

BUILDING INDIA'S CLIMATE STORY



BUILDING ON INDIA'S CLIMATE STORY

Inertia doesn't drive inaction, the lack of information does.

Thoughtful, accessible, and powerful information is often the difference between the status quo and much-needed change. This belief fuels the ClimateRISE Alliance—a collective dedicated to combating the climate crisis through effective messaging. The alliance aims to shape an India view, a common vocabulary, and enable intersectional climate action in India for the most vulnerable communities.

By uniting experts across industries, we aim to share insights, simplify complexities, and humanise stories of climate resilience. Our goal is to equip Indians – from governments and corporations to the general public – with the awareness to effectively ease the present global predicament.

Such a collaboration is imperative considering how today's climate upheaval has surpassed mere "change"; it's a crisis of prolonged droughts, violent floods, devastating fires, and unprecedented snowfalls. In the past year alone, India, home to over one billion people and diverse ecosystems, has borne the brunt.

Despite frequent headlines of death and devastation that's very obviously linked to the climate, what's often missing is accessible information connecting causes to catastrophes. Climate science, often laden with jargon, must become understandable and inclusive -- in terminology and the languages in which it is conveyed. Everyone needs to grasp the personal impacts and effective mitigation strategies.

Where do we begin?

Over 50 stakeholders including journalists, researchers, communication professionals, sector specialists, digital marketers, funders working in the climate space convened for a day long workshop on 7th of June in Mumbai to share best practices, debate strategies, and develop an actionable climate communication plan to adopt and circulate amongst various Indian stakeholders.

Before the group came together however, participants responded to our internal survey on the nature of mainstream climate communications in India. They emphasised the need **to simplify scientific data, tailor communication to different audiences, and encourage collaborations for wider circulation. This feedback shaped the agenda for our convening.**





LEARNING FROM PARTICIPANTS



The Migration Story

Roli Srivastav, founder editor of The Migration Story, began the learning sessions with a powerful presentation on how technical phrases like net zero, the Paris Agreement, carbon offsets, and non-fossil fuel targets can detract millions from grasping the severity of the crisis.

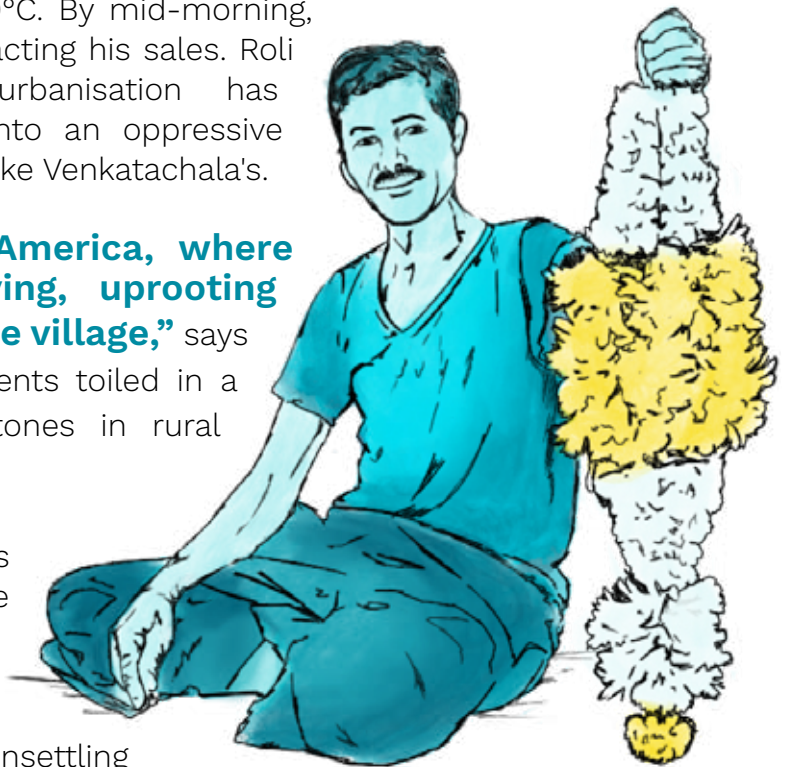
She then cut to an animated film depicting bustling streets, honking autos, and everyday scenes of saree-clad pedestrians and roadside vendors, offering a stark contrast to verbose, and ironically, alienating headlines. The film immediately resonated with the group because its visuals captured the essence of daily life in India.

The central figure was Venkatachala, a flower vendor in Bengaluru whose business suffers under scorching temperatures nearing 40°C. By mid-morning, his roses and jasmines wilt, severely impacting his sales. Roli highlighted how rapid, expanding urbanisation has transformed the once-cool Bengaluru into an oppressive environment for vulnerable communities like Venkatachala's.

“It feels like Bengaluru is our America, where we’ve relocated to make a living, uprooting ourselves from the serene life of the village,” says

the 38-year-old flower seller, whose parents toiled in a quarry, carrying and breaking heavy stones in rural Karnataka.

According to Roli, this scenario epitomises The Migration Story's mission. Millions have left villages where farms fail and job opportunities are nil. She questions whether the stories of rural migrants, forced to live and labour under unsettling conditions in cities, are adequately represented in public discourse. Can personal narratives, like Venkatachala's struggle, drive meaningful action on climate change?



The Locavore



Food, a universal language, found its advocate in Thomas Zacharias, a celebrated chef turned entrepreneur who now runs The Locavore. His message resonated deeply: the journey from farm to plate is pivotal, and consumers wield immense power through their choices. The tagline says it best, Doing Good through Food.

His impactful approach includes alarming people about the potential extinction of beloved foods due to environmental degradation. For instance, a viral post on Locavore's Instagram forewarns about the impending extinction of Kokum fruit by 2050, a staple in many dishes across India's western ghats.

As a chef in one of Mumbai's most popular restaurants, The Bombay Canteen, Thomas is no stranger to the chaotic, stressful but often controlled world of kitchens. However, the challenge he embarks on now is to understand the duress with which many farmers grow much of these ingredients that come into our homes and end up as dishes that also enter our hearts.

His strategy not only highlights the challenges faced by producers and supports small-scale businesses in scaling up operations, connecting them with conscientious consumers.



India Development Review (IDR)

Journalists Shreya Adhikari and Srishti Gupta stressed on how the connections and implications of climate change are still not clearly understood by most, including governments or the development sector.

IDR has made a conscientious effort to consistently publish climate jargon explainers, platform voices most affected by the crisis and most importantly -- translate ALL of this into Hindi, India's most widely spoken language.

Language itself emerged as a pivotal barrier. To penetrate every corner of this diverse country, we must speak in tongues that all can comprehend. India has 22 official languages, but about 780 unofficially -- including a multitude of dialects. English alone will not inform our most vulnerable.

The journalists also pointed out how many research institutes in India still orient work around conversations in the global north such as – energy transitions, renewables, loss and damage, mitigation, etc, which in turn shapes policy and public discourse. If research is tailored to local narratives, they said, then that strengthens remediation methods too.

From their experience, Shreya and Srishti underscored the importance of fostering hope too: all organisations in climate communications should also focus on solutions and successful practices undertaken by communities, nonprofits, and funders.



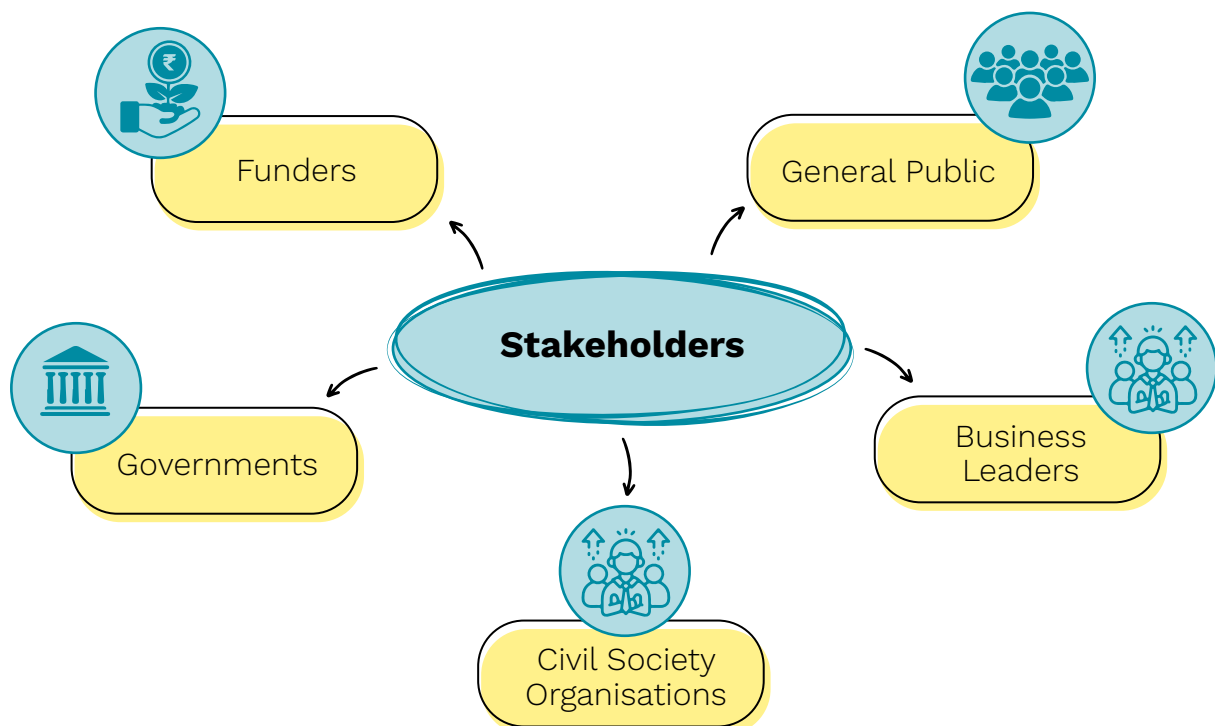
The floor was open to questions, comments, and even suggestions. Some of the important points made by participants were:

<p>'So, what' Angle</p> <p>Climate stories need to explain why they matter to communities, showing how climate change affects their daily lives.</p>	<p>Community Engagement</p> <p>Involve communities in decision-making to understand their specific issues and ensure climate actions meet their needs.</p>
<p>Storytelling Focus</p> <p>Tell stories that people can relate to emotionally, rather than just focusing on technical details about climate change.</p>	<p>Regional Engagement</p> <p>Use local journalists to connect policymakers with the public in smaller cities and towns, helping to bridge communication gaps.</p>
<p>Empowerment of Regional Storytellers</p> <p>Support local journalists and leaders to effectively share climate messages within their communities.</p>	<p>Underrepresented Perspectives</p> <p>Include viewpoints from future generations and non-human species in climate discussions for a more holistic approach to solving problems.</p>
<p>Inclusive Approaches</p> <p>Engage diverse communities through methods like films and digital tools, ensuring everyone can participate in climate conversations.</p>	<p>Impact Evaluation</p> <p>Assess how climate stories influence decision-makers and public behavior, determining their potential to drive changes in laws and actions.</p>
<p>Communication vs. Decision-Making</p> <p>Advocate for clear, centralized climate communication while allowing decentralized decision-making to ensure local actions are effective. in laws and actions.</p>	

How do you capture the most expensive resource: Attention

During the second half of the day, we split participants up into five cohorts and handed them a case study. The objective was to craft a compelling message that prompts different audiences to pay attention to the problem highlighted in the case study so audiences can act on it within their respective capacities. Each cohort was given a stakeholder to tailor their message Here is an excerpt from it:

The searing heat of an Indian summer is more than a seasonal inconvenience; it's a life-threatening reality for many, especially for those like Biresh Kumar and his wife Sunita who belong to the Santhal Adivasi community. This family, along with countless, endure relentless heat, a condition made worse by their socio-economic status. For Kumar, a 38-year-old labourer in Haryana's Faridabad district Bhopani village, the rising temperatures are not just numbers on a thermometer but a daily struggle for survival.



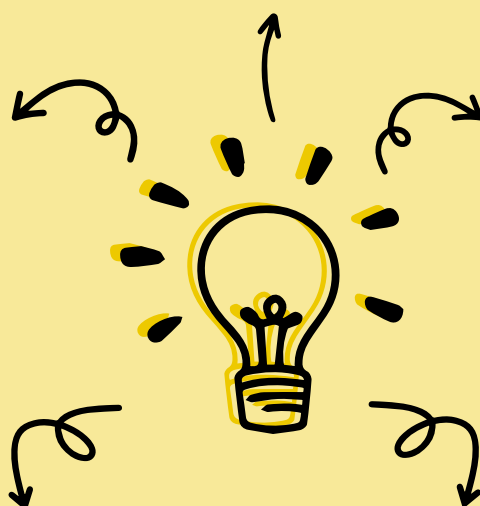
For 45 minutes, discussions flowed, revolving around how storytelling, scientific rigor, and lived experiences can compel action. When each cohort presented, they incorporated the following perspectives:

Customise messages to meet specific group needs:

For instance, funders receive exact details on affected members, including impacts on children. Highlight the short and long-term challenges faced by the community, along with potential funding opportunities for assistance.

Use photos and videos to make content more evocative:

This is especially useful for research organisations whose material leans heavily on data.



When communicating with migrant workers, it's crucial to use multiple **regional languages for accessibility**. It is also imperative to decide the medium of distribution for such audiences such as Whatsapp, radio, and social media.

Rely on **direct quotes** from affected people instead of only leaning on opinion editorials. The voices of people are the crux of powerful storytelling.

Treat data with care. Do not dump data into a story, but weave it into the narrative after careful consideration. This is so the precision and power of numbers are easily understood and remembered by audiences, making messaging more convincing.

At the end of this convening, every participant left with a few learnings that could become the cornerstone of all climate change communications they undertake: **Ask more questions, tell compelling human-centered stories, handle data judiciously—acknowledging its crucial role in revealing the crisis's severity. Embrace diverse formats and media, share knowledge in regional languages, identify a robust publicity plan, and strive for transformative change.**

Where do we go from here as an alliance?

With the aim to strengthen these learning and build an India's Climate narrative - one that permeates to the farthest end of this country, highlighting problems and providing solutions. The alliance will create an active working group to collaborate on enhancing and innovating various messaging strategies and simultaneous dissemination plans. To make this happen, we will:



Launch sector-led multimedia campaigns

We want to help produce easy to consume solution-oriented content in creative formats because we believe in the transformative power of art. This will be via a carefully planned digital campaign that includes poetry, comics, skits and even music. We aim to collaborate with creators who have a wide reach, so that this crucial message can travel far and wide.



What's your climate story?

In India, class, caste, gender and geography determine how climate crisis impacts peoples' lives. Through collaborative efforts we will capture and share stories of how climate change is changing the lives of the country's most marginalised individuals and communities. At the same time, we seek to spotlight initiatives across India aimed at enhancing resilience in the face of a shifting and unpredictable climate. This collaborative effort will engage both mainstream and niche media outlets.



Regional Language Climate tool

The need of the hour is more powerful climate change communication in regional languages. We aim to collaborate with partner organizations and linguistic experts to create a digital tool that simplifies climate terminology in India's major regional languages, making it accessible for different communities. This lexicon will be circulated to various stakeholders such as media houses, think tanks, and educational institutions, who can incorporate it in their daily communications.



Work with Media

We aim to collaborate closely with the Indian media to bring systemic level changes. Our focus will be on prioritising intersectionality in climate stories and highlighting community resilience. By providing readers with the tools to mitigate this crisis, we hope to dismantle the barriers people have when they are faced with overwhelming climate change related information.

SEEKING SUGGESTIONS & OPINIONS

We invite you to send us suggestions on how we can collaborate in the future to better understand the crisis and how we can mitigate it.

As the alliance grows, we will always strive to keep up the spirit of sharing insights, amplifying important work of partner organisations so the message reaches wider audiences, and in the process even help upskill members of various marginalised communities — so they can recognise and tell these stories themselves and tell these stories themselves.

The task the alliance has undertaken will never end because its success depends on the strength of its ongoing efforts to highlight stories and seek solutions to protect our environment. But as we build on it, we believe in its power to drive the meaningful change our country and planet desperately needs.



ClimateRISE Alliance is bringing together over 70 civil society organisations, think tanks, intermediary groups and funding organisations. The collaborative platform aims to shape an India view, a common vocabulary, and enable a multi-stakeholder engagement approach on intersectional climate action in India for the most vulnerable communities focusing on solution-based approach and community resilience.

Get in Touch:

If you are keen to collaborate with us or want to learn more about our work,
you can write to us at: climaterise@dasra.org



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