



Guidebook

Humanizing Environment and Climate Change Stories



The Egyptian Observatory for Journalism and Media

Economic and Social Rights Program

Humanizing Environment and Climate”

“Change Stories

Guidebook

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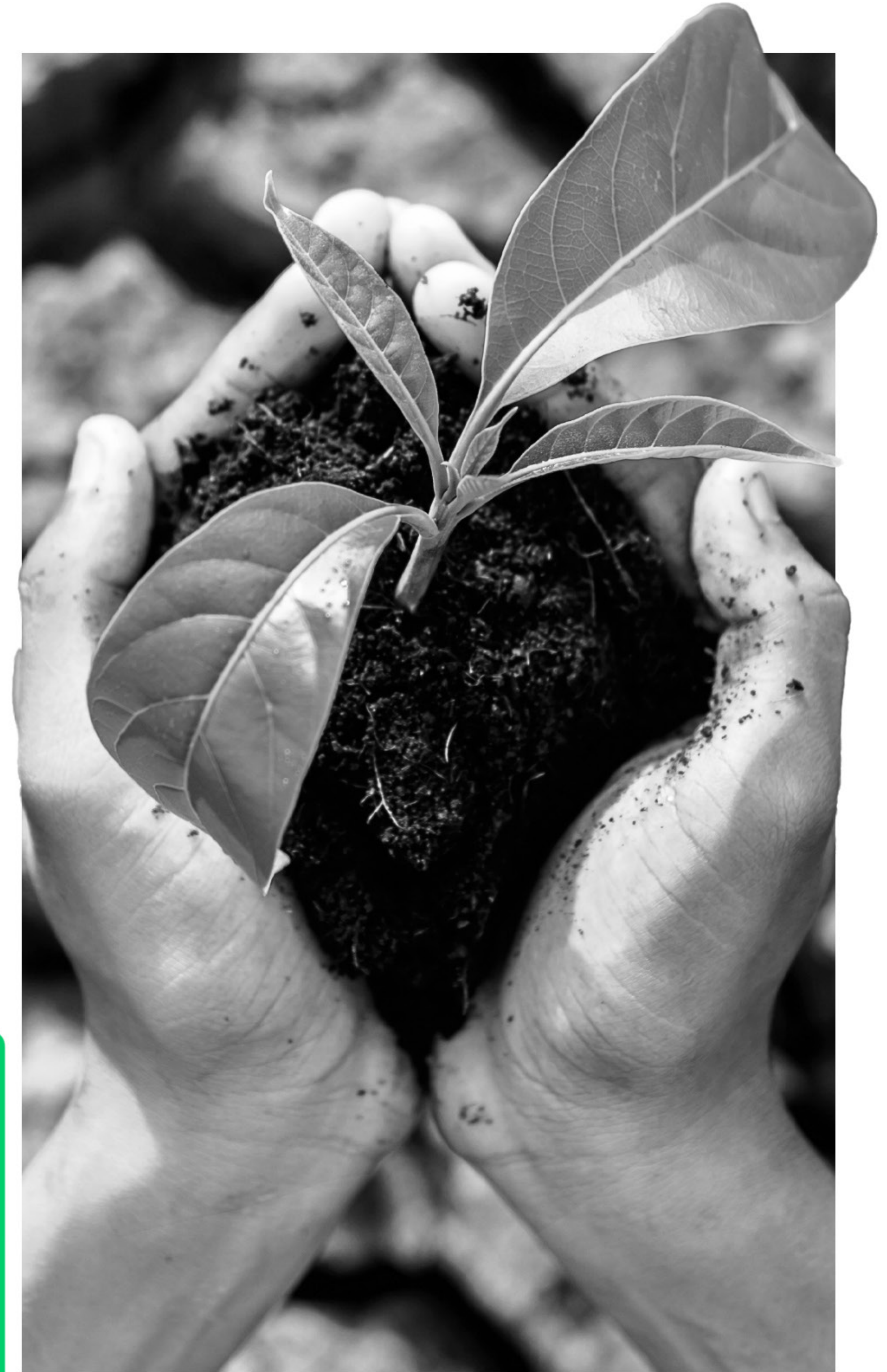
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Introduction

We, as journalists in the Arab region, face many challenges during our work on producing stories related to climate change, on the top of it our ongoing need to use complicated expressions, scientific studies and numbers that we want to use all the time to explain our climatic stories and to measure its impacts.

This guidebook discusses the idea of “humanization of environment and climate change stories”, and the possibility to write the complicated climatic stories with a humanitarian perspective that makes it eventually “a delicious easily digestible meal”.





First

Basic information about climate change

What is climate change?

How does it affect people's lives?

Why do we describe climate change as an "unfair" issue?

What are the sectors that produce the most greenhouse gases in Egypt?



What is climate change?

Climate change is “a long-term changes” in temperatures and weather patterns, since the 19th century, the human activities was the main reason of climate change because of burning fossil fuels, such as; coal, oil and gas.

Burning fossil fuels emits greenhouse gases, such as; carbon dioxide and methane, and it is a blanket that wraps around the globe, trapping the sun’s heat and raising temperatures. The past decade (2011-2020) was the warmest at all.



How does it affect people's lives?

Climate change negatively affects people's lives through its accompanying effects, as it causes severe droughts and leads to water scarcity, thus affecting agriculture and food production, increasing hunger, causing severe fires in some areas, rising sea levels and flooding in other areas, which destroy homes and residents' lives, destroy agricultural crops, and increase the number of homeless and displaced people.

Climate change also causes severe storms, contributes to the decline of biodiversity, and was recently described by the United Nations as "[the greatest](#) health threat facing humanity, after it was expected to cause an additional 250,000 deaths each year due to malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea and heat stress. Its direct health costs are estimated to be between \$2-4 billion annually by 2030.

Climate change causes five major health problems, such as malnutrition as a result of food insecurity after the damage to agriculture, which is one of the reasons that contributed to an increase in the rate of hunger in the Middle East and North Africa by 91.1% than it was twenty years ago, and the number of hungry people in the region reached to 69 million people in 2020.

Due to climate change, storms and floods result in thousands of deaths and injuries, and outbreaks of diseases such as cholera and diarrhea that kill [1,400](#) children daily around the world, and cause the spread of heat stress, and according to a [study](#) published in "Nature" journal, climate change is responsible for 37 % of heat-related deaths between 1991 and 2018.

Due to changing temperatures and rainfall patterns, climate change also changes the geographical distribution of insects that transmit infectious diseases such as malaria and dengue fever.


Why do we describe climate change as an "unfair" issue?

Climate change is a very "unfair" issue, and around this idea revolves a lot of discussions about achieving "climate justice".

About [10 developed countries](#) emit more than two-thirds of greenhouse gas emissions at 68%, led by China, the United States of America and the European Union, compared to only 3% of emissions from other 100 countries, but the losses and damages resulting from climate change do not know the fairness of distribution, and therefore Developing countries suffer from the greatest impacts due to their weak financial and technological capabilities and the unpreparedness of their infrastructure to deal with all these disasters. According to the Meteorological Organization's [Atlas](#) of Deaths and Loss from Extreme Events, developing countries accounted for 91% of deaths from global climate change, out of more than two million cases reported between 1970 and 2020.

For this reason, "climate finance" is the first pillar of the issue, and the element that occupies the forefront of discussions in global climate conferences to discuss the commitment of developed countries to finance developing countries to help them reduce carbon emissions, and most importantly, support them to adapt to the damages of climate disasters.





What are the sectors that produce the most greenhouse gases in Egypt?

In Egypt, there are four main sectors producing carbon emissions, the first of which is the “energy sector” with 64.5% due to fossil fuel combustion activities, while the second sector is “agriculture” with 14.9% through enteric fermentation processes, animal manure treatment, flooding rice cultivation, Agricultural soil management and burning agricultural residues in the fields. The third sector is “industrial processes” with a percentage of 12.9%, such as production factories of cement, lime, iron and steel, and the fourth sector is “wastes” at 8.10%, which includes the disposal of solid waste, and the treatment of domestic and industrial wastewater.

Source: Egypt's Convention with UN on Climate Change Report 2018, the most recent statistic until now.

On the other hand, there are three main sectors exposed to the risks of climate change in Egypt, on top of which are the water resources and irrigation sector, because climate change changes the degree of rainfall intensity, and increases the risk of floods or droughts. The second sector is agriculture, as it causes a decrease in agricultural production, desertification or salinity of land, and the spread of agricultural diseases and pests. This sector alone provides job opportunities for 55% of the labor force, and consumes about 80% of the total water resources in Egypt.

The third sector is “coastal protection”, as the Nile delta region is at risk from rising sea levels and extreme weather events caused by climate change.

Second

What do we mean by “humanizing climate change stories”

Humanizing climate change stories means writing from human perspectives, and explaining to readers through real stories how climate change affects their immediate lives, how it relates to their daily food and houses where they live in, the education of their future children, and other impacts.

Human writing benefits your climate story for several reasons:

- Attracts the reader’s attention and pushes him to complete the story, because he is eager to know the story.
- Reduce the complexity of the statistics and figures we use to prove the impact of climate change.
- You make the reader get involved with your story and not feel that what is happening is far from him, and that the issue of climate change is not just a political debate or a crisis that does not concern him, but is at the bottom of the problem and is exposed to its influence all the time.
- It helps simplify the scientific content within the story, because we use a lot of scientific studies and reports that seem complex within the climate stories.

How do we humanize climate change stories?

- The first rule is that the more you read about your story, the more you will be able to capture a different and new human perspective, then look for the stories of people affected by the case you are writing about.
- Select a specific area to write about, and a specific point to process, so you can narrow down the search area where you’re looking to find human stories.
It is also important to choose a standpoint and reshape the story to fit your local community, to fit your audience’s culture and knowledge needs, and to fit the platform you’re working on.
- Link scientific information and statistics to the details of the human story that you narrate. Relate the details together as a piece of art. Do not write too many numbers in one paragraph or successive paragraphs as one dry run. Rather, make the numbers a part of the story that the reader can devour without feeling alienated or bored.
- Don’t exaggerate the numbers. Although statistics are important to power your story, too much of it can dry out and damage it, so stick with the most obvious numbers that support your story.
- Use poignant descriptions or influential comments from the person you are talking about in your human story, because the character’s own expressions bring intimacy and closeness.
- Also, quickly explain and simplify complex climate terms, for example if you use the term ‘mitigation’, explain that it means reducing carbon emissions, and ‘adaptation’ meaning resilience and minimizing the damages of climate change.

Where do we find our human resources?

- 1- Observation and field visits: During your public tours you may pick up an interesting story to write about, or meet someone with an experience that can be linked to climate change, always think about capturing ideas from the broad impacts of climate change around you.
- 2- Join social media groups with those involved in your story, for example if you are writing a story about climate-smart farmers, coal workers, or people in Alexandria, you will find a lot of groups with these people that may help you to find the right person for your story.
- 3- Communicate with civil society organizations and research institutions, as their staff often helps give you a way to communicate with the humanitarian cases you are looking for.

4- Search open source data, there are many websites, research institutions, government and private agencies that provide a wide base of data on climate change, this will help you capture specific angles and may reach human stories, and always think outside the box, there are many angles per story.

5- Ask your colleagues and acquaintances in the area in which you are looking to help you.

When conducting interviews with humanitarian sources:

- Make sure to capture the history of the character comprehensively and briefly at the same time.
- Ask about details that bring intimacy to the story, such as age, number of children, income, feelings in the person's head at the time of the incident, future dreams and challenges he faces.
- Use your favorite character expressions to serve your story without exaggeration

How can you make your story relevant to your local community?

Before preparing your story, think about and define the audience you are addressing well. It is important that the story is of interest to your local reader, because although the climate crisis is a global issue from which no country is spared, its losses and damages vary in shape and scale from country to country.

For example, if I were addressing readers in a developing country, stories about the impact of climate change on rising rates of hunger in their country, or the destruction of health care centers as a result of floods that occurred near them, or the spread of cholera in a neighboring country due to climate change, would be more important. And a priority for him over other stories about a heat wave in British Columbia, or the earthquake in Haiti, or Hurricane Ida in New York. This does not mean that the reader may not be interested in the effects of global climate change in other countries, but you have to catch his interest in some way, talking to him about the impact of the disaster that occurred in America due to climate change on his life as a person living in Egypt, and so on.

This also does not mean that one climate story is more important than another, or that you cannot write about global climate events, but we are talking here about the priorities for your treatment of stories, and the angles that you will focus on when writing for your local readers about climate change, so that you can finally attract their attention to dedicate the time to read your story, and feel that it touches their lives directly and not just a distant event in another country thousands of miles apart.

The format of the story also varies according to the platform on which it is published. There are global platforms that address readers from the whole world, and there are Arab platforms that care about readers in a certain range of Arab countries, and platforms that only care about Egyptian readers, for example.

There are also newspapers that target content for a general reader who needs to simplify the language as much as possible, and other newspapers that target readers who are more specialized and have specific interests. All of these factors determine the standpoint you choose to address, and what kind of human stories you will rely on to humanize your reporting coverage on climate change.

Solutions Journalism: Give Some Hope

Climate change is a huge crisis with negative impacts on all aspects of life. However, over time, readers may refrain from reading climate stories if they are limited to stories of losses, damages and deaths, or at least they will be less affected by it.

We can tackle climate stories with side that offer some hope, such as talking about community initiatives to adapt to climate change, or new projects that will help the transition to renewable energy and emissions mitigation, or early warning systems that will help people prepare in advance for climate change.

Solutions journalism does not mean that we ignore the crisis or claim that it does not exist, nor does it mean that we underestimate its risks and paint a purely rosy picture, but it means that we give some hope by discussing the proposed solutions as well, even if these solutions face different challenges and difficulties.

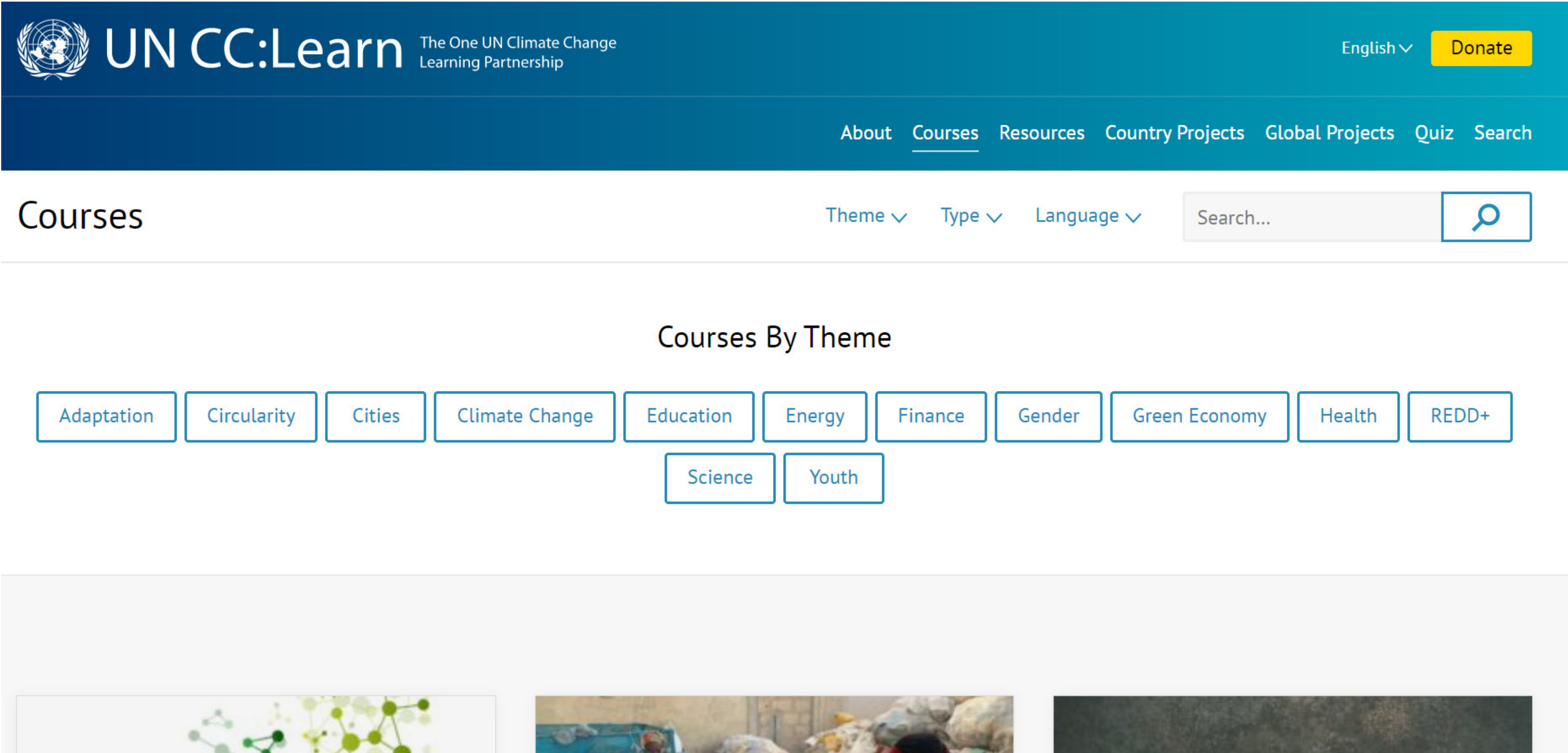
Sources of information you can search to find ideas for climate stories:

Scientific studies and research reports are a real treasure for extracting dozens of ideas for stories related to climate change, especially if the scientific journals are reliable, and if we have studies with a recent publication date, and include strong and influential numbers.

Among the most important sites that survey new scientific studies are:

- sciencedaily
- sciencealert
- eurekaalert
- phys.org

Learning ...a continuous process:



Many institutions provide training courses concerning climate change issues and its various impacts on food, health, women, marginalized groups and other topics, most notably the “UN CC learn” website, which is affiliated with the United Nations, and provides training courses explaining many issues intertwined with climate change, most notably Energy, circular economy, green transition, finance, gender gap, and others.

English is the primary language of the training materials, but some of them are also available in other languages, including Arabic.

By researching this information, and knowing how climate change affects different elements, you will be able to find different ideas for your press stories.

There are also other useful websites to learn more about climate change and pick up new topics and ideas to tackle your stories, such as those of the United Nations organs that give you solid numbers and thorough studies, including the United Nations Climate Change Authority (IPCC), the World Meteorological Organization, and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. FAO, and the World Health Organization.

Look for the intersections of the impact of climate change with other issues

We cannot consider climate change as a separate issue in itself, but rather as an issue that is intertwined and connected to everything in our lives.

For example, climate change affects biodiversity, which in short, means that the universe works in balance and in a complex network, meaning that there are millions of living organisms, including humans, plants, insects and animals, each of them plays a certain role in nature, and when climate change affects one of these elements permeate the entire system. Also, we have been able to work on dozens of stories about sustainability practices at the level of individuals, organizations and countries, and the difference these practices can make in reducing climate change.

If we haven't covered climate issues before, what do we need?

- 1- Extensive reading of data and reports on climate change issued by the United Nations and relevant institutions.
- 2- Extracting ideas from the titles of the sessions in the official websites of the climate conferences.
- 3- Attending conferences, seminars and online training to understand more about the field.
- 4- Researching areas affected by climate change in my country to get ideas for stories of interest to my local community.

Little tips before you start writing your climate stories:

Be logical, and choose applicable ideas.

You should have an initial idea of how to access their sources, because the ability to find human stories suitable for a climate story varies from one journalist to another according to their source base, circles of contacts, and the type of climate issues they are interested in.

Be an expert in your story and don't be in a hurry to start writing.

Do enough preliminary research and read the published news and some scientific studies on the climate issue you want to write about, this will help you understand the topic well, and choose a new and different standpoint.

Put people at the center of your stories.

Discuss in your climate story how the event affects people's daily lives, their future, how it will harm their basic food or affect their economic income and reduce their quality of life? And what solutions have they invented to adapt to climate change? and the challenges they face to make these solutions effective enough, so that for each story you can find many different human angles to write about.

Achieve balance. Don't over-simplify or over-complicate.

Talking about writing in an understandable language to the reader and simplifying scientific concepts does not mean that you overdo it because your story will eventually lose its meaning. At the same time, do not use numbers and scientific terms too extensively or too much as this will make them repulsive and complex,

Don't give up on your thoughts.

Don't give up quickly to realize your ideas, you can always redraw the perspective of the story or develop new sides in it, and find alternative press sources.

Initial ideas can pop up in your head all of a sudden, so keep a dedicated blog or Google Drive file for you to come back to later and do more research to see how you can develop these ideas.

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