

Tips on Climate Communications during the COVID-19 Crisis

The global COVID-19 crisis is changing by the minute, along with the economic, political and social impacts. The COVID-19 crisis shows how fragile countries and global systems are to major shocks, and offers many painful but important lessons. There is a **fundamental reason** to talk about climate change in relation to the current crisis - to foster deep reflections on the nature of fragility, resilience, systematic threats and human society in the hope that the world will learn the lessons and be more prepared for climate risks that are also unfolding now.

As the world enters a time of uncertainty, climate communications will be carried out in a fluid, sometimes chaotic, media and political environment. This requires a rethink of our approach and priorities. We should **consider what elements of our existing work are now of increased importance, what can and should be delayed, and where we might pivot to as narratives and political realities shift**. Without trying to offer a full answer, this document aims to provide a few practical recommendations on what to do and what not to do, as a starting point for more comprehensive strategic thinking.

This document was drafted by climate communications experts from around the world, who brought their various regional and professional perspectives to the mix, aiming to produce a set of recommendations that work not just in one current COVID-19 reality, but ideally across geographies experiencing the pandemic in different ways.

The basics

- Coronavirus is not a solution to climate change. The short-term reductions of carbon emissions and air pollution due to the outbreak are no reason to celebrate.
- With media coverage and discourses in flux, we need to pay extra attention to media and social media monitoring, stay agile and be ready to adapt tactics. Pay attention to new narratives, new voices and unexpected influencers that surface.
- The experience in countries that were hit by COVID-19 the earliest shows that while media space can be overcrowded at first, once outbreaks come under control and subside, media interest in related, broader topics such as sustainable investment, nature protection and climate impacts will recover at a fast pace. This will create space in the media for deeper and more substantial reflections.
- Information sharing across geographies is important. The pandemic is hitting different countries at different times. While each country's media debate is unique, how media and political debates evolved in other regions - particularly those hit earliest - offer useful lessons.

Do's**On tactics**

- Do plan for COVID-19 to dominate the global media landscape for longer than just the next few months.
- Do plan for when the immediate crisis has passed. Media space and appetite will open up again and there may be more space for using our knowledge and insight to add useful dimensions to media narratives.
- Be mindful of emotions and show empathy. Do remember that many audiences will be deeply worried about and saddened by COVID-19, and think about how they may hear your messaging.
- Do ask journalists what would be helpful, whether they are still on their regular beats, and if they're looking for pitches around COVID-19.

On narratives and messages

- Do acknowledge, in all communications, that the COVID-19 pandemic is first and foremost a human tragedy and that emergency measures to contain the virus and to help people in crisis are of utmost importance.
- Do point out that climate change is another massive but foreseeable global risk, that the COVID-19 crisis shows us the importance of early action, and that governments should and can take huge steps to protect their populations.
- Do watch closely governments' plans to recover the economy and start to feed in policy discussion at the earliest stage. Call for stimulus measures which pave the way towards a more resilient and sustainable economy that will bring long-term economic benefits.
- Do warn that recovery efforts that lock in high carbon industries will lead us into another crisis from worsened air pollution and climate change.
- Do expose the precarious nature of global supply chains and how reliant all countries and people are on each other as a result, therefore highlight that international collaboration is needed to tackle global crises. Point out:
 - Leaders are waking up to the fact that we have multiple crises at once – we need international cooperation to tackle them.
 - The people of the world are all in this together. Countries are stronger working together.
- Do encourage deep reflections on the relationship between humans and nature.
 - Stress that if we take care of nature, nature takes care of us. The more we make the connection between the health of humans, wildlife and ecosystems the more likely we will be to avoid future events like this.
 - Warn that a warming planet and a less resilient ecosystem are putting people, societies and economies at growing risk of global crises.
 - Highlight the benefits that we all get from restoring damaged ecosystems.
- Do stress the role of scientists as trusted experts in an international crisis: they are the ones to listen to. The best way to tackle fake news is to rely on facts and only hard ones.

Don'ts	<p><i>On tactics</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Don't try and push stories if there's no space to do so. Journalists are more likely to be overloaded at the moment. ● Don't hype or sensationalise links between COVID-19 and your issues. In the long run, this will do more damage than any short term gain.
	<p><i>On narratives and messages</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Don't imply that the declines of emissions and energy consumptions due to the virus outbreak are good news for the climate agenda. A net-zero society is not a society in constant recession / economic crisis. Climate action requires moving forward into a more sustainable future, not backwards. ● Don't try to portray climate or air pollution as a bigger threat, by comparing climate risk or air pollution with COVID-19 based on the number of deaths that may occur. ● Don't say that COVID-19 has stolen the thunder of climate issues in terms of political and media attention. ● Don't complain that governments and societies are willing to accept restrictions of individual freedom to act against the spread of the virus, but are not prepared to take similar action against the climate crisis. ● Don't provoke nationalism or protectionism. International coordination and collaboration will be key to solving this crisis, and the climate crisis. ● Don't portray tropical forests or nature as hostile and dangerous environments. It's only by pushing nature beyond dangerous limits (deforestation, wildlife trade and human encroachment) that we are causing problems for ourselves.