

# HARVESTING THE IMPACTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL MEDIA

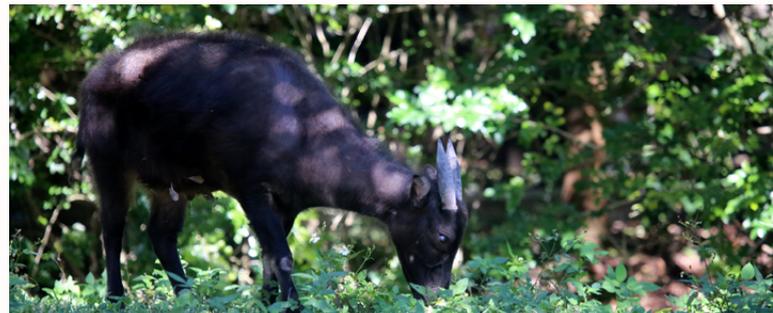
**Internews' Earth Journalism Network (EJN) works with journalists and media organizations across the globe to improve the quality and quantity of environmental journalism. In recent years, EJN has invested time and resources to better understand how that support impacts environmental policies, public debate and community action.**

The media can affect environmental practices and governance in different ways. Journalistic content may directly influence government and policymakers, or create change through less direct means, such as by generating public awareness or collective action. In late 2020, EJN commissioned external researchers to build on its own work of tracking the impacts of environmental journalism. The research team took examples of change reported to EJN by partners and grantees and worked to verify and analyze them.

The research used a case study design and built on EJN's use of the [outcome harvesting](#) evaluation methodology, which seeks to identify real-world change and then determine the extent that project interventions contribute to the change process. It was carried out by a team of 7 local researchers who used interviews and desk-based research to examine 12 cases in 6 countries. They were supported by lead researcher Cathy Shutt who consolidated the findings and authored the final report.

The research team found that EJN's activities do influence policies, discourse and environmental practices. Several specific examples include:

- Stories<sup>1</sup> written by a journalist supported by EJN motivated local government actors in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia to collaborate and intensify their efforts to protect the anoa, a dwarf buffalo, from extinction. The stories also prompted environmental activists to begin community education activities aimed at deterring community members from killing anoa.
- A [Third Pole article](#) was picked up by a local



Stories written about the threat to anoa intensified efforts to protect them

activist and used as evidence in an Indian court case. This contributed to an order by the country's National Green Tribunal for the restoration of the Adi Ganga River.

- An [article on water shortages](#) in the Philippines province of Albay contributed to a politician committing budget resources to the area, although the researchers could not confirm that the village at the heart of the story ultimately benefited.
- Financial support and mentoring enabled experienced journalists employed by the Philippine Daily Inquirer to write 2 articles<sup>2</sup> that empowered members of an Indigenous people, the Aeta. The article led to a significant outpouring of public support for the Aeta's struggle for land and environmental rights, which increased the group's confidence and determination.
- In Uganda, [a story](#) describing the success of anti-poaching initiatives in a nearby reserve sparked the interest of local radio journalists. As a result, the journalists held a short public debate on the beauty and economic potential of the Ajai Game Reserve. This issue had previously received little media discussion.

<sup>1</sup> Article 1: [Nasib Anoa di Pulau Buton berada di ujung tanduk \(ekuatorial.com\)](#), Article 2: [Anoa, masyarakat, dan konsesi tambang aspal di Sekitar SM Lamбусango \(ekuatorial.com\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> Article 1: [P607-B Clark 'green city' to displace Aeta communities | Inquirer News](#), Article 2: [New Clark City: Development for whom? | Inquirer News](#)

Exploring EJN's contributions to these outcomes generated insights as to how and why some supported stories and media outlets contribute to shifts in public discourse, policies and practice:

- A single story on its own may have limited impact, but if it sparks further reporting, public debate or collective action, it can lead to significant change.
- Related to the previous point, continuous reporting is often needed to increase awareness of “slow-burn” disasters.
- Evidence-based stories with human interest angles engage readers. Short-form videos in local languages also seem to be highly engaging.
- The relative strength of civil society and the connections they have to the media are important factors that contribute to a story's influence and ability to prompt actions.
- Representing marginalized people's voices in stories is necessary, but not sufficient. In addition to representation, journalists should also consider ensuring that communities can access stories in local languages, for example, or access them even if they don't have Internet.
- Vested interests, local politics and government capacity all play roles in determining whether commitments triggered by EJN-supported journalism are implemented or not.
- Outcome harvesting is a promising method for learning whether and how media platforms and stories influence environmental policies and practices, yet it needs fine-tuning to ensure it is effective.

The research found that overall, EJN support enables journalists to undertake reporting on environmental issues that they would otherwise find difficult due to lack of resources, time or training.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

EJN could undertake further research on the implicit or explicit assumptions of how real-world change happens and consider how to ensure the reporting it supports is accessible to audiences most likely to act and have impact at different levels.

Questions for reflection include:

- What are the assumptions about how environmental media and journalism are most likely to achieve impact in a given context?
- How can EJN ensure stories reach organizations that work on issues related to the themes in the stories we support, to see that they are shared more widely?
- Are EJN's stories more likely to receive the support they need to gain traction at the international, national or local level?
- Would greater investments by EJN in local language media and translation of stories into local languages enhance the value for money it delivers?
- Does EJN need to encourage those it trains and supports to consider reach and engagement more deeply?
- What additional research does EJN need to undertake to make better decisions about grant processes and outcome harvesting?

The researchers also felt that EJN could integrate power analysis more centrally into its planning, monitoring and evaluation systems. This could include looking at story accessibility for vulnerable groups, considering the essential role that intermediaries play in environmental accountability ecosystems and also the possibility for normative bias from partners and grantees when trying to identify project impacts.

*Information Ecosystem Assessments are a methodology developed by Internews. Internews' work under the Earth Journalism Network project was supported by USAID/DOI, Sida, and the Climate Justice Resilience Fund.*



**About Internews:** Internews is a nonprofit that supports independent media in 100 countries. For nearly 40 years, it has helped partners reach millions of people with trustworthy information that saves lives, improves livelihoods, and holds institutions accountable.

**About Earth Journalism Network:** EJN works with journalists and media organizations across the globe to improve the quality and quantity of environmental journalism. EJN provides workshops and training, funding to support in-depth story production and mentorship for journalists and media outlets worldwide.

**About 25x25:** This research is part of Internews' 25 x 25 initiative, a strategic commitment to increase robust evaluation of Internews' work by delivering 25 research studies by 2025.



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