



*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*

## UNDP CLIMATE CHANGE STORY TELLING CONTEST

### Evaluation report

In August 2015, UNDP launched Voices2Paris, a storytelling contest targeting young journalists under 35 years old to cover climate change and contribute to the global debate through local media.

The storytelling contest had two main objectives:

- ✓ Promote the telling of compelling human stories from developing countries on climate change risks and opportunities to amplify public debate in support of an ambitious outcome to COP21
- ✓ Build the capacity of young and promising journalists in developing countries to report on climate change and achieve greater impact and outreach ahead of the landmark Paris conference

In terms of coverage, the results surpassed our expectations as over 300 journalists expressed an interest and we received 116 articles from 54 countries worldwide. 17 seasoned journalists also supported the contest and mentored the top 23 articles that were then shared throughout the partners channels including major media houses such as Deutsche Welle, IPS and Trust.org (affiliated with Reuters).

#### **Target Group**

We targeted journalists 35 years of age and under from developing countries who were mostly writing through an official media outlet and had a strong interest in climate change.

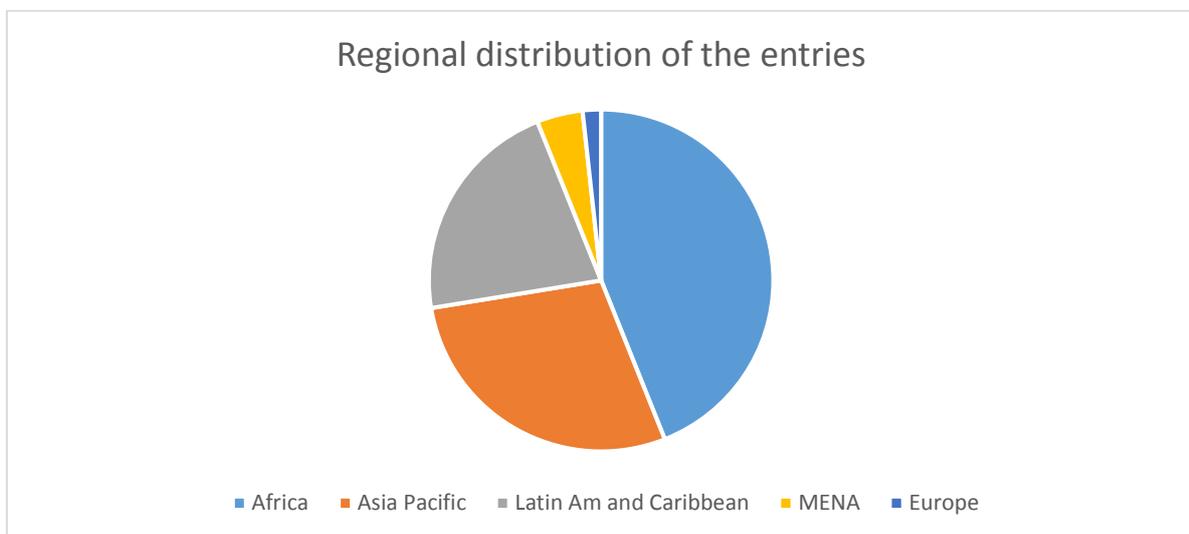
## ELIGIBILITY

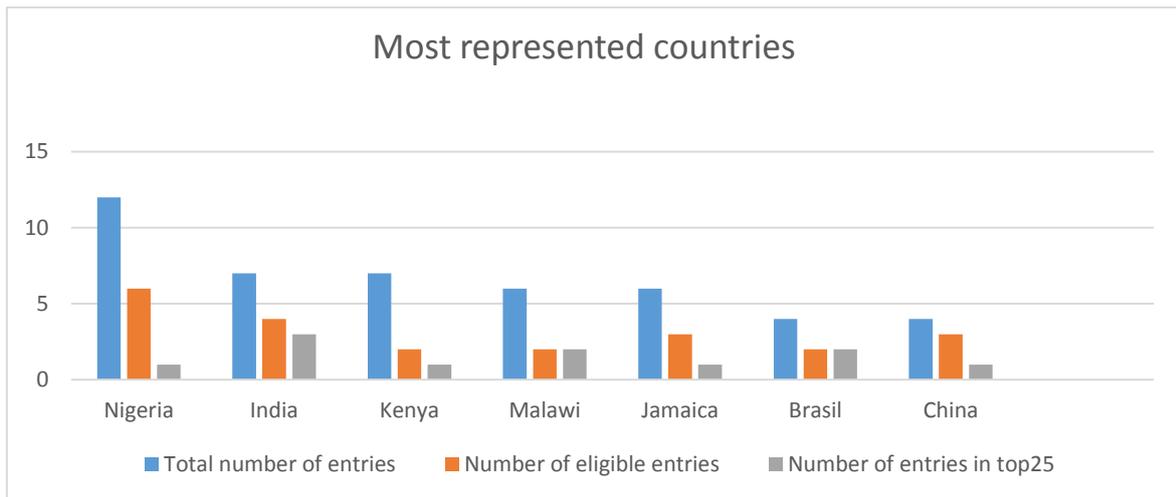
- Journalists from developing countries under 35 years old
- Focus on impact of climate change as well as solutions being undertaken to adapt to and mitigate climate change
- Feature story consisting of up to 1000 words and including at least 5 high-resolution pictures, published from August 24<sup>th</sup> to October 11<sup>th</sup> 2015, or confirmed for future publication by a media outlet at the time of submission
- Feature and pictures licensed under creative commons [Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International](#)

We received an overwhelming number of expressions of interest that converted into 116 articles. Many journalists from the broadcasting industry (especially radio producers in Africa) expressed their interest but were not eligible to submit an audiovisual file for the contest. We encouraged them to submit an article but they did not make the final selection, often lacking the specific skills required for writing for print media.

In total, we received entries from 54 different countries covering all regions.

Sub-Saharan Africa (mostly English speaking) was over-represented in the total number of articles that were received. Entries from the Middle East and North Africa were highly underrepresented.

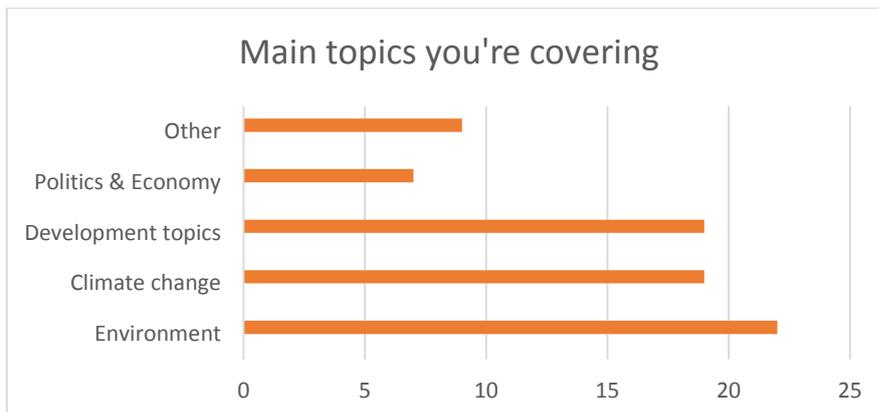




In terms of country distribution, Nigeria, Kenya and India ranked the highest. Interestingly enough, we received a good number of entries from Malawi and Jamaica. Despite organizing a strong drumbeat with partners in China and the active environmental blogosphere in the country, we received only four entries from the country. As a result a large majority of the entries were submitted in English, with the remaining 30% of the articles being written in French, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese and Arabic (order per number of entries that were received).

In terms of gender balance, 68% of the participants were female journalists, and four out of five of the winners were young women.

Two third of the participants were staff or freelancers, with about 50 % writing already on environmental and climate related issues.



Looking at their motivation, the majority wanted to report on the local impact, be part of the global conversation on climate change, get a chance to observe as insiders the COP21 policy making process but most importantly what motivated the journalists was the fact that they could through their story make an impact and contribute to a positive outcome for their local reality.

“I wanted my voice to be counted among those fighting for our planet and have a firsthand experience of the negotiations taking place.”

“Always been passionate about the consequences of Climate Change and have always loved writing. When I heard about the storytelling contest, it seemed like a great opportunity to lend my voice to this global cause.”

“The opportunity to contribute to the fight against the negatives of climate change and what could be done right to ensure that we have a safe climate.”

## **Partnership**

UNDP partnered with different types of organizations and with individuals to:

- Reach out to developing country journalists to encourage participation
- Participate in the selection panel
- Mentor the journalists
- Disseminate the story entries

OXFAM Hong Kong also supported the contest by funding three additional journalists to attend and cover COP21, beyond the five journalists who became the winners of Voices2Paris.

### *Reaching out to journalists in developing countries*

One of the challenges of the contest was to reach out to the target audience. We decided to partner with organizations that had already constituted solid networks of journalists in developing countries.

We partnered with the African Press Organization (APO), a commercial wire that has a large database of journalists in Africa. APO supported the contest by distributing the press releases to their entire network.

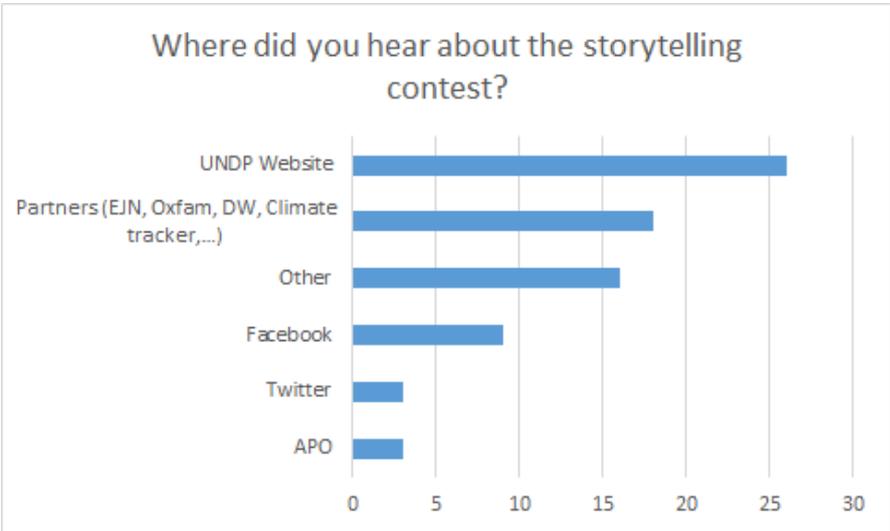
We also partnered with the Earth Journalism network (developed by Internews to empower and enable journalists from developing countries to cover the environment more effectively) that has access to 4500 journalists.

Deutsche Welle Akademie, the International Center for Journalism, Thomson Reuters Foundation, The Climate Tracker Program (part of the Global Call for Climate Action), RTNC (the Dutch media training institute), the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, the Pacific Islands News Association, the University of South Pacific (Media studies Department), the African Network for Environmental Journalists, Oxfam Hong Kong, China Dialogue have as well developed regional journalists networks and they disseminated the information related to the contest.

We also leveraged social media to reach out to journalists. We used Twitter to relay the announcement with the support of the partners and UNDP country offices. We identified networks of journalists (e.g. journalist associations) or individual journalists on Facebook who could relay the announcement. We reached out to 32 groups/individual pages in total and the website statistics show that 2/3 of the visitors who accessed the contest pages through social media were referenced by Facebook.

Finally it is important to stress that UNDP regional and local offices played a major role in reaching out to the media community.

We did a survey to understand better where the participants heard about the contest. The following graph is based on 76 answers.



*Selecting the winners*

We reached out to 40 seasoned journalists who are regularly covering climate change for major media outlets and established a strong team of reviewers, including reporters from EFE, Reuters, the Economic Times of India, Climate Home, Climate Central, Business Green, Le Monde and La Cité.

Internews supported us to identify the selection criteria and prepare the scoring guidelines and scoring grid for the selection panel.

Considering the uneven quality of the articles received, we set up a screening committee that filtered the entries and only channeled to the selection panel the stories that scored high enough to be considered. 64 articles were proposed to the selection panel for a first round of scoring. 27 articles were selected for a second round of scoring to identify the top five stories and select the winners.

### *Strengthening journalists' capacities*

17 seasoned journalists accepted to mentor the top 23 best stories so that they reach the quality standards of international publication. The mentoring consisted of working with the journalist to develop the story by encouraging further research, providing editorial comments to structure the article and suggesting improvements regarding the pictures.

Deutsche Welle and RNTC played a crucial role in this process by allocating respectively four and two editors to the stories.

One major gap noted by the mentors was the lack of scientific evidence that backed the stories on climate change. Other mentors noted the need to rework the storytelling format to make the articles more appealing for the readers. Finally, most articles tackled the impact of climate change but very few were solution oriented or focusing on innovation.

The mentoring, despite being a “light” capacity building mechanism was highly appreciated by the journalists who benefited from the interaction with seasoned journalists:

“I was mentored by John Upton and he was incredibly easy and supportive to work with. He guided my thoughts and helped me to refine my points without rewriting the article and making it his. He was also very open to discussion and disagreement.”

« I liked the fact that I worked with an editor that helped me adapt my story for an international audience. The mentoring was the highpoint of the whole fellowship for me.”

“I got to understand better how to write in-depth stories to make a targeted impact.”

“This was absolutely useful. It allowed for me to have my work critiqued by a professional who, in turn, allowed me to understand my mistakes and develop on them.”

Inviting five journalists to cover COP21 also extended the capacity building component of the campaign. We planned coverage before COP21, facilitated the journalists' participation to a training organized by EJN, connected them to experts, briefed them on key issues during the conference and linked them up with dissemination channels.

However, the level of engagement and the capacity to make the most of the experience was uneven. COPs are complex environment that newcomers navigate with difficulty and the winners would have benefited from being included in a structured mentoring approach throughout the event.

“Being my first time to attend such a major conference, there was a lot of information to digest. I tried reading through previous agreements but still the content was too much to comprehend. All in all, I got people to help me understand what was happening and at least write some stories. I wish us as the five contestants were working or helping each other out. We had a big disconnect whereby it was

everyone for himself. It would have been better if we had meetings either early in the morning or later in the evening to discuss about the conference and help each other develop their stories.”

“It would have been really good if the mentors continued guiding us through the whole COP21.”

Considering the significant investment of inviting five journalists to cover COP21 and the lack of capacity on UNDP side to guide/mentor/supervise the journalists during the event, it is advisable to piggy back on an existing cohort of fellows. Internews or the Climate Tracker Program provide a structured plan for the fellows they invite to cover COPs, giving them assignments, providing the support of mentors and organizing debriefing sessions on a daily basis. Rather than UNDP managing the participation of the winners, it would have been more effective to partner with one of these two organizations and provide them with a grant to invite and manage the winners.

### *Dissemination*

The best 23 stories, once edited, were published on UNDP and partners’ websites and/or on their social media to ensure maximum outreach and exposure. Participating journalists also actively shared through their own networks. A common hashtag – #Voice2Paris – facilitated Twitter integration, helping to amplify the reach of the stories.

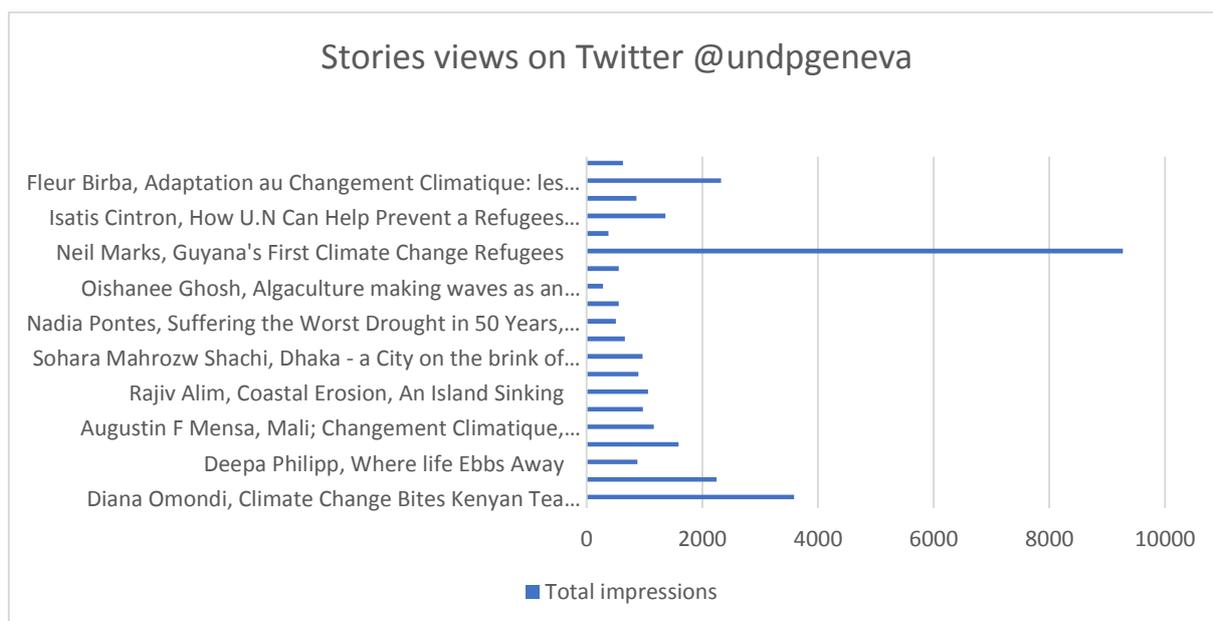
All materials were licensed under creative commons, encouraging media outlets and people everywhere to make maximum use of the stories and photos gathered.

It is difficult to calculate the outreach of the stories as we encouraged partners to post them on their channels, generating traffic to their own website. We also did not track the outreach of the hashtag Voice2Paris (that our partners and supporters did not use consistently).

The statistics that are available are only a minimal portion of the outreach of the contest. The diversity of feedback we have received informally suggest that the contest and the stories got a fantastic exposure. For instance, three UN agencies approached us to present the know-how of the contest as they want to replicate it for their own area. We were approached by a University in South India to republish the stories for a training manual for journalists. Bond, the UK charity, asked us for permission to republish the stories on their website.

According Twitter analytics, 39467 people saw Voices2Paris content on the UNDP Geneva account, 71% of this traffic being geared to the 23 stories. But this is a small portion of the total traffic of the storytelling contest on Twitter: Most of our partners and the participating journalists crafted their own tweets, retweeted and were themselves retweeted.

One story in particular generated a lot of interest on the UNDP Geneva Twitter account: Widespread floods affect livelihoods in Guyana.



There were 28787 page views specifically related to the stories on the UNDPGeneva website, 54% of the total number of page views over the period, 28% of this traffic was specific to the stories.

The following stories scored highest in terms of page views:

- Sinking into paradise climate change worsening coastal erosion in Trinidad;
- Dhaka: Climate refugees and a collapsing city;
- Climate change bites Kenyan tea farmers;
- Sargassum and Climate Change in the Caribbean.

### Spin Off

One of the major outcomes of the Voices2Paris was to generate an authentic coverage of the local reality of climate change and strengthen a diverse network of journalists interested in the issue. Much could also be done with broadcasters who expressed an enormous interest, especially in Africa.

However, the capacity to cover climate change is uneven and most stories were not grounded in scientific evidence.

We asked participating journalists how they saw the potential follow up and their answers back the conclusions of the report. They are interested in opportunities for in-depth reporting experience and for climate change related training.



A natural spin off would be to build on the network that was created through the storytelling contest, providing regular assignments to a smaller group of journalists determined to engage in climate change coverage, so as to build their skills and develop a network of local champions/influencers.

Some media houses have expressed the need to widen their network of local correspondents to cover climate related issues. A natural collaboration could be developed benefiting all parties involved.

*Geneva - March 10, 2016*