

Environmental Literacy among Journalists in Bangladesh: Present Reporting Practices, Challenges, Significance, and Frameworks for Improvement

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In the current dynamic global landscape, environmental literacy is a critical aspect of knowledge. The world is facing environmental issues more than ever. However, environmental destructiveness can be meaningfully reduced when populations possess adequate environmental literacy, the capacity to understand, interpret, and act on environmental information. Bangladesh is among the top-ranked countries in terms of environmental vulnerability. Due to environmental challenges, Bangladesh faces natural disasters, and most coastal communities are in terrible danger. From this ground, a group of researchers conducted a study examining environmental reporting practices in Bangladesh, their significance, challenges, and a framework for resolution.

The study finds the current environmental literacy and practice in Bangladesh, which reflects in the four themes: (1) Journalists' Reporting Practices and State of Environmental Literacy; (2) Challenges of Environmental Reporting; (3) Importance of Environmental Journalism; (4) Frameworks for Improvement.

Journalists' Reporting Practices and State of Environmental Literacy

a. Environmental Literacy and Knowledge

A large portion of the participants stated that they did not have proper knowledge of environmental laws. As they report on a surface level, they avoid giving an overview of environmental laws in their report. However, some of the journalists give proper insights into environmental laws in their indepth reporting. They had to learn or get to know about the laws and ethics on their own. For instance.

Notably, most participants framed environmental literacy primarily in terms of familiarity with environmental laws and regulations, rather than the broader understanding of ecological systems, political economy, and scientific processes discussed in the scholarly literature (Hsu and Roth 1996; Ainin and Asafri 2023).

While a few journalists demonstrated awareness of underlying environmental dynamics such as salinity intrusion patterns and climate-driven migration, the predominant association of literacy with legal knowledge suggests that journalists' operative understanding of environmental literacy remains narrower than what the field normatively demands. This gap has implications for reporting depth. A handful of participants stated that although they tried their best, they did not have access to scientific data or resources that had been simplified in the Bangla language that could assist them in making further conclusions about issues.

b. Reporting Practices and Quality

Environmental reporting sometimes relied on more immediate and visible matters, such as floods, salinity, and embankment breaches. The majority of journalists admitted that they are ill-equipped to offer comprehensive context or probe systemic causes due to their lack of expertise and time. Journalists faced a lack of funding for fieldwork, restricted access to cutting-edge data collection and analysis equipment, and inadequate provision for in-depth work. These limitations have, in turn, limited their ability to examine environmental issues in any depth, often leading to superficial reports.

This reactive approach underscores the challenges journalists face in transitioning from event-based reporting to a more preventive or solution-focused style. This desired transition aligns with the broader solutions journalism movement, which advocates reporting that rigorously covers responses to social problems alongside the problems themselves (Thier 2025). However, unlike the structured solutions journalism programs documented in Western contexts (Usery 2024), the shift among Khulna journalists appears largely self-initiated and lacks institutional scaffolding, making it uneven and difficult to sustain.

However, with limitations, some participants actively sought to increase the quality of their reporting. They brought in competing perspectives. For instance, journalists used eyewitness accounts from affected populations as “human faces” in their reports and, where available, sanctioned these narratives with data and expert opinion.

c. Information Collection and Sources

All participants relied heavily on fieldwork, community narratives, and open-source materials as their primary sources. These accounts brought authenticity to their reporting, but they had little access to reliable data to validate the information. This emphasis on community voices is a feature of environmental reporting at its essence, but it reveals the lack of scientific grounding. Lack of transparency made it impossible for journalists to back their reports with credible evidence. Even when participants did try to engage with experts or NGO reports, these sources were insufficient in some cases. The need for centralized, accessible data repositories for journalists comes into focus in this situation.

2. Challenges of Environmental Reporting

The challenges of reporting environmental issues in coastal areas are related to finances, skill gaps, political interference, and low public interest in such reports. Because of these barriers, they can’t tell deep, impactful stories that impact education or policy. But these were no impediments to journalists carrying out their work; they also demanded systemic change to address them.

a. Resource and Financial Constraints

Journalists often cited a lack of financial and logistical resources as a major issue, with media organizations providing minimal funding for travel, data collection, and other necessary tools. This limited the scope and depth of investigations, leading to financial stress and a preference for stories based on cost rather than importance. Participants faced challenges due to resource constraints, limiting access to basic technology like camera software and mapping tools, which hindered their ability to visualize and influence environmental stories. Although our study was not designed to compare experiences across outlet types, a pattern emerged in the interviews. Journalists affiliated with national media houses generally reported greater access to editorial support and occasional training opportunities, whereas those working for local outlets described more acute resource constraints, including a lack of dedicated environmental beats and limited budgets for fieldwork. This observation, while preliminary, suggests that outlet size and institutional capacity mediate the quality of environmental reporting and warrants systematic investigation in future research.

b. Training and Skill Gaps

The interviewees highlighted the lack of specialized training as a significant obstacle to effective reporting on complex environmental issues. They admitted to lacking a complete understanding of environmental science, climate-related phenomena, and policies. Workshops and short-term programs were relied upon for learning about environmental journalism, but were often considered lacking, providing superficial knowledge without preparing journalists for in-depth reporting or analysis.

Participants emphasized the need for effective training programs combining environmental science with journalistic techniques to effectively communicate complex topics like climate adaptation and salinity management. They also sought sustained mentorship projects to work closely with experts, improving their ability to craft solution-driven stories.

c. Political and Institutional Barriers

Government institutions often refuse to grant journalists secure access to environmental data for evidence-based reporting, leading to bureaucratic red tape and an inability to be transparent. This slows journalists' output and questions the validity of their findings, making it frustrating for many journalists.

2. Importance of Environmental Journalism

Environmental journalism raises awareness, engages communities, broadcasts important issues, and influences policies. Journalists act as intermediaries between affected communities and decision-makers, educating, inspiring action, and holding them

accountable. However, systemic barriers like resource constraints, editorial neglect, and policy responsiveness often hinder this potential.

a. Awareness and Education

Journalists stressed their position as educators of the general public in outlining environmental issues. They seek to make complex topics simple and bridge the knowledge gap between policymakers, scientists, and communities. Participants had many positive views of their work as a continuation of bringing environmental consciousness and behavioral change. It believes that environmental journalism plays an important role in connecting the global phenomena of climate change to the realities on a local scale. In areas where formal environmental literacy is rare, journalists often serve as the sole source of information on salinity, soil erosion, and climate adaptation. However, limited access to reliable data and resources constrained their ability to fulfill this educational role effectively.

b. Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Community and Stakeholder engagement are crucial in environmental reporting, as they form the foundation of the story. Journalists amplify the voices of marginalized groups, such as farmers and fishers, to provide a platform for those most affected by environmental challenges. This bottom-up approach captures the human face of complex issues like climate change, salinity, and deforestation, building trust and collaboration between journalists and communities.

While talking to local voices, journalists also focused on the necessity of working with other stakeholders, NGOs, and environmental activists to obtain the data and further stimulate environmental actions. Partnerships often bring journalists insights, resources, and logistical help into the equation. Yet participants warned never to sit back, placing too much faith in NGOs to control the narrative when their organizational agendas could influence what is said.

c. Highlighting Critical Issues

Environmental journalism exposes overlooked issues like illegal logging, pollution, and land degradation, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations. It raises public awareness, holds authorities accountable, and campaigns for change. Participants noted the difficulty of balancing event-driven disaster coverage with deeper investigation of systemic issues like rising salinity. However, insufficient editorial support and low public interest in environmental stories relative to political or crime coverage limited their ability to pursue this balance.

d. Policy and Societal Impact

Journalists perceive their work as a crucial driver of policy change and societal transformation, aiming to bridge the gap between environmental challenges and actionable solutions. By documenting the effects of issues such as salinity, deforestation, and erosion, they strive to influence decision-making processes at both local and national levels. Their reporting often seeks to bring accountability to institutions, encouraging policymakers to address environmental problems more effectively. This role positions journalists not only as observers but also as active agents advocating for change.

4. Frameworks for Improvement

The strategies identified by the participants aim to address key challenges in environmental reporting, emphasizing the need for reliable data and resources, better reporting practices, institutional and policy support, and enhanced skills through training and capacity-building initiatives. These measures are seen as crucial for empowering journalists to produce impactful, solution-oriented stories that drive public awareness and policy action.

a. Data and Resource Improvement

A core challenge to effective environmental reporting was the lack of reliable and credible data, which journalists frequently found. It impacts the credibility of their reporting because the environmental data they report will be fragmented and, oftentimes, inaccessible. Journalists showed how limited access to such data prevents them from conducting comprehensive analyses in areas where understanding of salinity levels, deforestation, and disaster resilience has become increasingly important to coastal and environmental vulnerabilities.

Many journalists proposed a key solution: centralized, open-access databases. If such platforms are made available in Bengali, they will democratize access to updated, verified information. These might be scientific research, policy documents, or expert analyses that could be created as a one-stop shop for reporters to refer to. This approach is meant to centralize data and reduce dependency on scattered or unofficial sources for environmental journalism to rely on factual and authoritative content.

b. Improving Reporting Practices

Participants see the need to move toward environmental reporting practices that are less event-driven, more systemic, and more long-term. While documenting disasters or environmental crises is important, they believed that it was not enough—what was needed was an understanding of why things were happening and what could be done to stop them. Effective journalism requires a more in-depth approach that includes systematic reflection on factors such as policy failure, socio-economic drivers, and scientific insight.

To produce better quality work, journalists care about including a diverse range of perspectives in their reports. Two ways through which we were able to incorporate the viewpoints of affected communities into the design of stories were by using their authentic and relatable elements as a foundation for stories and drawing insights from the scientists, as well as policymakers, to give stories credibility and depth. Taking a multidimensional approach not only elevates the story but also guarantees that stories can be acted upon and are solution-oriented.

c. Institutional and Policy Interventions

Journalists diagnosed that they need strong institutional and policy support to overcome the challenges of environmental reporting. The participants treated media organizations as actors that played a crucial role in this process while expressing an insistence on the need to have dedicated resources to accommodate environmental journalism. For strengthening the practice, it was considered essential to allocate budgets for field investigations, to establish environmental beats, and to provide editorial guidance.

Moreover, policy interventions were considered important to facilitate journalists' work effectively. The participants stressed the importance of having transparency laws on the ground and enforced so that accessing government data and reports is made easier. Journalists interviewed stated that a bill that gave them the ability to produce evidence-based stories with more accountability would devastate how they operate, and it would discourage them from being part of the profession.

Participants also proposed collaborative partnerships among media organizations, NGOs, and academic institutions to pool resources and technical expertise for environmental reporting.

d. Training and Capacity Building

One commonality among participants was the need for comprehensive and capacity building training programs. However, they said that existing short-term workshops, while useful, are inadequate to provide journalists with the skills and knowledge needed for in-depth environmental reporting. However, programs that present long term integration of theory with application that allow a candidate the opportunity to learn and implement were deemed to be the more desirable solution.

They thought that hands-on training with these environmental experts would greatly improve their reporting capabilities. To build specialized skills and enhance mutual understanding between the parties, the writer suggested that this effort be initiated by scientists, researchers, and journalists collaboratively.

Conclusion

Environmental journalists in Khulna, Bangladesh, face challenges including resource constraints, data access barriers, and institutional obstacles. However, they continue to work towards bridging scientific knowledge, community reality, and policymaking. Based on the findings, we offer the following policy recommendations. First, the Government of Bangladesh should enforce the Right to Information Act (2009) more rigorously, particularly regarding environmental data held by agencies such as the Department of Environment and the Bangladesh Water Development Board, to ensure journalists can access credible, timely data.

Second, media regulatory bodies and press councils should introduce incentive structures, such as dedicated environmental reporting grants and annual awards, that elevate the institutional priority of environmental beats.

Third, journalism training institutions and universities should develop specialized environmental journalism curricula that integrate scientific literacy, legal frameworks, and solutions-oriented reporting skills, in partnership with environmental science faculties.

Fourth, international development organizations and media support foundations should fund sustained mentorship programs pairing coastal journalists with environmental scientists, moving beyond short-term workshops toward long-term capacity building.

Finally, newsroom leadership must allocate dedicated budgets and editorial space for environmental reporting, establishing permanent environmental desks rather than treating environmental stories as secondary to political or crime coverage. These measures, pursued collaboratively by media organizations, government agencies, NGOs, and academic institutions, can strengthen environmental journalism as a tool for public accountability, community resilience, and evidence-based policymaking in one of the world's most climate-vulnerable regions.

Reference

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