

MISSING IN ACTION

Experiences of women with climate journalism

An Oxfam in Pakistan Publication
Written & Compiled by Zofeen Ebrahim



**Australian
Aid** 


OXFAM

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FOREWORD BY MOHAMMED QAZILBASH Country Director Oxfam

Climate change has increased the frequency of natural disasters globally. These disasters are likely to hit the poorest of the poor communities first, and the hardest, even though they are the least responsible for global emissions.

Statistically, women are more likely than men to die during disasters. This disparity is directly linked to the rights of women. The everyday life of a rural woman impacted by climate change is heavily marked by resilience; she is struggling to adapt and find solutions to improve her well-being. Climate change makes a woman's long workday even longer. Socially-constructed roles and responsibilities usually put women at a disadvantage in preparing for climate change. These circumstances contribute to a cycle, where women are unable to participate in decision-making about climate change solutions. They are left out of conversations around adaptation, despite being uniquely placed to provide solutions. Oxfam strongly believes that women with agency and social power can effectively combat the effects of climate change.

Oxfam is working with vulnerable communities to build their resilience. Through our projects, we are promoting climate-smart agricultural practices, alternate livelihood options, and a risk transfer mechanism to help communities address climate change. Oxfam is also encouraging mangrove reforestation for coastal rehabilitation and curbing seawater intrusion. At the same time, we work on supporting women leadership

across different sectors. Our experience has shown that women are effective leaders in tackling climate change and building resilience.

The media is an important player in climate change communication as the general population does not read scientific reports, specialist websites and blogs. Media portrayals have therefore strongly influenced personal and global efforts of mitigation and adaptation. The media framing of these strategies, along with the influence of the government and scientists, literacy in interpreting climate change stories and specific media messages, can either mobilize climate action or cause paralysis.

Journalists often explain complex climate science and legitimize sources. They play a key role in how audiences process climate stories, as they compete with other issues for public attention. The media can engage public audiences in climate change issues, frame climate change opinion and mobilize climate change activists. It is therefore imperative for journalists, especially women, to write about the issue.

Oxfam has been facilitating media dialogues at the provincial level, focused on encouraging journalists to report on social issues. Field reporters, magazine reporters, writers and journalists of electronic media were encouraged to gear their efforts towards unbiased reporting. Oxfam is also trying to address some of the gaps identified in this publication by connecting with journalists involved in ongoing projects on climate change in Sindh and providing them access to local communities. This past year, Oxfam nominated three journalists to participate in a conference for an equitable Asia in Bangkok.

These efforts alone are insufficient. We all must work collectively to address climate change in Pakistan. We need a participatory process, where various actors from civil society, the public and private sectors, academia and NGOs can help to establish regulations and policies. Communicators, media and journalists are key actors in this process. I hope that this publication drives positive action and encourages more women to write on climate change in the future.



FOREWORD BY ZOFEEEN T EBRAHIM

Like so many other journalists, I write about wrongs that I see happening around me. I feel strongly about poverty, inequality and injustice. But I find them closely connected to climate change, migration, human rights, minority and faith issues, women's reproductive rights, conflict and displacements, population, water and energy.

In their quest for stories, journalists often chat with people from other walks of life to elicit information; but rarely from their own. So, when Oxfam asked me to interview five women journalists for this assignment, I was both excited and thrilled. In the process I discovered the person, got a peep into her life, her work and the plethora of challenges a woman journalist faces. I also got to hear interesting stories, the different points of view, beliefs, attitudes and opinions.

In addition, these interviews opened up conversation on their missing role in a fast-changing world where scientists say climate change is affecting everyone, but women more disproportionately. If that is the case, where are their voices?

In the last few years, when I started organizing media workshops and training events on environment and climate change in Pakistan, I realized how difficult it was to come up with a list of journalists with a good gender balance. Was there really a dearth of women journalists in Pakistan? Or was there a dearth of them who write on issues around environment and climate change? Even when invited, many female journalists of good repute were uncomfortable or uninterested in sitting through a whole day listening to experts talking about "water shortages", "glacial melt",

"environmental flows", "loss of biodiversity", "greenhouse gases", "ecology", "SDGs", the list goes on. They just could not connect the dots between these mouthfuls of terminology and the common man. Their stories thus remained devoid of a human face. The same problem was faced when searching for experts for panel discussions, with the result that it would invariably be male-dominated!

Early last year, in my quest to find if there was any truth in my hypothesis, that fewer women journalists are writing on the environment, I carried out a tiny research concentrating on print media alone, to which I belong as well. With the help of students from Habib University, we monitored four newspapers (three English and one Urdu), websites of two media outlets and two English language current affairs monthlies for a span of six months (from January to June 2019), to see how many articles were written by men and how many by women, where scientists and experts were quoted, or where politicians and legislators were referred to, and which gender did the numbers lean towards.

We found 179 (72 per cent) articles written by men as opposed to 69 (28 per cent) by women. In all the articles analyzed, 147 male experts or scientists were quoted, while only 33 females were given space to put forward their point of view. The study also revealed that gender inequalities existed not only in terms of the percentage of news written by women, but the number of times women experts and politicians were quoted.

If there is truth in what the experts are saying, that women are facing a lot more stress in the face of climate-induced catastrophes, with more responsibilities piling up on them for which they do not have the capacity to sustain, then why are we not talking about it? Why are we not presenting them as heroes, given that we are also told that they play a critical role in managing natural resources – water, fuel, food – specially at the household level, both in urban and rural settings. Why do they continue to remain unheard? Neither the common woman nor a female expert or a scientist is brought on the table and asked if she has ideas that can help give the policies, plans and strategies a shot in the arm.

I think it is time for women to take the floor!



INTRODUCTION

Rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and shifting seasons. If there is early spring in one part of the world, there is news of a heat-wave in another. If not that, then we hear of out-of-control bush fires or an onslaught of yet another natural disaster.

Today there is enough scientific evidence to prove that humans are adding heat-trapping gases to the earth's atmosphere through burning fossil fuels. This has led to drastic changes in the climate.

As the world uncomfortably steps into the decade of the 2020s, it is becoming increasingly clear that the carbon emission reduction pledges for 2030, that 184 countries made under the Paris Agreement to keep the planet from warming above 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit (2 degrees Celsius) will not be met.



Pakistan has recently been placed fifth on the Global Climate Risk Index 2019 of countries most vulnerable to climate change by the Germanwatch. This index analyses the extent to which countries and regions have been affected by impacts of weather-related events (storms, floods, heat waves etc.). Pakistan has witnessed 152 extreme weather events between 1999 and 2017.



We know this because the media has been writing about, and broadcasting these events. Sporadic as they may be, more environment and climate stories have made inroads into newspapers and magazines and on the electronic media, than they did a decade ago. And yet, it is not broadcasted enough, and definitely not with the urgency and consistency that is required.

Media often unleashes a flood of coverage and then retreats. There is a deluge of stories, reports and opinion pieces on certain international days pertaining to environment followed by long periods of lull. This is a challenge that writers face globally. But, to be fair, the media has managed to play a small role in shedding the science mantle typically associated with climate change, which is now starting to be seen from the prism of economic, public health, water resources, food insecurity, technology, women and infrastructure.

While adopting this lens has helped, the stories have mostly failed to include everyone's voices, especially those of the vulnerable communities. Accordingly, this collection of case studies aims to explore why fewer women journalists write about climate change and the environment. The voices of five women journalists from various media houses are captured, to understand their role in addressing climate change and the barriers they face when writing about this topic.



**BENAZIR SHAH:
DODGING THE
ENVIRONMENT**

Media organization: Geo Television
Experience: Nine years
Area(s) of Expertise: News Reporting, Editing

In a newsroom where one has to continuously argue that “smog is smog and not fog” and where “slow news days when you could slide in reports on environment and such stuff” are getting fewer and far in between; getting her colleagues excited about covering climate change and the environment is not an easy task, said Benazir Shah, a features editor at Geo Television.

A graduate from Beaconhouse National University in 2007, where she studied film and television, and nine years into the field of journalism, Shah has been both nationally and internationally commended for her work. Back in 2013, she won the U.N. Correspondents Association Award for her cover story with Sami Yousafzai and Shehrbano Taseer on Pakistan’s polio murders. Having worked in both electronic and print media, she said that including stories and reports on environment and climate change continues to be a challenge, “but a conversation has begun to include such segments in some current affairs programmes.”

She also conceded that while print media may be covering the issues around environment and climate change, she has barely seen any “interesting, well researched and attractively-packaged television programmes on Pakistani television channels.” This requires anchors to do quite a bit of homework and reading up, to be able to ask the right questions. “They need to learn themselves, and then inform the common man in a digestible language, which requires careful planning!”

But it does not help if their guests are just as clueless. “There is generally a lack of information amongst politicians and bureaucrats in Pakistan when it comes to climate change,” she said. She gives an example, that lack of official data always posed a problem in reporting on the yearly smog in Lahore.

She emphasizes the dire need for workshops and internal trainings to be conducted, to encourage journalists to take climate action seriously. “I sometimes feel when we want to, we do find the time to dig up facts and information on a story or a report; but I think it boils down to our willingness and priorities.”

She joined Express News soon after graduating, then dabbled in the print medium when she worked at Newsweek from 2012 to 2017. Now she is back in television at Geo.

She has covered a variety of topics that range from politics to rights issues to entertainment. Yet, she said, as a woman she has to push hard to get assigned to stories on politics.

“In the last nine years, I have gained experience in reporting on a range of issues, but despite that, I am still asked to cover entertainment stories or those on children’s rights, since I would, I am told, understand them better. Don’t men have children too? Why wouldn’t they understand these issues?”

And it is perhaps to avoid being pigeon-holed and made to cover softer news like “women’s rights, education, art and climate change” that Shah and other female journalists have “dodged” topics considered to be “traditionally female story areas.”

She does admit, however, that if there is something she has not covered enough, it’s the environment and climate change. “I have not done a lot of writing on these topics,” she said.

But then she countered: “Why should writing on climate change be restricted to a particular gender, when it is imperiling all of us?”. She said she always got a very clear impression in the newsroom, that these issues “raised by the urban elite” were not “pressing ones” that required “urgency” or a journalist’s “immediate attention.” However, she said, the same topic does gain traction if, for example, the schools close due to smog. “Then the news becomes sellable,” said Shah.

At the same time, said Shah, reporting on environment or writing stories on topics related to climate change always works better if done from the field. However, with media organizations facing a serious financial crunch, the tightening of the belt has meant that “reporters are hardly sent on those odd trips to remote parts of Pakistan to report from anymore.”

Additionally, said Shah, reporting on climate change often entails accessing areas that are vulnerable to devastation and not easy to access. **“If women were to travel to these places, in some cases they have to be accompanied by male colleagues.”** She also added that **issues of lodging and safety need to be accounted for, which only newsrooms can ensure.** Shah added that her organization has **“drastically reduced commissioning work to freelancers as well.”**

With plenty of experience of reporting from the field, Shah, as a female reporter, conceded to facing her share of harassment, publicly and privately. “This kind of unsolicited male attention is uncomfortable and a hindrance, especially if you have to keep going back to the same politician and/or official for a comment,” she said.

Along with the financial crisis that Pakistan’s media is grappling with, the other front where they are fighting to keep their head above the water, is press freedom. Many senior journalists have unceremoniously been shown the door. Witnessing one of the darkest periods in decades, most journalists have imposed self-censorship or they risk losing their jobs. “These are seriously dangerous times to be a journalist,” admitted Shah. Coupled with that is the serious financial crunch that media houses are facing while trying to remain credible. “We all are facing serious job security issues.”

Despite the many barriers that she and her colleagues are trying to overcome, including that of mobility (getting to and back from work at odd hours) and braving harassment both at work and on social media (where women are not free from online threats and intimidation), Shah says she “loves being in the media,” is “addicted to news!” and will not exchange it for anything.

A glimpse at her work:

Smothered by smog, Pakistan proposes using “artificial rain” to bring relief

<https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1586991/pakistan>

With record new cases, Pakistan is polio’s final frontier

<https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1564591/pakistan>



HAYA FATIMA IQBAL'S
Insatiable Quest
for Answers

Media organization:
HFI Productions
Experience: Nine years
Area(s) of expertise:
Documentary filmmaking

Long before 32-year-old Haya Fatima Iqbal started working as a documentary filmmaker, she was doing stints in various newsrooms; both print and electronic.

Reporting on issues around human rights and persecution of the marginalized, and dabbling on topics around sustainable development goals, it is only recently, she admits, after seeing the devastation and destruction in various parts of Pakistan with her own eyes, that she realized the gravity of the situation.

"I was part of a three-member team that won a National Geographic grant under which we travelled to 22 cities and towns across Pakistan. **I saw how the melting of glaciers in the north was affecting agriculture in Sindh,**" said Iqbal. **"It hit me really hard that climate change was real, and it was happening right in front of us!"** she added.

The response that the three women received was amazing. "It made me realize that there is a dearth of human-centric stories when it

comes to climate change," she said. And she began to understand why it was important for women journalists to write on the environment.

Not only do women writers "showcase women's perspectives" in their stories, Iqbal pointed out that the former had an added advantage over their male counterparts due to easy access to women in impacted communities. It's also easier for women to speak to a woman reporter. "For instance," she explained, "When disasters hit and families are displaced after, say a flood or a GLOF (Glacial Lake Outburst Flood), I really don't think a male reporter fully understands what it means for women to be living in tents. Important health-related issues such as menstruation, access to contraception and pregnancy tend to be ignored because no male reporter would want to ask such awkward questions from a woman. Even if he did breach those topics, not many women would react comfortably to such queries coming from a man."

Iqbal started interning at media organizations when she was just 17. If there was one thing she learnt about herself, it was her insatiable curiosity for life and people. "I had so many questions to ask. I enjoyed talking to people and listening to them," said the qualified "one-woman band" documentary filmmaker.

A Fulbright Scholar (2010-12), Iqbal completed her postgraduate studies in News and Documentary from New York University, after which she joined Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy Films. She joined as an assistant producer and quickly rose to become co-producer for [A Girl in the River](#), a film on honour-killing that received an Academy Award. "I graduated with a Masters degree in documentary filmmaking and returned to Pakistan literally a day after she had won her first Oscar. SOC Films was the place to be!" said Iqbal. She added, "It

was the only place in Pakistan working solely on documentaries at the time. I sent her a blind email and asked if there was a job there and got a position immediately after one meeting with her!”

It was her kind of life, being out in the field. “Those three years were a huge learning experience for me. I travelled the length and breadth of Pakistan, met people and loved every bit of it,” she recalled.

By the end of it, she realized she was not in a good situation at SOC Films. “At 28, I was the senior most person after Sharmeen, and mentoring and coaching all those younger to me. It was my time to learn, as I felt I didn’t know enough.” she said, adding: “I was aching to shoot, although I thoroughly enjoyed what I did – researching, conducting interviews, etc.”

She quit and decided to become a freelancer and since then, there has been no looking back for her. Today she has her own production house, HFI Productions, and is doing gigs she loves, describing it as “actual journalism in a creative manner.”

And that is what climate change and the environment need; someone to package it in such a way that is visually impactful and easy for people to understand.

While she does not cover climate change and environment regularly as “documentary filmmakers don’t have a beat,” having worked at print and broadcast newsrooms in the past, Iqbal had observed that the environment was “not taken too seriously by the editors.”

She said the “system was designed in such a way” that a male reporter who covered what was considered an “important beat pertaining to politics or a major political party, would also be given this side beat that did not require anything more than covering an event or a seminar.”

But whenever she did cover stories related to climate change or the environment, the single-most “persistent barrier” she found is “men controlling the narrative” in most communities.

“Be it flood affectees or victims of untimely rains, it is usually the men who will sit down to talk you. In communities, the focal person will often arrange a visiting journalist’s conversation with the men of the community only because that is what occurs to them naturally and subconsciously. Often, they will tell you it is the men who only know how to speak in Urdu. So, they automatically assume that a journalist would not be interested in hearing out the women because of the language barrier,” she explained.

And at the workplace, there are a different set of challenges. “Most journalists and even editors do not have that depth of knowledge of what climate change or what it entails; many think of it as nothing more than a science and it is therefore reported in a stale and boring manner,” said Iqbal, adding that “We have still not connected the dots, or made the connections between climate change and the economy, politics and, even the conflicts happening around us.”

However, all is not gloom and doom and a lot has changed since Iqbal first started. “I think social media has helped people in expanding the breadth of the conversation on climate change.”

And now that the discussion has begun, her advice to her colleagues is to “fight with your editors to take this beat much more seriously and express your interest in covering it.”

Karachi to New York: Haya Fatima on her Fulbright experience
<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1092182/karachi-to-new-york-haya-fatima-on-her-fulbright-experience/>



SHABINA FARAZ
The Accidental Journalist

Media organization: Freelancer
Experience: Nineteen years
Thematic area(s) of expertise:
Environment, Climate Change, Health
and Gender

Senior Urdu journalist, Shabina Faraz, would probably have become a famous short story writer, or may even have been one of the most sought-after playwrights for television, while continuing to write on entertainment in magazines, but fate had something else in store for her.

“One fine day, some 19 years back, a friend asked me to fill in for her for an out-of-city event, being held in Faisalabad. I agreed happily, taking it up as nothing more than a junket,” narrated Faraz.

This turned out to be a transformative journey. The workshop organized by the International Union for Conservation, was facilitated by none other than the two heavy-weights, both of whom have passed on, Obaidullah Baig and Saniya Hussain. “I returned thoroughly converted,” she said.

She was so motivated, that she took to writing short stories on the environment. “But something was amiss; I did not seem to enjoy writing about these issues while dabbling in fictional genre. That’s when I started writing articles for Jang,” she said.

Today, she said: “**Journalism did not make me an environmentalist; it was the environment that made me a journalist.**” While discussing that environment and climate change is her passion, writing travelogues is her first love. In between, she dabbles in writing on health and gender issues.

She contributed to Jang for nearly 14 years before she decided to break free and expand her canvas. “I started writing on the environment for Jang and when my stories started receiving positive feedback, they gave me a whole page. Now that I have left, that page has also closed,” she said. Today, she contributes regularly to Dawn’s Urdu website as well as to Express Urdu. In addition, she also takes up translation work.

“I think women writers must write more on the environment, but unfortunately they are not. The issues of climate change and the environment require a serious approach, strong research and commitment; and most women have all three. Today with media at a crossroads, mediocrity has set in. The 24/7 television channel, especially with their nonstop barrage of breaking news is good at creating nothing but sensationalized content. How the environment or climate change is impacting the lives of ordinary people is barely ever discussed. But if women take up the cudgels against man-made disasters, media houses are bound to notice. But for that, women journalists need to be motivated,” said Faraz.

"I have been writing on the environment for nearly 20 years now, but it seems like a thankless job as nothing seems to be happening for the better. In such a scenario, if we want the younger lot to join in the fight, especially women, they need to be provided with training, exposure visits and study trips, both within and outside Pakistan," Faraz suggested.

"Many young women come to me seeking advice, but without incentives, we cannot hold their interest for too long," said added honestly.

As for her, she has been fortunate to have been awarded several fellowships like the South Asia Climate Change Award (SACCA) by PANOS, HICAP Media Grant for Upper Basin Program by ICIMOD, a Story Grant Program for Atmospheric Issues, and the most recent one was a Asia-Pacific Environment Story to the Grant 2019 by Earth Journalism Network, under which she was able to visit Gilgit-Baltistan and came back with not just one story, but a bagful.

While she feels fortunate to have been selected for these awards, **she said that in her experience, most organizations prefer those writing for English language newspapers. "I think they should, on the contrary, favour national and regional language media, because what you write for the masses will have more impact,"** pointed out Faraz. She gave an example of a recent story that she did for Earth Journalism Network. "The story highlighted the problems faced by women in Skardu, Gilgit-Baltistan, due to climate change. The story was published on The Third Pole website. I shared it with the women as well but they turned around and said that they did not understand a word of it. I am getting it published in Urdu now so that it gets read widely."

Nevertheless, thanks to social media, her stories are getting a far bigger audience than ever before. "I use this platform to promote my work, and I find it to be an easier and quicker way to get the word out," she said.


As a freelancer, said Faraz, applying for these grants came with their own set of challenges. Often it comes with the precondition of getting it published. While her stories are never rejected, the dilemma is that "editors of newspapers that one contributes to are reluctant to write letters guaranteeing publications without seeing the story at hand, and I do not blame them as this should not be obligatory."

She also said that often organizations sponsoring your travel do not give a per diem. "If the journalist is taking time away from his or her regular work, it should be compensated for," she pointed out.

A glimpse at her work:

As the brown bear thrives in Deosai, villagers feel threatened
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1522593/as-the-brown-bear-thrives-in-deosai-villagers-feel-threatened>

Climate change leaves women in Skardu facing disaster
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1519525/climate-change-leaves-women-in-skardu-facing-disaster>

A portrait of Rabbiya Arshad, a woman with dark hair, wearing a black jacket over a patterned top. She is looking slightly to the right. The background is a light blue circle with green leaf-like patterns. The text 'RABBIYA ARSHAD' and 'In an all boys' club culture' is overlaid on the right side of the image.

RABBIYA ARSHAD
In an all boys' club culture

Media organization: Freelancer
Experience: Fifteen years
Thematic area(s) of expertise:
Environment, Health and Gender

Having worked in a variety of media such as broadcast and print, and having dabbled in different genres such as reporting, documentary filmmaking, data journalism, mobile journalism (Mojo) and podcasting over the last 13 years, if there is one thing that the young, independent journalist Rabbiya Arshad has learnt, it is to toughen up if one wants to survive the bullying in this field, as a woman.

"I learnt that one has to become thick skinned, and I learnt in time to draw a boundary around me," she said. But even today, it is not easy to survive in this profession, and navigate the all-boys-club culture despite so many women entering the field every day.

From experiencing "verbal and emotional abuse," to "her ideas getting stolen" even before its takeoff, or work being "undermined" or made light of, Arshad said that is the price women journalists pay to remain relevant.

Disgruntled, she tried leaving the field, but the high it gave lured her back.

"Journalism gives me the motivation to move on, allows me to network and meet some of the most interesting people on earth and listen to their stories of struggle," she said. She went on to add that, "Though I cannot use my full potential due to my fears and self-imposed limitations, when my byline appears or if there is a reaction to my story, or if it has made a difference in even one person's life or in the society, that day it feels my struggle has been worthwhile."

Arshad began working, while still studying for her Master's in development journalism from 2005 to 2007, at a national daily where she began writing a popular feature series titled, 'Faces in the crowd' and 'Children of a lesser god.' At the same time, for two years, she served as a lecturer in a government college, in Raiwind. She left print media after three years and joined FM 103, a country-wide FM radio network.

"I reported on anything and everything both for radio and its weekly magazine and went for topics around the environment."

But when she started adding environment more frequently to other topics like politics, social issues and women's issues, it was not taken very kindly. "My immediate bosses started gaslighting me," Arshad said. "I also realized that a number of times, the story ideas I pitched were initially rejected, but were then taken up by him!"

The year 2013 was a turning point. "I won a human rights award by South Asia Partnership (SAP), for articles and features on the participation of women in political processes and in the electoral system. The same year I joined Rang Bhoom media house, a documentary filmmaking media outlet," said Arshad.

In 2016, she got a one-year scholarship to learn documentary film-making from University of California, Los Angeles, USA. After her completion and return, she rejoined FM103.

Today, she is exploring the possibility of working independently as it may be a better option for the many challenges she, as a woman faces in journalism. "Although money is a problem, I have learnt to navigate and find gigs," she said.

But freelancing for newspapers, periodicals and even online websites is not without its share of frustrations. "They do not pay you for the story. The ones on environment not only require devoting time on research but also require a fair amount of financial spending, as the story will often demand field visits and doing rounds of various departments." Additionally, by the time she would be able to arrange for some grant money, the story angle would change!

As a freelancer, since you do not have the backing of a media organization, Arshad said many government authorities are unwilling to share information or data with you. For example, for a story on water quality, she visited a government laboratory for testing the water but was asked to pay "thousands of rupees."

She asked some senior colleagues for help, but before she knew it, the idea had been stolen, and the story, in a report form, had already gone on air!

In the past, Arshad received a couple of fellowships. "I was once sent to Nepal by WaterAid, an international non-governmental organization that focuses on water, sanitation and hygiene. From that one interaction, I remember I got so many ideas that I ended up doing several reports for radio and print at the organization I was

working at back then." Tech savvy and trained in Mojo, she definitely has an edge over her colleagues. "It gives me the freedom to share my work online," she said, and there are organizations working on the environment who often seek her help.

She added, that with a little bit of encouragement and a smattering of scholarships, "new ideas germinate" as you are motivated.

"Although omnipresent and all powerful, for some reason, media outlets do not see themselves as key actors in educating the public about the environment and climate change. Nor do they know the power they wield over people to take action, alter norms and change attitudes. Or even how issues can be placed on the national agenda."

But things are looking up now. Arshad has noticed a change. "The environment is becoming top news on city pages," she said excitedly, "not in my wildest of imaginations, would I have thought that could happen!" But these topics require more coverage to continue to remain at the top and become a public concern. "If the media does not mention them, they are likely to be ignored and will receive little attention," she said, specially referring to the electronic media, and emphasizing on the consistency and continuity of the message for a public with an increasingly shorter "attention span."

Link to her documentary on religious conflict:

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2329659047266050>



RINA SAEED KHAN

Climate change is the biggest story of the 21st Century!

Media organization:
Express Tribune and Reuters Alertnet
Experience: Twenty years
Thematic area(s) of expertise:
Climate Change, Environment and Development

Rina Saeed Khan is more than a journalist writing on the environment. She is on a quest for a better world. And before taking up the issues close to her heart, she rolls up her sleeves and gets her hands soiled. You may find her rescuing blind dolphins or climbing the stony slopes of Torghar hills on the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan, in Qilla Saifullah district, just to get a glimpse of the elusive Markhor in the wild or the Houbara bustard in the desert of Cholistan.

On her journey of 20-something years of writing on the environment, and later taking up the issue of climate change, Khan has seen almost every little patch of Pakistan which she finds “stunningly beautiful” through the “eyes of an environmentalist” and cannot see herself going to these places as a tourist just for vacationing. “It just won’t cut it for me!” she said.

From surviving the freezing temperatures at Khunjerab Pass (4,693 metres) in the Karakoram Mountains, to wading knee deep in the swamps of the creeks of the Indus delta where it meets the Arabian Sea, she is far from done with the wild outdoors. She remains undeterred by the assignments that come with hardships and a lot of discomfort. “I still have to see Rama Lake near Astore (in

Gilgit-Baltistan) which I believe is an incredible sight!” said the journalist associated with Express Tribune and Reuters Alertnet.

In her early years, Iqbal wanted to be an architect and after completing her undergraduate studies in the United States, she returned to Pakistan for a gap year during which she joined the English weekly, The Friday Times, in Lahore and started covering architecture, art, heritage, conservation and preservation. As things would have it, which Khan calls an “accident of fate,” one of her stories on smokeless stoves got noticed by people working in the “NGO circles” and she started getting requests from people in the development sector to write on issues that affected people. “I was taken into the field. I saw rural life at close quarters and it was very satisfying,” Khan described, explaining that she had found her niche.

To this day, she has zero regrets of not becoming an architect. “A whole new pastoral world opened up to me” that she said she had found simultaneously endearing, “tugging at her heart strings,” and ugly, with poverty blatantly glaring back at her. But in retrospect, the rapidly changing environment had bothered her even as a child. “The destruction of Murree Hills happened right in front of my very eyes! I used to spend all my summer holidays at my grandmother’s house there, with half a dozen cousins of all ages. I saw how the forest around her home slowly disappeared, giving way to a concrete jungle of houses. The meadows, lined with daisies, where we would sit or roll down, all vanished before us. I used to pick raspberries from the bushes and they were the sweetest you could have ever had! There came a time during college that I refused to visit Murree; I hated what had happened to it and it made me sad to see how the place had been

ruined.” Interestingly, Khan is one of the few Pakistani journalists, a woman at that, who has steadfastly, continued to pursue just one beat; environment and climate change. But she fully understands why journalists are reluctant to write on these issues.

“It is not a highly paying field; in fact, it barely pays the bills, and most papers and channels do not have dedicated beats for environment journalists. It is a struggle to get climate change and environment stories the same coverage and importance as political stories. Journalists who cover environment are also not given the same kind of recognition, limelight or payments that political reporting attracts in Pakistan,” she pointed out.

She should know, as her own editor had repeatedly told her she could become a star if she took to writing on politics. “I delved into political reporting, even did a few interviews, but it was really not my cup of tea,” said Khan, adding she had no regrets.

However, all that is beginning to change and topics around the environment, especially climate change, are getting noticed. “For example, when a heatwave occurs causing many deaths, or a massive flood destroys lives, homes and crops, then only does it become headline news, and environmental journalists are better able to connect the dots and do in-depth reporting,” she expressed. **But women journalists in Pakistan, said Khan, are not encouraged to report in the field, which is very important for an environmental journalist; to be able to visit the location where climate change impacts are happening on the ground.** “Most newspapers do not even cover travel costs,” she said. And in the rural areas where impacts are readily felt, the local journalists, she added, need more training on the subject. As a journalist, one of the most frustrating parts is the lack of

support. “Many stories have to be dropped because newspapers are not interested or they will not cover your travel costs, and reporting from telephone interviews does not do justice to the story. One has to be able to visit these places and see the effects of climate change or environmental degradation for oneself,” she said, adding that “interviewing the local communities to get the right sense adds flavour to the story and just makes it more authentic.”

However, she admitted, as a woman, some remote locations “can be a logistical nightmare as it is often difficult to stay overnight if one is travelling alone.” Another issue is the lack of reliable and safe local transportation, due to which one is left with renting a private car which becomes very expensive and is not always supported by the newspaper or the channel one is associated with.

But even if the logistical issues are overcome, sexual harassment continues to be a far bigger challenge for women journalists, said Khan.

“I have faced it frequently, often happening in the most remote areas where they cannot understand why a woman would be travelling alone or asking them all sorts of bold questions,” she pointed out. “Now I am older and feel less vulnerable but as a young woman travelling around the country, I had to face many such incidents which would be quite upsetting, and at times even dangerous. I now look back and think I should not have taken those chances, and I am not sure I would recommend younger female journalists to follow suit. The toxic masculinity that one encounters in Pakistan, and the misogyny, can make reporting in remote, extremely conservative areas so much more difficult. Maybe it will slowly begin to change, but younger female journalists tell me it is still quite toxic.”

But travelling made her braver and more confident, she said. Khan was also fortunate to have travelled abroad for work, which helped her understand the science behind climate change.

"I was lucky to get selected by one of the most important media organizations, the Earth Journalism Network, that offers fellowships. I was awarded one to cover the Copenhagen climate summit back in 2009. We were also taken to the climate negotiations in Bonn and Thailand, and we also visited Kathmandu for more training. They expected us to produce a certain number of articles on the UN negotiations, which are quite complex and difficult to report on for most journalists who are exposed to them for the first time. They introduced us to the history of the climate negotiations and all the different concepts and streams of negotiations, and appointed senior editors and mentors who were extremely knowledgeable and helpful," she recalled.

Before that she was selected as a fellow for Leadership for Environment and Development (LEAD) in Pakistan with training in Mexico for two weeks and graduating in England. "During my LEAD fellowship (I was in Cohort 10), I was given exposure to Pakistan's environmental problems with training visits to Ziarat, Mardan and Karachi, where we were also joined by other international LEAD fellows," she recalled.

Khan said that these opportunities, where she met environmental journalists from all over the world, "were not only tremendous learning experiences" but also "confidence building exercises." She felt truly part of a global community dedicated to reporting on the importance of climate change and the environment. "I also got

to meet with global experts and hear from scientists, all of which helped me to further my interest and passion for the environment." said Khan.

Today, despite the many challenges, she wants to encourage women journalists in Pakistan to pursue this issue as she believes climate change is the "biggest story of the 21st century."

Pakistan's melting glaciers: Our climate change crisis will destabilize Asia's rivers.

<https://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/78387/pakistans-melting-glaciers-our-climate-change-crisis-will-destabilise-asias-rivers/>

As Lahore chokes on winter smog, Pakistan moves to cut air pollution
<http://news.trust.org/item/20190107111016-iqvsc/>

CONCLUSION:

Although there has been an increase in environment and climate stories in newspapers, magazines and on electronic media, the voice of female journalists is still largely missing. Further, news relating to climate change only reaches the headlines when disaster strikes. Journalists continue to face challenges in ensuring that stories on climate change and the environment get the same importance and recognition as political stories. While there is no accurate research specifying the number of journalists in Pakistan, or the actual number of female journalists, many feel that it is a male-dominated field and therefore, women do not have adequate or equal opportunities.

Female journalists believe that they can showcase a woman's perspective with empathy. Male reporters may not fully understand the difficulties women face, or how disproportionately climate disasters have affected them. Women journalists are also more likely to have more and better access to women in climate change impacted areas.

Most mainstream journalists and editors do not have adequate knowledge about climate change. In cases where they are aware of what it constitutes, they treat it as nothing more than a science to be reported in technical terms. Thus, they fail to meaningfully engage an average reader.

Further, media houses in Pakistan have been unable to connect climate change to the economy, politics and the conflicts happening around us. They believe that climate change is an "urban and elite," issue which does not require the immediate attention of journalists.

While not overtly, media houses often restrict female journalists by offering them stories relating to entertainment, women's rights, education and art, while climate-related issues are predominantly considered to be in the domain of male journalists. Media houses are also reluctant to pick up the costs associated with travel of journalists, given that good, in-depth stories often require extensive fieldwork. Female journalists are also disincentivized because of lodging and safety concerns, as well as mobility issues. For example, getting to and from work at odd hours is difficult for female journalists, or they may need to be accompanied by male journalists on field visits. Sexual harassment and verbal abuse also continue to be big challenges for many female journalists during field visits.

Female journalists believe that to encourage young women to cover climate change stories, media houses must provide them with incentives, training, exposure visits and study trips, both within and outside Pakistan. In addition, these issues will find a wider audience if they are covered in both national and regional languages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Raise awareness about the value and importance of environmental news reporting among philanthropists, the corporate sector, publishers and the government.
2. Encourage, and provide incentives to women to further engage with environmental journalism.
3. Introduce writing competitions featuring environment-related topics, with monetary prizes.
4. Hold journalism fellowships involving different media outlets, to ensure that stories are given priority on their platforms. Travel grants can be provided to encourage participation.
5. Focus on sensitizing the editor and gatekeepers, who will then be encouraged to assign, and run stories relating to climate change.
6. Conduct workshops on thematic environmental topics, training reporters on how to package information in an engaging manner, and the use of digital tools to entice readers.

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