leaving them to endure the sweltering heat in stark contrast to the comfortable environments of their wealthier neighbors. Super Typhoon Man-yi, the 16th to hit the country and the 6th major November storm, brought devastating storm surges, destroying homes, inundating towns, and upending the lives of those unable to seek refuge in safer places.

The discussion about Climate Change has been ongoing for decades. It is no secret that the main culprits are economies with the largest carbon footprints. Scientists, nonprofits, and advocates protest toxic emissions, unsustainable lifestyles, and the dumping of first-world waste in third-world countries, yet their voices are silenced by empty promises, greenwashing, and deliberate evasion of accountability.

As long as the disadvantaged and marginalized communities are lied to, as long as truth is manipulated to serve the chosen few, as long as dissenting voices are muted, the devastation of nature's revenge will be ruthless.

Role of grassroots communities in articulating climate realities

While grassroots communities are the first to be severely affected by climate change, they are the ones who can also greatly contribute to its mitigation and adaptation. The IKSP (Indigenous Knowledge Skills and Practices) of the indigenous people and the practical experiences of the communities are uniquely valuable. They stand as vital architects, bridging the chasm between ancient wisdom and modern necessity. Their deep-rooted connection to the land is not merely a facet of their identity; it is a testament to a symbiotic relationship that has persisted for centuries.

Indigenous peoples possess an intimate understanding of local ecosystems, honed over generations. Their traditional ecological knowledge is a wellspring of practical and time-tested solutions that are inherently sustainable because they come from a principle that the earth is not a resource to be exploited but a partner to be respected. In their practices, we find the blueprints for reforestation efforts that mimic natural patterns, water management systems that harmonize with local hydrology, and agricultural methods that enhance biodiversity rather than diminish it. The **Alangan-Mangyan tribe in Mindoro** believes that nature provides for them and therefore they need not take more than what they need. The **Talaandig tribe of Bukidnon** considers Mount Kalatungan sacred and protects its water source. In doing so, it assured clean and continuous water for the low land communities.

Resilience and adaptability

Grassroots communities embody resilience and adaptability. Their lived experiences provide invaluable insights into the local manifestations of global phenomena. The women-led people's organization in **Coron, Palawan** manages the mangrove nursery. They have discovered a better way of ensuring the optimum growth of these trees – which serve the dual purpose of a habitat for fingerlings and barricades against storm surges and tidal waves. The same community has also lobbied for strict policies for tourist visiting **Siete Pecados** – a diving site for coral reefs.

These are among the many community-led initiatives for climate mitigation or biodiversity conservation. They are uniquely positioned to articulate the impacts of climate change on their livelihoods, cultures, and ecosystems. By sharing their stories and experiences, these communities can challenge dominant narratives and advocate for climate justice.

However, collaboration is easier said than done. Dialogue between these groups and those in the know as well as acceptance of their methods are fraught with challenges, where the chasm of misunderstanding looms large. The dominant narrative often marginalizes these voices closest to the land overshadowing them with a singular focus on technological or academic solutions. The biases against ordinary voices ignore the profound insights that these communities offer. Without channels for these voices to be heard, without the bridges of communication that allow their wisdom to cross into mainstream discourse, we risk losing insights that could guide us toward more sustainable futures.

The wall of division can be torn down if we reimagine communication as a space for inclusive and equitable conversations of diverse voices. There had been several attempts to promote this principle through grassroot movements or civil society sponsored programs. Organizations like the **Philippine Movement for Climate Justice** (PMCJ) or **Communication Foundation for Asia** (CFA)'s work amplify the voices of indigenous and local communities, advocating for policies that reflect their knowledge and experiences. Through storytelling and participatory governance, these groups challenge the dominant narratives, ensuring that the silence of marginalized voices is replaced with a chorus of collaboration.

In reflecting on the role of Indigenous and grassroots communities, we need to reconsider our approaches to environmental stewardship. Human beings are stewards with the singular role of ensuring that creation is respected and protected for all of society and for the future generation. We need to be reminded that the path to sustainability is not a solitary journey but a collective endeavour. Hence, the need to embrace the wisdom of those who have long walked in harmony with the earth, danced to its rhythm and lived in its bosom.

The sound of climate discourse

Real and productive human interaction begin with dialogue. This is the building block to connect us to one another. Words encapsulate experience; culture and perspective intersect at a common meaning so relationships are built, visions are formed, common goals are strengthened. However, words alone cannot sustain rela-

tionships, visions and goals. A real and sustained connection goes beyond exchange of ideas and enters the reality of participation.

Participation is the fertile soil wherein the seeds of dialogue may take root and flourish. It is an active engagement, a commitment not only to listen but to be present and involved. In this shared space of action and collaboration, we transform from passive observers to co-creators of a shared reality. It is through participation that we breathe life into our words, transforming them from fleeting whispers into enduring legacies of change.

Like dance, dialogue is the starter, inviting us to listen to the beat and sway to the rhythm. But unless participation happens, there will only be solitary and disjointed movements instead of a synchronized choreography. When we participate, we step into each other's shoes, feeling the weight and consequence of every step, every misstep. In this dance, we learn to navigate the complexities of our shared humanity, bridging the gap between self and other.

Without participation, dialogue risks becoming an echo in an empty room, a conversation without consequence. Participation, however, turns conversation into collaboration, dialogue into action. It demands of us courage and vulnerability, a willingness to expose our biases and challenge our assumptions. It is an invitation to build bridges not only of understanding but of empathy and compassion.

In moving beyond dialogue to participation, we embrace the fullness of our potential as interconnected beings. It is through synodal participation that we journey together toward a future defined by shared purpose and collective growth.

Silence is not just the mere absence of communication but a profound presence of its own. It is the abyss where understanding falters and assumptions breed. The dangers of this silence are far reaching and deep seething. When the voices of those most affected by climate change are not amplified, the narratives that dominate tilt towards the interests and perspectives of those in power, often aligning with industrial and developmental agendas that may not prioritize ecological balance.

In the Philippines, this silence is seen in the numerous policies that favour short-term economic gains over long-term environmental health. It is reflected in the encroachment of mining operations into indigenous lands, where the extraction of resources takes precedence over the preservation of ecosystems. It is seen in infrastructures built at the expense of biodiversity loss. It is felt in tourist-centred decisions unconcerned about waste accumulation or disturbance of natural habitats. These actions, fuelled by the absence of communication justice, deepen the divide between those who bear the brunt of environmental degradation and those who dictate its terms.

No climate justice without communication justice

Climate change communication should significantly influence public perception, policy decisions, and individual actions. For the longest time, dominant narratives often frame climate change as a distant, future threat, obscuring the immediate and severe impacts on vulnerable communities. At times, climate change messaging centres on rhetorics, emotional marketing or publicity. These framings can lead to a lack of urgency and a failure to prioritize climate action.

Some paths that have proven to help promote a robust communication space include **conducting learning exchange and spaces for multilogue with empowered grassroot communities**: Indigenous peoples, fisherfolk, and farmers in the Philippines have long been stewards of the environment. Their traditional knowledge and practices offer valuable insights into sustainable living and climate adaptation. However, their voices are often silenced in policy-making processes. By amplifying their voices through community-based media, social media, and traditional storytelling, communication justice can ensure that their knowledge and perspectives are

integrated into climate policies.

When we allow the stories from the ground to be heard by the majority, we not only contribute to a holistic education but also commit to empowering the communities with valuable knowledge, experience and culture. Creating safe spaces where people of different cultures, languages and perspectives can come together and create common understanding to scientific or technical discussions will promote collaboration.

Promoting critical thinking to counter information disorder: The phenomena of disinformation, misinformation and mal-information have crept into almost every aspect of Filipino society. Disinformation about climate change undermines public trust in science and hinders climate action. The proliferation of fake news and conspiracy theories on social media has contributed to climate change denial and scepticism. Polarization and a dismissive attitude towards the dangers of climate change has led to a lack of pro-active programs for mitigation then and adaptation now. There is an imperative need to counter this situation through fact-checking initiatives, media literacy campaigns, and the promotion of critical thinking skills.

Building climate literacy and fostering climate conversations: The ability to understand and respond to climate change is crucial for informed decision-making. By providing accessible and culturally relevant climate education, communication justice can empower individuals and communities to take action. Inclusive and participatory dialogue can facilitate the development of equitable and effective climate solutions. Community-based forums, town hall meetings, and online discussions can create spaces for diverse stakeholders to share their experiences, concerns, and ideas. Materials and references about climate change need to be produced in the local languages understood by specific cultures. As the public understands what is at stake, they will find the courage and skills to demand accountability.

Advocating digital inclusion and digital literacy: Unequal access to digital technologies remains a reality in most countries. Voices must be raised so that the government is compelled to expand access to digital technologies and broadband internet in rural and marginalized communities.

Technology and media play a crucial role. As the world pivots towards digital transformation, digital equity needs to be realized in order to achieve democratized access to useful, timely and relevant information as well as assert the full, unhindered and inclusive participation of all stakeholders in the climate discourse.

The road to a just society where communication is equitable and stewardship for the environment is practice is the same road to a more compassionate and humane society. When walls of division are torn down by inclusion and empowerment, when bridges are built over chasms of silence and ignorance, and when chains of lies and oppression are broken by integrity and empathy, people and planet can live in harmony. ▪

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Digital media literacy: Important lessons from a climate change classroom

Dina Gilio-Whitaker

There is an old adage that the best way to really learn about a subject is to teach it. I would agree but with a caveat: one must begin with at least a baseline understanding of the topic at hand. Such was the case when I set out to teach for the first time a course on climate change in an undergraduate American Indian studies (AIS) course called Climate Change and Indigenous People.

My scholarly background is in American Indian studies with a specialty in environmental justice (which I've written a popular book about), and climate change and climate justice are closely related topics. As a researcher and writer, I also have an extensive background in journalism. It was thus logical to bring together all these elements as a methodological approach to teaching the course, but it was not obvious to me at the beginning. In the process of shaping the class, I learned three important lessons: media literacy is crucial to student learning about climate change; how they learn it matters; and most importantly, that they come to conclusions on their own. My hope is that readers will find these insights valuable in their own teaching and writing.

First, some background. I teach at California State University San Marcos in San Diego County. San Diego has the distinction of having more Indian reservations than any other county in the United States, and our campus has one of the highest populations of American Indians in the state. Our AIS major is quite robust in terms of course offerings, and one of the concentrations of the major is Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Climate Change. All our courses are offered for general education credit, which means that most of the students in our courses are not actually AIS majors. They come from a diverse array of majors, from business to biological and environmental sciences to criminal justice and many more.

Assessing student knowledge

I've learned that it's very helpful to assess students' knowledge of American Indians at the beginning of any class I teach. It's become predictable but not surprising to find out the vast majority of them know next to nothing. Why? Because their public school education is sorely lacking in this regard. Research has shown that in the educational standards of all fifty states American Indians are overwhelmingly depicted in a pre-1900 existence, as people of the past with no presence in modern America. In other words, they are represented as extinct. In actuality there are 574 tribal nations that are federally recognized and have government-to-government relationships with the United States, and currently steward approximately 56 million acres of land under tribal jurisdiction. And as other research has clearly shown, on a global scale Indigenous people are among the most disproportionately impacted by climate change.

Knowing all this, it seemed sensible to assess my students' knowledge about climate change as well. I am currently on the steering committee of a project creating curriculum for climate change and environmental justice literacy at all levels of elementary and secondary education for the state. I am well aware that students receive little to no education on climate change, so I presumed they would know very little about it in my classroom. My suspicions turned out to be correct, which gave me valuable information to make decisions

about how to proceed from the outset.

In today's increasingly polarized world, few topics are more politicized than climate change. Despite decades of solid international science confirming the planet is warming due to human activity ("anthropogenic" climate change), we have seen how the public can easily be misled to reject science and instead believe cockamamie conspiracy theories about almost anything. The purpose, of course, is to deflect attention away from industries and processes that are most responsible for causing climate change. Virtually all this information manipulation occurs in our media spaces, with media broadly defined here as news, entertainment, and social media ecosystems.

As evidence shows, younger generations raised entrenched in the digital world of cell phones and computers fall prey to propaganda and psychological manipulation in numerous ways, including distorted perceptions of reality. The combination of a lack of education about climate change and reality distortion were dynamics that became obvious in my classroom assessment.

Teaching media literacy

As everyone knows, there is no avoiding online technology and as college professors it is our responsibility to learn to use it as an effective teaching tool, as well as to guide students in its wise use in their own personal use when appropriate. I also like to teach with the visual medium of film given the proliferation of great material that is widely available on so many topics. I decided to use a diverse set of digital media to aid in my students' skill-building as savvy consumers of media, and I set aside the first four weeks of the course dedicated strictly to the goal of media literacy learning with climate change as the focal point.

It's also important to note, however, that in the US higher education has come under attack in recent years by conservative critics who believe colleges and universities are incubators for liberal ideological indoctrination. Because of many higher education institutions' dedication to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, sometimes DEI is derisively called "wokeism". The term "woke" derives from social justice oriented projects that recognize oppression against certain marginalized groups as systemic; essentially, it describes progressive values. Ethnic studies (including American Indian studies) and environmental fields are direct targets of anti-wokeism rhetoric and legislation. Therefore, it was critical that my teaching methods not be centred on my personal political viewpoints, but instead be directed from and shaped by professional objectivity, while also accepting that climate science has long been settled on the concept of anthropogenic climate change.

I began by showing a set of films, the first one called *Climate: The Movie (The Cold Truth)* by Martin Durkin. Durkin is widely known as a climate denier, and this was not his first climate denial film, just his most recent. The film uses cheeky British humour combined with slick graphics and interviews with a recycled cast of climate denying academics to mock and denigrate climate scientists, activists, educators, and politicians working to combat anthropogenic climate change. To the untrained eye the film seems convincing; I asked students to write a reflection, discussing whether or not they were convinced of the film's claims that climate change is a hoax. It was disturbing to me how many of them found the film convincing.

Next, they viewed two episodes of a four-part documentary called *The Power of Big Oil*, a PBS series chronicling the history of the fossil fuel industry's knowledge that carbon from burning fossil fuels was causing the planet to warm, and their subsequent decades-long disinformation campaign to conceal the knowledge and mislead the public. The series features former industry insiders, climate scientists, and a plethora of damning documentation with the unvarnished, hard-hitting credibility PBS is known for. Again, the students were asked to write a reflection and assess for believability and compare it to the Durkin film. I could see some of their minds beginning to change or at least to question the

veracity of the previous film.

Finally, they were asked to view a YouTube video made by Peter Hatfield, a science journalist who exposes "junk science" in media. Hatfield systematically deconstructed the Durkin film to reveal the manipulation of data and other dishonest tactics that contributed to the film's supposed credibility.

For reading assignments my students read an article on how to detect media bias from the Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) website. I have appreciated FAIR's work for decades and the article provided clear, honest appraisal of what constitutes media bias. FAIR pointed out things like the way stories are told, from what perspective, and how images can be skewed to sway opinion. Students also became familiar with the Ad Fontes Interactive Media Bias chart, a valuable tool they would use in future assignments for understanding how various news sources tend to lean in their perspectives.

For one class session I brought in as a guest lecturer a trusted colleague from the communications department of our university who teaches media literacy. She delivered a well-honed lesson that focused on two social aspects of media: the public sphere perspective and the market sphere perspective. The public sphere perspective understands media as existing in the realm of the public trust, which should be subjected to some kinds of regulation to guard against corporate mis- and disinformation. The market sphere perspective, on the other hand, values the expansion of choice which in theory results in lower cost and better quality sources. In reality, however, it has resulted in the consolidation of corporate control over media in which just a handful of conglomerates (which she referred to as oligopolies) control mass media in the US.

Other assignments included a media analysis comparing the previously mentioned three films. They analysed each for things like emotionally driven content, credibility of the filmmakers, quality of sources, citations, and visuals, and funding sources. They also had a news journaling exercise throughout the semester where they looked for and summarized news sources on climate change and assessed them for bias utilizing the tools they had been given. I don't normally love grading, but I really looked forward to reading their news journals and learned a lot from them.

One of the most valuable aspects of the course this semester was its coinciding with the highly contentious and consequential Harris/Trump presidential election. For one of their news journals, I had students find news stories comparing the proposed climate policies of both candidates. This was an excellent way for them to find out for themselves the differences between the two main political parties in the bipolar American system relative to climate change. This approach meant that I didn't have to put myself in the precarious position of advancing one political view over another in a way that could be construed as "indoctrination". They can now see for themselves what the future means for climate change policy with the Trump-led Republican party at the helm. And it's not pretty.

Final reflections

At the end of the course, several students remarked about how eye-opening the class was for them. Overall, I was impressed by their written assignments which showed me that they were really alert to media bias. At the same time, they seemed convinced about climate change being human caused.

As a result of this most recent election, for those of us who care about the environment and accept climate science, we are in for a rough ride as we were in the first Trump administration. My students were too young to have been aware of the seismic changes that the first Trump administration ushered in, and they have grown up in an era of political hyper-polarization. This hyper-polarization is in large part the result of systematized psychological and perceptual manipulation designed to obscure what we understand as truth. The Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2018 showed us how digital social media derived data has been used against global citizens

in new ways, distorting our ability to discern fact from fiction. In a world of "alternative facts", truth becomes a matter of whose opinions get the most attention in our news and information ecosystems, regardless of hard, evidence-based facts.

For this generation of young people critical thinking is more important than ever, and it is incumbent upon our education systems to foster those skills. Media literacy training is one of the most valuable and useful ways we as teachers can build those abilities. Without skilful thinkers, democracy is endangered, and so is human habitability on this planet. ▪

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UN Summit of the Future: Why the climate-gender-conflict nexus would be a game changer

Paula Kowal

World leaders and international civil society gathered in New York on 22-23 September 2024 for the UN Summit of the Future. The following article takes issue with how the climate-gender-conflict nexus was not discussed in the lead-up to the Summit. Reviewing the summit documents, the author argues that the draft Pact for the Future treats gender justice, climate crisis, and conflict as separate silos of challenges, overlooking their interconnectedness.

Conflicts and climate change do not affect everyone equally. Climate change can exacerbate conflicts and, vice versa, conflicts can increase climate vulnerability. The escalation of (climate related) conflicts can therefore reinforce pre-existing vulnerabilities and patterns of gender-based discrimination. The interconnectedness of these different dimensions is fundamentally stressed by the term climate-gender-conflict nexus.

Even though climate change is not a direct cause of violent conflict, it can intensify them and reinforce drivers of armed conflicts such as poverty, inequalities and economic shocks. Therefore, climate change must be seen as a stress factor and risk multiplier for existing conflict-prone situations whereby climate change threats

to peace are very unevenly distributed across different world regions.

Moreover, the living conditions of groups suffering from social, economic and political inequalities are particularly and disproportionately vulnerable to the hazards of climate change. Since gender overlaps with axes of social difference, women from marginalized cultural, political, ethnic, or economic groups face the most challenges and climate change impacts.

Gender focuses on the differences and multiplicities of identities and especially in the Global South it is often a decisive factor in assessing a person's risk level for climate shocks as well as for access to resources and options to react. Gender has multiple linkages to vulnerability and agency related to climate change and can exacerbate vulnerability to climate change because gender-related social norms, structures, processes and relations of power have an influence on the distribution of the impacts of climate change and adaption opportunities.

One example of how the climate crisis and conflict reinforce gender inequalities is food insecurity. As women are often forced into specific gender roles around the world and are mostly responsible for subsistence agriculture and water collection for the household, they suffer disproportionately when climate change affects water availability and agricultural yields. They face the burden of additional work as they struggle to find alternative sources of food, water and income as well as caring for the sick.

However, climate-related threats to human security not only increase the burden on women, but also aggravate existing gender inequalities, as women in many cultures and regions of the world are often already seen as less deserving of food, mobility and access to health services. Moreover, women's greater vulnerability to food insecurity is often linked to gender-based violence, as risks of gender-based violence and inequality reduce women's and girls' access to food while, at the same time, food insecurity and gender inequality increase women's and girls' risks of gender-based violence.

In sum, while climate change can exacerbate conflicts, for example by increasing food and livelihood insecurity, conflicts can equally intensify environmental degradation and increase vulnerability to climate change. This interrelationship is shaped by factors such as gender which intersects with climate change impacts and security but often remains unaddressed in climate action. As the impact of climate change and environmental conflicts is gendered, any approach to transformative solutions to gender inequality, climate insecurity and environmental conflicts must have affected groups at the centre, especially those in fragile and conflict affected contexts who are most vulnerable to impacts of climate change.

How is the climate-gender-conflict nexus (not) addressed in the draft UN Pact for the Future?

The draft *Pact for the Future* is organized in five main chapters:

- sustainable development and financing for development,
- international peace and security,
- science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation,
- youth and future generations, and
- transforming global governance.

Each chapter has concrete proposals focusing on human rights, gender and sustainable development. It is clear from these goals that there are no separate chapters planned dedicated to gender or the climate crisis, but both are treated as cross-cutting issues. Regarding the preliminary *Pact for the Future* and the policy briefs, which are both openly accessible, various combinations of the three dimensions gender, climate and conflict can be identified.

Regarding the climate crisis, its gendered impacts are not explicitly mentioned in the draft documents, but it is acknowledged that climate impacts can multiply the risks that fuel conflict, and therefore greater efforts are encouraged to address climate change, including its possible

security implications.

The final version of the draft Pact more specifically states that climate and environmental impacts can exacerbate social tensions, instability and economic insecurity, increase humanitarian and socio-economic needs and contribute to the onset or escalation of conflict. The need to accelerate efforts related to the environment and to effectively address the adverse effects of climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and desertification through the implementation of intergovernmental commitments is emphasized. Relations to conflict and peace or to gender and feminist solutions are not mentioned in the documents with regard to environmental protection.

The draft Pact does address climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation as the greatest challenges of our time, with a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups. Yet who these vulnerable groups are is not further specified. The disproportionate gender impacts of the climate crisis could have been mentioned here. Even in the section on peace and security implications of climate change, there is no mention of gender relations, which is a missed opportunity to include a gender perspective and highlight the climate-gender-conflict nexus.

With regard to gender, connections are made to peace, security and conflict but not specifically to the disproportionate impacts of climate change and conflict. The draft documents emphasize the importance of diversity and gender representation in international institutions to better address global challenges and to achieve gender equality, girls' empowerment and the realization of their human rights. The focus on gender is on combating gender stereotypes and discrimination, as well as harassment and gender-based violence and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation or early and forced marriage.

In particular, the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls and violations of their rights is emphasized, with links being made to gender-based discrimination and conflict (e. g. in the WPS agenda), but not to the effects of the climate crisis, which can exacerbate such violence.

Regarding conflict, the draft Pact does not explicitly emphasize the nexus between conflict, gender and climate. Although it mentions that countries affected by armed conflict often lack the capacity, resources and resilience to respond to the adverse impacts of climate change and other environmental challenges, and therefore need to be supported, the disproportionate and gendered effects are not addressed. With regard to international peace and security, a stronger focus on addressing the root causes and underlying drivers and enablers of violence and insecurity is proposed, but the climate crisis and gender inequality are not included.

In the policy brief for a *New Agenda for Peace*, peace and climate change as well as inequalities, violence and conflict are linked, but without a gender perspective. When it comes to addressing the effects of the climate crisis and responding to the call for action, as well as finding solutions to the climate crisis and protecting the most vulnerable, both climate-related investments in conflict contexts and the differentiated impacts on women and men are briefly mentioned, but the three dimensions are not really linked again.

Nevertheless, the uneven burden of the climate crisis is highlighted and its impacts such as the destruction of infrastructure or displacement are mentioned as exacerbating the risks of instability, especially in situations already affected by conflict. The draft Pact also recognizes that failure to address the challenges posed by climate change and the inequalities it creates would have devastating consequences for the planet, development, human rights and peacebuilding objectives. Nevertheless, the climate-gender-conflict nexus remains implicit.

Outlook

While the climate-gender-conflict nexus is not central to the draft *Pact for the Future,* and the three dimensions are considered separately rather than as intertwined, this article argues that the nexus should have been taken more seriously

and placed at the centre of the UN Summit. As pointed out above, several sections of the preliminary Pact could have been used to do so. For example, the commitment to the WPS agenda and its implementation is emphasized in the Pact but instead of responding to calls to add the context of the climate crisis to the WPS agenda, the climate crisis is left unaddressed in the draft Pact as a fundamental obstacle to implementing the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS).

The Summit of the Future has in fact offered a unique opportunity with great significance and ambition as the *Pact for the Future* aims to prepare the world to respond to emerging global challenges. This could have been a moment to take the experiences of vulnerable groups seriously highlighting the already existing impacts of the nexus. However, it seems, the Summit missed this opportunity to strengthen the linkage between climate, gender and conflict. The nexus was not put at the centre of the negotiations and the gender dimension was once more treated as an add-on issue, looking at the climate crisis and conflict, peace and security mostly separately.

Considering the interrelatedness of climate, gender and conflict, it was a serious mistake not to put the nexus centre-stage. If the ambition to shape a better present and future is to be taken seriously, the climate-gender-conflict nexus offers a leeway to address the complex challenges in their interconnectedness. ▪

This article was first published 20 September 2024 by the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, which analyses the causes of international and domestic conflicts and looks for ways to resolve them. Source: PRIF. Reprinted under Creative Commons Non-derivatives 4.0 International.

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COP29 Declaration on Green Digital Action

The Green Digital Action (GDA) initiative aims to harness the transformative power of digital technologies in a collective fight against climate change and calls on the technology industry to take responsibility for its environmental impact. The GDA initiative was launched by ITU and over 40 stakeholders from government, international organizations, business and civil society worldwide in the context of the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference (COP28).

The Declaration on Green Digital Action affirms the vital role of digital technologies in climate action and outlines a collaborative framework for advancing sustainability and ensuring that digital growth does not deepen environmental decline. The text is the result of extensive consultation and has been circulated by the Azerbaijan COP29 Presidency for endorsement.

We, national governments and other stakeholders, including international organisations, financial institutions, philanthropies, private sector entities, academia, and civil society organisations:

Recognising the imperative to mitigate and adapt to climate change and underscoring the important role of digital technologies in achieving these objectives, the objective of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the goals of the Paris Agreement, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Pact of the Future;

Highlighting that digital innovations can have enabling and systemic effects in reducing GHG emissions across various economic sectors and adapting to climate change impacts when properly used and governed;

Noting with concern the adverse climate impacts associated with the full life cycle of digital technologies and related tools, devices and infrastructures, including with regard to the energy and water consumption of the digital sector, notably in the case of data processing centres, artificial intelligence development and deployment, coupled with the carbon footprint and pollution of producing digital tools and devices, as well as the unsustainable disposal of obsolete digital infrastructure, that need to be addressed;

Underlining the various digital divides as substantial impediments to achieving equitable, inclusive, just and digital transitions, and cognisant that disparities in digital access, capacities and resources can deepen inequalities and obstruct global climate efforts;

Expressing deep concern about the potential effects that disinformation and misinformation may have on the credibility of scientific knowledge and on the global perception of the causes and potential impacts of climate change, as well as on public awareness, mobilisation and collective action to prevent and combat these impacts;

Reaffirming the imperative to address these disparities to fully leverage digitalisation for global sustainability, ensuring that all benefit from a meaningfully connected world while leaving no one behind, including Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, children, youth, and persons with disabilities;

Emphasising the importance of stronger collaboration between governments, the private sector, academia, technical communities, civil society and other stakeholders – in conformity with their roles and responsibilities, as well as synergy building among international organisations, and collective action and strengthened partnerships as a way to leverage digitalisation for climate action effectively; affirm within our respective mandates the following common objectives:

1. Leveraging Digital Technologies and Tools for Climate Action: Encourage the development and adoption of sustainable digital technologies to accelerate GHG emissions abatement, reductions, and removal and energy efficiency across sectors and to support climate-resilient communities, including through the UNFCCC Technology Mechanism. Additionally, enhance climate monitoring and forecasting and strengthen emergency response and preparedness capabilities through the broader use of digital technologies, including mobile early warning systems. Encourage improvement of digital technologies for energy modelling and forecasting to make grids more resilient to climate change's impacts and support clean energy initiatives that are adopting digital solutions.

2. Building Resilient Digital Infrastructure: Emphasise the importance of designing digital infrastructure resilient to climate change impacts, ensuring the continued functionality of critical digital systems in adverse conditions.

3. Mitigating Digitalisation's Climate Impact: Develop policies and technical advancements to contribute to achieving net zero emissions and minimize the resource intensity of digital technologies. This includes powering digital infrastructure with clean energy, promoting energy-efficient practices, reducing emissions embedded in digital infrastructure and supply chains, extending product lifecycles, and improving recycling and e-waste management systems. It also includes establishing metrics and indicators to measure climate impacts of ICTs and to monitor the impact of digital actions on climate.

4. Promoting Digital Inclusion and Literacy: Promote the accessibility of digital technologies for climate action to developing countries, including Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States. This involves supporting digital skills, digital literacy and capacity-building initiatives, especially for young people and women. Foster local digital ecosystems by providing support and resources for

startups, small and medium-sized enterprises, and research institutions working on sustainable digital solutions.

5. Data-driven decision-making: Deploy assessment methodologies to estimate the net climate impact of green digital solutions, implement effective systems to accurately track and standardise climate-related data and energy usage and effectively monitor regulatory adherence and data quality and integrity.

6. Fostering Sustainable Innovation: Mobilise existing climate funds and invest across all channels in innovation, research and development and implementation of environmentally sustainable digital technologies and resilient infrastructure, encouraging collaboration across sectors to integrate climate considerations early in and throughout the technological development process. Recognise the importance of protecting intellectual property rights to incentivise innovation while also enhancing cooperative action to facilitate the widespread adoption of digital and green technologies. Promote policies that account for the protection of intellectual property and the need for open access to technologies that contribute to global climate goals.

7. Encouraging Sustainable Consumer Practices: Promote awareness and education on sustainable digital consumption and practices among consumers.

8. Sharing Best Practices: Leverage existing mechanisms and develop and implement new mechanisms that facilitate the sharing of best practices, including both good policy practices and effective technology applications, among countries in using digital technologies to reduce GHG emissions and enhance adaptation and resilience. By creating platforms for knowledge exchange and fostering international collaboration, we can ensure that successful initiatives, both in policy and technology, are replicated and adapted to diverse contexts, thereby accelerating global progress toward achieving climate and environmental goals. ▪

Source: Green Digital Action.

Artificial Intelligence: Setting boundaries, striking balances

Jim McDonnell

A year is a long time in the world of AI. Back in the halcyon days of the Bletchley Park Summit on Internet Safety in 2003, the great and the good of the AI world convened to discuss and debate the future regulation of AI and to out its benefits for humanity. Since those days the number of AI applications has proliferated and the boundaries of what might be achieved by AI systems has expanded so much that the following year two scientists working with the Google search engine DeepMind could win the Nobel Prize for chemistry.[1]

The rapid spread of AI over the past year or so has been dramatic but perhaps not noticed so much by those who have begun to take AI use for granted. The majority of people working with AI in offices, healthcare, businesses and academia have taken up the use of AI at an unprecedented rate. Voice assistants (e.g., Siri, Alexa, Google Assistant) are estimated to be used by over 4 billion people as of 2024. In addition, the market for specialised AI assistants continues to grow and develop. Among the well-known names are Chat GPT, Microsoft Co-Pilot, Google Gemini, Claude, and Perplexity. These AI assistants show the advances made in natural language processing and integration with a variety of services.

Of course, these developments, like all technological advances, disproportionately work to the advantage of those already open to such

technological change. As ever, the take up among the poorest segments of society and unskilled workers in the Global South is skewed by the nature of the relatively unskilled work that they are required to perform for minimum wages.

AI is bad news for the Global South

The coming wave of technology is set to worsen global inequality. That is the stark message which Rachel Adams, the CEO of the Global Centre on AI Governance, and author of *The New Empire of AI: The Future of Global Inequality* wants to tell.[2] In a thoughtful analysis for the journal *Foreign Policy*, Adams comments that advocates for AI celebrate its potential to decode intractable global challenges and even end poverty, but its achievements are meagre. Instead, global inequality is now set to rise. Countries that are readily able to incorporate AI into industry are set to see rising economic growth. But the rest of the world will be left further and further behind.

AI designed on largely English-language data is not often fit for purpose outside of wealthy Western contexts. The outputs they produce for non-Western users and contexts are often useless, inaccurate, and biased. Without stable internet access or smartphone technology, only 25% of people in sub-Saharan Africa have reliable internet access, and African women are 32% less likely to use mobile internet than their male counterparts.

In 2017, PwC attempted to put a price on the value AI would bring to national economies and global GDP. In a seminal report the consulting firm boasted that by 2030, AI would contribute $15.7 trillion to the global economy. China, North America, and Europe stand to gain 84% of this prize. The remainder is scattered across the rest of the world, with 3% predicted for Latin America, 6% for developed Asia, and 8% for the entire block of "Africa, Oceania and other Asian markets".

Following the advent of generative AI technologies such as OpenAI's GPT series, McKinsey estimated that this new generation of AI would increase the productive capacity of AI across industries by 15 to 40%. McKInsey identified sectors and productive functions set to achieve the most growth – high-tech industries (tech, space exploration, defence), banking, and retail.

By contrast, the industry likely to see the least growth is agriculture, Africa's largest sector, and the major source of livelihoods and employment on the continent. Nevertheless, Adams is able to point to a growing number of cases demonstrating AI's value in African agro-industries. In Tanzania, a researcher is using generative AI technologies to create an app for local farmers to receive advice on crop diseases, yields, and local markets to sell their produce. In Ghana, experts at the Responsible AI Lab are designing AI technologies to detect unsafe food.

But despite the efforts of African pioneers, as AI is adopted across industries, human labour for poorer countries is changing. There is now a new race to the bottom. Adams notes that machines are cheaper than humans and cheap labour that was once offshored is now being onshored back to wealthy nations. Collectively, the global south is home to just over 1% of the world's top computers, and Africa just 0.04%.

Generative AI technologies threaten the rising middle class in developing contexts. The World Bank estimates that up to 5% of jobs are at risk of full automation from generative AI in Latin America and the Caribbean and that women are most likely to be affected.

While AI creates uncertainty for the poor, argues Adams, we are witnessing the largest transfer of income to the top brackets of society. According to Oxfam two-thirds of all the wealth generated between 2020 and 2022 was amassed by the richest one percent. And the richest is the new class of tech billionaires. AI designed to generate profit and entertainment only for the already privileged, will not be effective in addressing the conditions of poverty and in changing the lives of groups that are marginalized from the consumer markets of AI.

Adams concludes that the costs for poorer nations to catch up in the AI race are too great.

Public spending may be diverted from critical services such as education and health care. Without a high level of saturation across major industries, and without the infrastructure in place to enable meaningful access to AI by all people, global south nations are unlikely to see major economic benefits from the technology.

Another author who stresses the potential downsides of AI is James Muldoon. In a recent book, *Feeding the Machine: The Hidden Human Labour Powering AI*, (London: Canongate, 2024)[3] written with Mark Graham and Callum Cant, James Muldoon highlights seven key issues that need to be addressed: the hidden army of low-paid, often poorly treated workers in the Global South; the continuation of colonial power dynamics in AI supply chains; AI as an "extraction machine" profiting from human labour and resources; generative AI's theft of creative work; the rise of a powerful "Big AI" conglomerate; the significant environmental cost of AI; and the need for collective political action to redress these inequalities. Ultimately, Muldoon aims to expose the ethical and social costs of AI development, urging a fundamental shift in power dynamics to create a more equitable and sustainable future for AI.

Super intelligent AI – a real threat?

Geoffrey Hinton, often called the "Godfather of AI," laid the foundation for today's artificial intelligence systems. His research on neural networks has paved the way for current AI systems like Chat GPT-4. In artificial intelligence, neural networks are systems that are similar to the human brain in the way they learn and process information. They enable Artificial Intelligence to learn from experience, as human beings would. He has recently sparked intense debate about the potential risks of super intelligent AI systems.

In a recent BBC interview with broadcaster Matthew Syed, Hinton expressed his growing worries about the potential for AI systems to emerge that will eventually challenge human agents. AI, he said, is more like people than conventional machine learning and GPT-4 for example knows more than any one person. He believes that AI systems are approaching or may have already surpassed human-level intelligence in certain aspects and is worried that "bad actors" may find ways to manipulate and destabilise our systems. He has even warned that autonomous weapons could be active on the battlefields of the future.[4]

AI is now used more and more routinely in healthcare, in education, research and many businesses and is claimed to have made substantial differences to the functioning of these fields. What is less commented upon, however, is the extent to which AI has been inserted into the arena of war and conflict. The ever increasing use of autonomous or semi-autonomous drones has changed the dynamics of the battlefield and led to innovations that enable the development of new, ever more deadly and accurate weapons systems.

In the military race to develop newer and ever more sophisticated weapons the voices of those who urge restraint, and call for restraints to minimize civilian casualties and refrain from targeting civilian infrastructure fall, as too often in times of war, on deaf ears. As ever, the victims of war and terror, have only limited options to flee, if they can, or to raise their voices in anger and despair.

The contrast between the use of AI as a tool for diagnosis and healing and a weapons system is stark. The temptation then is for the designers and users of AI systems to place the weapons issue into its own box where it will not impinge upon what is being done elsewhere. But leaving the AI tool chest unopened and in the hands of the "experts" who claim the right to determine what is relevant and important in these situations, is not a solution. The AI world is complex, but its complexity is not an excuse for ignoring the darker side of technological developments, such as global warming.

From super Intelligence to superagency

Another author who has entered the debate about the future of AI technologies is Reid Hoffman,

the creator of LinkedIn. Hoffman's book, *Superagency: What could Possibly go Right with our AI Future*,[5] is the optimistic antithesis to the concerns raised by Hinton, Adams and Muldoon. Hoffmann is less fearful than Hinton and more optimistic about the possibilities opened up by AI technologies to enable people to do more.

He envisages AI as a transformative general purpose technology which people will be free to use as they wish and which will empower capabilities and adaptations to cascade through society. Hoffman does recognize that there will be many different kinds of trade-offs as society learns how to balance the competing demands that will inevitably arise as people try to determine the boundaries between different versions of the good, e.g. privacy and security, free speech and protecting minors and adults alike from abuse and hatred, more surveillance in the cause of safety and more or less tolerance for behaviours which are deemed to be risky and anti-social, In Hoffman's vision the range of possibilities to be considered is growing all the time.

With AI, intelligence is a tool, but who will get to use it and for what purposes and in what contexts? The future that Hoffman envisages will need people to think long and hard about values of freedom, autonomy, privacy, human agency and the need to balance innovation with regulation. In an interview last year, Hoffman also underlined that people in the global South too need to be recognized as potential partners in developing appropriate technologies if the potential benefits of AI are to be realised.

Hoffman commented: "When developing AI applications, such as medical assistants, it's crucial to create versions that serve both affluent markets and those with fewer resources…. If you make a medical assistant, don't just provision it to people who might be able to pay you much more money than people in the Global South. Figure out how to do a version that also helps the Global South, even though the Global South may be poorer than a first-world market."[6]

While we are busy contemplating the ethical implications of super intelligent AI, we are in danger of neglecting and underplaying the very real and present dangers posed by our current technological dependencies. AI is already more capable and more embedded in our systems than most of us realise. The chief security officer of Amazon, CJ Moses, has spoken about how generative AI is being used in efforts to disrupt critical infrastructure. In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* he commented that that Amazon is seeing on average, 750 million disruptive attempts per day. Previously, they had seen about 100 million hits per day, and that number has grown to 750 million over six or seven months.[7]

Dealing with complex and vulnerable systems

The Amazon example shows that the world is facing a challenge of dealing with complex and vulnerable systems and attempts to disrupt them. This has to mean that we start "de-complexifying" our digital systems. New risks can emerge due to the complications and interplays of components and applications. In July 2024 the US cybersecurity company CrowdStrike released a software update which affected over 8 million computers running Microsoft Windows. The near global cyber failure which followed was triggered by the over-reliance of Microsoft-driven systems on CrowdStrike services; a stark reminder that our most pressing vulnerabilities lie not in the realm of science fiction but in the intricate web of digital systems that power our daily lives.[8]

In a post on the Diplo website, Jovan Kurbalija commented: "Taming these systems requires a mix of regulatory, standardisation, and awareness-building actions and initiatives. …. We can work towards a safer and more resilient digital future by holding tech companies accountable, implementing robust legal frameworks, fostering international cooperation, and rebalancing our focus between future risks and present vulnerabilities."[9]

Because no one state (or more appropriately, the private corporations of one state) control the entirety of the infrastructure of cyberspace, Laura De Nardis argues that the problems sur-

rounding cyber vulnerabilities, and the diffusion of insecure cyber-enabled technologies, requires a multilateral approach. She argues that cybersecurity is a growing human rights issue not least because control of cyber-physical infrastructure is a proxy for state power. She stresses that greater clarity surrounding liability and jurisdiction in the cyber-physical space is needed – and quickly.[10]

The worries that Hinton, Adams, De Nardis and others express deserve to be taken seriously. This does not mean, however, that every apocalyptic view of future AI development will inevitably come to pass. A strong pragmatic counter voice is provided by one of the pioneers of AI, Mustafa Suleyman, the author of the influential book, *The Coming Wave: Technology, Power, and the Twenty-first Century's Greatest Dilemma* and one of the main promoters of the case for dealing with potential harms through more and better regulatory action.[11] At the end of 2023 he commented in an interview with *Fortune* magazine that there are "more practical issues that we should all be talking about, from privacy to bias to facial recognition to online moderation".[12]

Suleyman argues that to bring AI regulation to fruition, there is a need for a combination of broad, international regulation to create new oversight institutions and smaller, more granular policies at the "micro level". These remarks carry even more resonance today, following the latest announcements by Meta and Mark Zuckerberg, that they are abandoning their responsibilities for fact checking.[13]

Suleyman believes that a first step that all aspiring AI regulators and developers can take is to limit "recursive self-improvement" or AI's ability to improve itself. Limiting this specific capability of artificial intelligence would be a critical first step to ensure that none of its future developments were made entirely without human oversight. "You wouldn't want to let your little AI go off and update its own code without you having oversight," Suleyman said. "Maybe that should even be a licensed activity – you know, just like for handling anthrax or nuclear materials."

Without governing some of the minutiae of AI, inducing at times the "actual code" used, legislators will have a hard time ensuring their laws are enforceable. "It's about setting boundaries, limits that an AI can't cross." To make sure that happens, governments should be able to get "direct access" to AI developers to ensure they don't cross whatever boundaries are eventually established. Some of those boundaries should be clearly marked, such as prohibiting chatbots from answering certain questions, or privacy protections for personal data.[14] ▪

Notes

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Haarlem Declaration 2024

Championing Artificial Intelligence (AI) for advancing inclusive, safe, and reliable digital media spaces!

As a global community of digital media makers – including independent media organizations, journalists, digital content creators and civil society groups using digital media for social impact – we recognize that AI technologies, and generative AI in particular, is actively and rapidly influencing, shaping and transforming the digital media ecosystem. Its influence extends across all aspects of content creation, curation, recommendation, moderation, distribution, promotion, and audience analytics.

While AI technology offers the potential to make routine and labour-intensive digital media processes and functions more efficient, streamlined and cost-effective, its deployment also introduces significant risks. Already visible is the disruption of the digital media ecosystem through the proliferation of misinformation, an erosion of human oversight in editorial decision-making, and the displacement of media workers. As a result, there is an urgent need for a value-driven, responsible and ethics-based approach to integrating AI technologies across digital media work and organisations.

In lieu of the adoption of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) by the United Nations Member States in September 2024, at the Summit of the Future which outlines as part of its broader key objectives to, "fostering an inclusive, open, safe, and secure digital space that respects, protects and promotes human rights; advancing responsible, equitable and interoperable data governance approaches; and enhancing international governance of artificial intelligence for the benefit of humanity", it is imperative that we, as digital media practitioners, take a proactive stance. We must commit towards using this powerful technology, in its application(s) to digital media, for advancing public good, and in service of the public interest.

We, therefore, under the ambit of Haarlem Declaration 2024, commit to deploying and utilizing all forms of AI-powered tools and technologies, in relation to digital media, in accordance with the following values and principles:

1. Ensuring transparency and explainability

- Human Accountability: Maintain transparency about how AI contributes to tasks and decision-making processes across individual, programmatic, and organizational levels.
- Explainable tools: Prioritise the use of AI tools that provide clear, understandable explanations for their recommendations, data privacy settings and data consent management.
- Continuous Education: Educate ourselves and relevant stakeholders about AI functionalities, potential biases, and limitations to enable greater transparency and better inform our decisions.

Examples in practice:

- We commit to conveying to our stakeholders and audiences how AI is utilized in content production, curation, distribution, and audience analytics practices.
- We commit to urge AI developers to prioritise explainability and accessibility in Ai systems designs, and we, as digital media practitioners, commit to sharing this information in an engaging and understandable way to promote public good and foster informed dialogue.

2. Promoting ethical data practices

- Protect personal Information: Ensure all AI applications comply with data protection laws and safeguard sensitive data.
- Data Minimization: Limit data collection to what is necessary for specific, clearly defined purposes.

- Consent and agency: Obtain informed consent for data use, providing users with transparent, accessible privacy policies that clearly outline how data is collected stored, used, shared, and deleted. Enable users to exercise control and agency over their data with opt-in and opt-out options.

Examples in practice:

- We commit to implementing AI tools that have clear terms and processes for data collection and use – including having an opt-in and opt-out options in place.
- We commit to calling on AI developers to design tools and systems that prioritize data diversity and inclusivity, guided by frameworks of informed consent and privacy protections.
- We commit to openly communicating to our audiences and stakeholders what types of data we collect, the purpose behind the collection, and how we use this data, whether for content curation, data analytics, or other applications.

3. Safeguarding Information Integrity & Content Authenticity

- Validate AI Outputs: Implement comprehensive fact-checking protocols for all content generated, curated, or recommended by AI systems to ensure its reliability
- Avoid and minimize misinformation: Establish safeguards in our processes to ensure that all AI-supported communications are factual, non-harmful, and support the aims of the European Union.
- Quality Control: Develop and adhere to content standard that prioritise accuracy, credibility, and contextual integrity before dissemination.

Examples in practice:

- We commit to upholding journalistic integrity and accuracy, ensuring that AI-generated content adheres to the same standards of truth as human-produced content.
- We commit to respecting the intellectual property rights of independent media and refrain from using our content to train their AI models without explicit permission or financial compensation.
- We commit to full transparency, when AI tools have been used to create or support digital content – be it text, audio, visual, captions, etc.) as well as for fundraising purposes (proposal development, positioning and visibility documents, etc.)
- We commit to upholding necessary measures and knowledge sharing to uphold the content provenance and authenticity.

4. Minimizing Bias, Harm, and Discrimination in use of AI tools

- Assess AI Applications: Regularly evaluate AI tools to identify, mitigate, and address potential biases that could result in unjust or discriminatory outcomes.
- Promote Fairness: Use diverse datasets and inclusive algorithmic designs to ensure AI systems treat users equitably and prevent the perpetuation of harmful and discriminatory stereotypes.
- Human Oversight: Maintain active human supervision to monitor and correct biased AI outputs ensuring alignment with human rights principles.

Examples in Practice:

- We consciously implement AI for content moderation in ways that uphold freedom of expression while effectively countering harmful content such as hate speech and disinformation.
- We commit to ensuring that AI-driven content moderation processes we use are transparent, accountable, and free from bias.
- We commit to using AI in content curation to promote a diversity of perspectives, providing relevant and inclusive content to our audiences while actively avoiding the reinforcement of echo chambers or perpetuate inequality.
- We commit to calling on AI developers to design AI systems that prioritize data diversity

and inclusivity, ensuring that marginalized and underrepresented groups are meaningfully included in algorithmic decision-making.

5. Centring people over technology

- Assess Impact on Roles: Evaluate how AI implementation may affect staff positions and responsibilities and ensure that any transformation is managed with a people-first approach.
- Support Staff Transition: Provide training, upskilling, and development opportunities to adapt to new technologies.
- Balance Automation and Human Touch: Use AI to enhance, not replace, human expertise, creativity, and interaction.

Examples in Practice:

- We commit to ensuring that human oversight remains a central feature in all AI processes, ensuring accountability and enabling intervention in cases of error or harm.

- We commit to ensuring that all AI systems are regularly audited and updated to meet evolving ethical standards and societal needs.

- We commit to using AI in content production to enhance creativity and efficiency while ensuring that human oversight remains integral to the editorial process.

- We commit to collaborative knowledge, learning and sharing, including with other media organizations, AI developers, and policymakers to share knowledge and best practices in AI use, including its impact on people who utilize these tools.

- We call on governments and regulatory bodies to establish clear guidelines and frameworks that support the ethical use of AI in media, while safeguarding freedom of the press and human rights.

6. Balancing environmental impact of AI use

- Energy Consumption: Recognise the energy demands of AI applications, especially those requiring significant computational power, and actively seek to minimize their carbon footprint.
- Eco-Friendly Options: Opt for AI tools that prioritize reduction of environmental impact efficiency.
- Green Policies: Embed sustainability considerations into procurement and operational policies pertaining to deployment and use of AI tools.

Examples in Practice:

- We commit to integrating a climate and environmental lens into our strategy and implementation processes to promote mindful use of AI technologies and applications in everyday work.

- We commit to engaging in collaborative knowledge sharing with other media organizations and our audiences to raise awareness about the environmental impact of AI. This includes supporting and highlighting marginalized narratives and counter-narratives on this pressing and intersecting topic.

Practical Commitments

To realise these principles and values in practice and action, we propose to strive towards implementing the following practical commitments:

- Learn, Share, Deliberate and Empower: as individuals and a collective, about using AI ethically and responsibly through open and accessible dialogue, learning circles, and lived experiences in relation to using AI in our everyday digital media work
- Shape & Amplify Diverse Narratives: Utilize the power of digital media to influence existing, and shape diverse, marginalised, and counter narratives about AI with our respective audiences, online and offline to inform opinions, decisions and actions
- Co-document our stories of AI practice: over time, for internal and external mutual reflection on the varying trajectories and outcomes resulting from application of AI in digital

media work, including human experience of using AI technology

- Ethical AI Checklist: Operationalise ethical and responsible use of AI in digital media work by co-drafting and implementing an ethical AI checklist to regularly monitor, course-correct, promote and ensure ethical use of AI across various digital media tasks, processes and functions
- Produce Evidence-Backed Research of both positive and negative implications of AI in digital media – spanning areas of information integrity/disorder, displacement of media workers, propagation of bias resulting from use of AI in a digital media process/function, etc.
- Collectively Advocate with/towards our peers and stakeholders in (digital) media ecosystem, where relevant, on minimizing harms and promoting ethical and responsible use of AI in digital media and by digital media actors, including donors and funders.

We, the undersigned, believe that these actions – rooted in our shared values and principles – will ensure that as digital media makers, we remain both alert and informed about existing and forthcoming changes in AI and technology (more broadly). Together, we will continue to co-create, enable, and sustain, inclusive, safe, and reliable digital media spaces for all.

Source: https://www.rnw.media/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Haarlem-Declaration-2024-English-and-French.pdf WACC has signed the Haarlem Declaration 2024.

Contextualizing Indian newspaper coverage of Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts

Sudeshna Roy

Media representations significantly shape public opinion and political discourse. In India, The Times of India and The Hindu are pivotal in influencing and reflecting public sentiment and government policies. By examining their coverage of the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts, we can gain insights into the interplay between media, politics, ideology, and their impact on international and intercultural relations.

The following study employs intercultural communication theories and critical discourse analysis to evaluate newspaper portrayals of war within the broader context of India's strategic relationships with Russia and Israel and the changing domestic political ideologies. The paper strives to understand the shifting media narratives as well as explore how Indian cultural perspectives shape the interpretation of foreign conflicts.

India's relationships with Russia and Israel

India shares a long-standing strategic partnership with Russia, encompassing defence, energy, and industry (Menon & Rumer, 2022). Conversely,

India's relationship with Israel has grown significantly since the 1990s, with robust cooperation in defence, agriculture, and technology (Blarel, 2015). These relationships are multifaceted and have evolved significantly over time, influenced by historical ties, strategic interests, and shifting geopolitical landscapes. The rise of Hindutva ideology, a form of Hindu nationalism promoted primarily by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its ideological parent, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), has added a new dimension to these relationships, specifically positioning Israel as a valuable ally in the fight against perceived common threats, such as Islamist extremism (Jaffrelot, 2007). Hidutva advocates of the primacy of Hindu culture and values, positioning them as the defining features of Indian culture.

India and the Soviet Union shared a strong partnership during the Cold War, marked by mutual interests in balancing the influence of China and the United States in Asia. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia inherited this relationship. Both nations continued to cooperate closely, particularly in defence and security domains. Russia's principle of non-interference aligns well with Hindutva's foreign policy stance, which often emphasizes sovereignty and non-intervention, reflecting a shared interest in opposing Western hegemony. The Hindutva-driven government has sought to strengthen cultural ties with Russia, including promoting yoga and Indian cultural events, which resonate with Russia's interest in cultural diplomacy. In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, which it termed a "special military operation". The invasion sparked widespread international condemnation and led to severe sanctions against Russia.

India's relationship with Israel has undergone quite the change since the 1950s. A strong supporter of the Palestinian cause, India did not have formal diplomatic relations with Israel until 1992 (Blarel, 2015). The cautious relationship with Israel was also due to concerns about alienating India's large Muslim population and the broader Arab world. However, the rise of Hindutva has fostered closer ties with Israel, driven in part by a shared experience of dealing with terrorism and security issues. The BJP and Likud party in Israel often share a rapport based on nationalist ideologies. On October 7, 2023, war broke out between Israel and Hamas. More than 50,000 Palestinians have been killed, mostly women and children, in the one year since the beginning of the war and 1,200 Israelis have also died.

The Times of India and *The Hindu* and the rise of Hindutva ideology

The term "Hindutva" refers to a form of Hindu nationalism in India, primarily propagated by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliates, including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The rise of Hindutva has had significant social, political, and cultural implications in India and has garnered substantial attention both domestically and internationally.

The Times of India is one of India's highest-circulating English-language newspapers, often perceived as having a centrist-right stance (Pain, 2018). It tends to focus on the political and economic implications of Hindutva policies. It does provide detailed reports on the BJP's strategies, victories, and policies. It may cover controversies and social issues related to Hindutva, often with a focus on political impacts. *The Times of India* might be expected to focus on international perspectives more through the lens of India's global image, trade relations, and foreign policy.

The Hindu, known for its intellectual rigor and comprehensive reporting, is viewed as adopting a more left-centrist perspective (Ninan, 2007). It critically examines the rise of Hindutva and its implications for secularism, social justice, and minority rights. *The Hindu* is more likely to contextualize Hindutva within global trends of nationalism and right-wing politics, drawing comparisons with similar movements worldwide. These newspapers thus provide contrasting editorial lenses through which international conflicts can be analysed.

Intercultural Communication Theories

The application of intercultural theories, specifically third-culture building and cultural convergence theory, can provide insightful lenses through which to examine the coverage of international conflicts.

Third-Culture Building

This concept explores how communication creates new, shared cultural understandings (Casrnir, 1999). It aids in examining how Indian media integrates local and global narratives. Within the scope of this study, we might encounter that both newspapers are engaging in a form of third-culture building by incorporating a variety of international perspectives and by engaging with diverse sources and voices.

Cultural Convergence Theory

This theory suggests that through sustained intercultural communication and globalization, cultures tend to become more similar over time, adopting shared values and practices. (Barnett & Kincaid, 1983). It helps evaluate the alignment of Indian media coverage with global perspectives. The reporting styles, choice of stories, and frames applied might show convergence towards global journalistic standards, influenced by Western media practices and the ubiquitous nature of digital communication.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

This study employs CDA to examine how language constructs social realities and power dynamics within newspaper articles. By analysing the discourse, we can understand how *The Times of India* and *The Hindu* frame the conflicts and reflect underlying ideological currents (Fairclough, 1995). For this study, only editorials were considered for the data analysis. Editorials reflect how media organizations frame certain issues and what they consider important. Analysing these pieces reveal underlying biases, priorities, and the methods by which media organizations shape public discourse (Entman, 1993).

The data was gathered from online versions of news from the *Times of India* and *The Hindu* for a period of one year after the outbreak of war between Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine using search terms such as, Israel, Palestine, Russia, Ukraine, Muslim, Islam, humanitarian, etc. The dates for Russia-Ukraine war were provided as February 24, 2022, to February 23, 2023. The dates for the Israel-Palestine were provided as October 7, 2023, to October 6, 2024. For the *Times of India*, eight editorials were dedicated to Israel-Palestine war and nine had relevant mention of the Russia-Ukraine war. For *The Hindu*, six editorials mentioned the Russia-Ukraine war with two only having fleeting reference to the war. The Israel-Palestine war yielded eight editorials in *The Hindu* with two having only passing remarks leaving a total number of six.

Analysis: The Times of India

Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Duality of Views

The Times of India's (TOI) coverage emphasizes the geopolitical and economic ramifications for India, with nuanced support for Russia's security concerns, reflecting India's long-standing ties with Russia (Gupta & Sidhartha, 2022). Since Hindutva, as an ideological paradigm, emphasizes the primacy of Hindu culture and values in Indian societal and political life, by situating the conflict within India's strategic interests, the newspaper aligns with a broader Hindutva narrative that prioritizes national security over global ethical considerations. None of the editorials articulated criticism of Russia's decision to wage war in Ukraine.

In the *TOI* coverage, it is easy to identify the balance of coverage avoiding overly critical narratives towards either side to maintain diplomatic poise. For example, Suraiya (2022) writes that "New Delhi's tightrope walk between Moscow and Washington is clear" and emphasizing that India's neutral position on this war might be confusing to outsiders. The confusion arises to those who are not aware of the fact that "Rus-

sia has been a far more reliable ally for India, in terms of military and moral support, than the US… (Suraiya, 2022).” Moreover, the *TOI* editorials repeatedly framed Russia as a longstanding ally as if juxtaposing it against other Western nations that have been more critical of India's domestic policies under BJP rule. Such a stance is evidenced when Bagchi (2022) writes,

> It's not just that India's traditional dependence on Russia that now lies in tatters. At least India can do something about it…. It's not enough for Indian leaders to say this is not India's war. It is rapidly becoming India's war.

Thus, the *TOI* data presented coverage that focused on how the conflict impacts India directly, such as effects on the economy, Indian students in Ukraine, and grain supplies, rather than delving deeply into the conflict's ideological underpinnings abroad.

Israel-Palestine Conflict: Tightropes Galore

The *TOI* exhibits a slight pro-Israel bias, mirroring Hindutva's admiration for Israel's defence policies and nationalist stance (Rahman, 2023). This perspective is evident in articles that highlight Israel's security needs as a democratic nation and take pains to provide historical specificity of the Israeli stance in the war (Arun, 2023; Suraiya, 2023).

> Politics that says Israel can do anything in Gaza and Rafah – because Hamas started it – is uncivil. So is politics that says Israel, a rare democracy in West Asia, be condemned as a nation, and Israelis, many of whom are fierce critics of Netanyahu, be tarred as a people (Chakrabarti, 2024).

However, there were a couple of the editorials that were critical of India's stance on the war, provided vivid description of the crisis in Gaza, and focused on the great suffering that has befallen Palestinians in this war (David, 2023). Such examples humanized the coverage and allowed for readers to visualize the realities of war beyond the geopolitics of India's and, specifically, Modi's stance.

The Hindu

Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Articulating Balance and Criticism of Russia

The Hindu provides a balanced and critical analysis, examining both the humanitarian crisis and international law implications (Srinivasan, 2022). This stance emphasizes ethical journalism over strategic pragmatism, aligning less with Hindutva ideology. One editorial, for example, argues that the “war is hurting, either militarily or economically, all sides…, and that the way forward is a ceasefire followed by peace talks between Russia and Ukraine” (How India looks, 2022). In fact, the editorials call out Vladimir Putin on his continued irrationality in waging the war. *The Hindu* was categorical in pointing out that any concern Modi has expressed about Russia's war *does not* come from a moral or ideological standpoint and that it would be wrong to read Mr. Modi's engagement with Mr. Putin as any kind of “public shaming” (Era of war, 2019).

Israel-Palestine Conflict: Focus on Humanitarian Crisis turned to Searing Criticism of Israel

The Hindu's coverage started off more balanced, critically assessing actions from both sides and focusing heavily on the humanitarian impacts on Palestinians (Johny, 2024). This narrative shifted to searing criticism of Israel as the war progressed and spilled over from month to month. This representation contrasts with the slight pro-Israel bias prevalent in *TOI*, reflecting *The Hindu*'s commitment to liberal values. The editorials repeatedly call out “… Israel's brutal, indiscriminate attack on the defenceless Palestinians” (Bloody Thursday, 2024) and point towards how “Israel has successfully turned Gaza into a bombed-out enclave of death, misery and hunger”.

Discussion

Based on the analysis provided in this study and contextualizing the findings within the scope of intercultural communication theories, the *TOI* seems to aim at building a third culture by con-

textualizing international conflicts within India's strategic interests. For instance, its coverage of the Russia-Ukraine conflict often draws parallels to India's strategic autonomy (Gupta & Sidhartha, 2022). This approach somewhat reinforces Hindutva ideology by framing global events through a nationalist lens. In the Israel-Palestine conflict, the *TOI* aligns with global pro-Israel narratives but adapts them to resonate with Indian nationalist sentiments, emphasizing shared security concerns (Rahman, 2023). Departing from its traditional non-alignment stance, India is opting to maximize its position within the US-led order by prioritizing relations with Israel. India's foreign policy in the Middle East, particularly with Israel, aligns with its wider strategic goals within US-led frameworks. *The Hindu* does not showcase any aspect of third culture building in its reportage of both conflicts.

In terms of the cultural convergence theory, the *TOI* narrative on Russia-Ukraine war shows *selective convergence* with global media in its cautiousness in portraying Russia's security concerns, reflecting alignment with broader geopolitical pragmatism influenced by India's strategic considerations (Gupta & Sidhartha, 2022). *The Hindu* too aligned with this theory but in a very unique way when it came to the Russia-Ukraine war. Its critical assessment of Russia's actions and focus on the humanitarian crisis shows alignment with Western *liberal media*, reflecting convergence towards liberal international values (Srinivasan, 2022).

Coverage of the Israel-Palestine war in *TOI* showcases significant convergence with global pro-Israel narratives, aligning with Hindutva's supportive view of Israel's security policies (Arun, 2023). However, *The Hindu*, with its balanced to heavily critical portrayal of Israel, converges with liberal global media, emphasizing human rights and humanitarian concerns, showcasing cultural convergence towards ethical journalism.

The *TOI* coverage reflects Hindutva ideology through nationalist rhetoric. Its portrayal of the Russia-Ukraine conflict highlights India's strategic interests, subtly favouring Russia, while its pro-Israel bias in the Israel-Palestine conflict aligns with Hindutva's admiration for Israel and aspiration for friendship with the US. The language used often emphasizes strategic aspects, reflecting a pragmatic approach aligned with Hindutva ideology. Terms like "strategic autonomy" and "security concerns" are prevalent, framing conflicts within India's national interests (Gupta & Sidhartha, 2022).

The Hindu, one the other hand, maintains journalistic integrity by providing balanced and critical coverage. Its focus on humanitarian issues and ethical considerations signifies resistance to ideological influence, promoting a more liberal discourse. The discourse makes use of terms such as "humanitarian crisis", "international law", and "ethical journalism". This language reflects a commitment to balanced reporting and liberal values, often critiquing Russia and Israel for unnecessarily inflicting indiscriminate harm on vast number of innocent lives (Hasan, 2024; Johny, 2024).

Conclusion

The present comparative analysis reveals significant differences in the coverage of the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts between the *TOI* and *The Hindu*. The influence of Hindutva on the *TOI*'s portrayal of the Russia-Ukraine war is slight, but it is there. However, Hintuva influence is more pronounced in coverage of the Israel-Palestine war that emphasizes strategic interests and nationalist rhetoric. *The Hindu* maintains a balanced to critical (of power) approach, focusing on humanitarian and ethical considerations. The application of intercultural communication theories and critical discourse analysis highlights the role of media in shaping and reflecting cultural and political ideologies. It reveals that the cultural perspective behind the interpretation of foreign wars is not monolithic but diversified and layered, reflecting the various cultures within Indian society, including those of media's political leanings. Future research could extend this analysis by incorporating audience reception studies to gauge public perception influenced by such media coverage. ▪

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ON THE SCREEN

Leipzig (Germany) 2024

At the DOK Leipzig – 67th International Film Festival for Documentary and Animated Film (29 October to 3 November 2024), the Interreligious Jury, appointed by INTERFILM and SIGNIS, awarded its Prize of € 2.000, donated by the VCH-Hotel Michaelis in Leipzig as well as the Interreligious Round Table and the Oratorium Leipzig, to *Twice into Oblivion* (L'oubli tue deux fois) directed by Pierre Michel Jean (France, Haiti, Dominican Republic, 2023).

Motivation: The film impressively shows how challenging it is to communicate about suffering and does not leave you cold. The documentary provides the tools for constructive and emotional communication that opens the path of forgiveness. At a time when hatred and aggression are loud, the film shows that it can also work differently.

Synopsis: Many people are unaware of the "Parsley Massacre" against the Haitian people of the Dominican Republic in 1937. Only a few, very elderly survivors in Haiti talked about it and their voices were finally heard now with this documentary. These old people are jewels for this film and were the impetus for young actors, dancers and artists from both countries to deal with this tragedy. The film director chose this artistic project for this process of reappraisal.

Members of the 2024 Jury: Blandine Brunel, France; Andreas Köhler-Anderegggen, Switzerland (president); Kadija Leclere, Belgium; Gabriella Meros, Germany.

Cottbus (Germany) 2024

At the 34th Festival of East European Cinema, Cottbus, 5-10 November 2024, the Ecumenical Jury, appointed by INTERFILM and SIGNIS, awarded its Prize to *Dobra djeca* (Good Children) directed by Filip Peruzović (Croatia, 2024).

Motivation of the Jury: We were impressed by the unagitated und quiet presenting of different approaches to grieve together with the sounds of the house and nature, which repeatedly dissolved into silence. That created a unique atmosphere. We were also struck by the complex sibling relationship on the one hand, which at the same time was reflected in the simplicity of the visual and cinematic language.

Synopsis: Sadness felt by the heart, and a feeling of alienation in the soul: their mother has passed away. Now the parental home has to be cleared. For the daughter and son, themselves now grown old, a journey into the past, amidst the removal boxes and the thousands of leftover objects, begins. Only slowly do they grow closer again.

Members of the 2024 Jury: Inês Mendes Gil, Portugal; Christian Olding, Germany; Gabriella Rácsok, Hungary; Kathrin Rudolph, Germany.

Lübeck (Germany) 2024

At the 66th Nordic Film Days Lübeck held 6-10 November 2024, the INTERFILM Jury awarded the Church Film Prize, endowed with €5,000 by the Evangelical Church District Lübeck-Lauenburg, to the film *Ljósbrot* (When the Light Breaks) directed by Rúnar Rúnarsson (Iceland, Netherlands, Croatia, France, 2024).

Motivation: The INTERFILM jury awarded its prize to a movie that portrays different stages of grief condensed in a single day, while stressing how important it is to share it within a community, to look out for each other and to find your neighbour where you least expect it. The film not only tells a relevant story in a visually impressive way, but also shows how a church can make you fly.

Members of the 2024 Jury: Julia Helmke, Germany; Johannes Rydinger, Sweden; Lilly Schaack, Germany; Eva Valvo, Italy.

Mannheim-Heidelberg (Germany) 2024

At the 73rd International Film Festival Mannheim-Heidelberg 7-17 November 2024, the Ecumenical Jury, appointed by INTERFILM and SIGNIS, awarded its Prize, endowed with € 2500 by the Catholic German Bishops' Conference (DBK) and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), to the film *Bound in Heaven (Kun bang shang tian tang)* directed by Xin Huo (China, 2024).

Motivation: They meet in the streets of a big city: the investment banker and the street vendor. At first glance, they could not be more different, yet a deep bond develops between them. Together they rediscover the joy of life. The young couple declare every day a holiday, precisely because they are aware of their own fragility and finiteness. With images of impressive beauty, the film speaks of love, respect, dignity, wishes, tenderness and care. A film that defies death, violence, illness, loneliness and social conventions, yet never drifts into the banal.

Members of the 2024 Jury: Tom Alesch, Luxembourg; Jörg Breu, Germany; Gaëlle Courtens, Switzerland/Italy (President of the Jury).