

Global Issues: Environmental Journalism

The planet's environmental future will be decided in the developing world. Home to four-fifths of the world's population, the world's fastest growing economies, and the richest remaining pockets of biodiversity, these countries will ultimately determine how drastically our climate changes, how many species go extinct, and to what extent our food chain becomes contaminated.

The local media play a critical role in influencing how governments and societies balance growth with sustainability. Unfortunately, environmental news is given short shrift almost everywhere, particularly in the developing world, where reporters are often assigned to cover this field without any training in environmental or scientific issues. They also face tremendous pressures from powerful local interests, the advertisers who support their companies, and even their own editors.

The Earth Journalism Network (EJN), a project of Internews, seeks to empower and enable journalists to cover the environment more effectively. By working with journalists the world over, EJN aims to improve access to quality environmental news and information and engage more voices in environmental policy dialogue on an international scale.

EARTH JOURNALISM NETWORK

Internews launched the Earth Journalism Network in 2004 to help journalists in developing countries cover the environment more effectively. Since relocating its headquarters from the U.S. to Thailand, EJN has been particularly active in Asia. EJN is currently working with environmental journalists from Indonesia, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma and Laos.

INDONESIA

The Earth Journalism Network celebrated Earth Day 2006 by sponsoring the launch of the Society of Indonesian Environmental Journalists at a conference at Tangkahan, on the edge of Gunung

Leuser National Park in Sumatra.

The event culminated with the signing by the 45 participating journalists of the Tangkahan Declaration, formally creating the *Masyarakat Jurnalis Lingkungan Indonesia* (Society of Indonesian Environmental Journalists, or SIEJ) and establishing its guiding principles. Participating members also elected an executive director, Harry Surjadi, a veteran environmental journalist who previously worked at the newspaper *Kompas*.

"This was an important event for journalism and the environment," says Surjadi, who was instrumental in bringing the group together. "It showed that we, Indonesian journalists, are committed to helping the Indonesian people by showing the importance of conserving Indonesian nature and the environment through excellent environmental journalism."

The event was the first-ever national conference of environmental journalists in Indonesia. By holding it at Gunung Leuser National Park, one of many conservation areas in Indonesia whose rich biodiversity is threatened by illegal logging and poaching, the attending journalists also had an



At Gunung Leuser National Park, site of the first national conference of environmental journalists in Indonesia, domesticated elephants are used for patrols and to build trust with local communities. Internews' Earth Journalism Network sponsored the conference, which launched the Society of Indonesian Journalists, an important step in building capacity for environmental reporting in the developing world.

opportunity to report on the impacts of deforestation there and efforts by local people to find a balance between development and the environment.

The Earth Journalism Network helped set the stage for the SIEJ by working with the Alliance of Independent Journalists and Surjadi over the previous year, including providing support for a workshop in December 2005 where some of Indonesia's top environmental journalists agreed to create the organization.

EJN also funded the Tangkahan conference with a grant of US\$20,000 and will provide continuing technical and financial support to the SIEJ.

THAILAND

EJN's base in Thailand has enabled Internews to co-sponsor some landmark workshops introducing regional journalists to environmental issues. The first, organized by Internews, took 13 journalists working in Thailand up to the highlands for six days where they learned about the complex interplay between farmers, forests, loggers and government, and the various approaches that would allow a balance

between development and environmental concerns. The second workshop, organized by two partner organizations, the Salween News Network and the Thai Society of Environmental Journalists, brought together Thai and regional journalists for two days to discuss key environmental issues such as dams, pipelines and forestry.

CHINA

EJN Executive Director James Fahn traveled to Beijing in May 2006 to deliver a lecture to the “salon” of environmental journalists which has been active in raising key issues in the press. He also contributed an article that was published in the *China Daily* and met with other potential partners.

In September, 2006, EJN provided resource people and materials, including keynote speaker Gary Strieker, to a workshop on environmental reporting held in Beijing by the Capital Youth Journalists' Association.

Over the coming year, EJN plans to organize a workshop on environmental law and the media that will be held in Beijing, and workshops on pollution and the media in both Beijing and the South.

VIETNAM and CAMBODIA

EJN is starting a new project that aims to build the capacity of environmental journalists in the lower Mekong region. Among other elements, this project will include three training workshops to be carried out in partnership with the Vietnam Forum of Environmental Journalists, another that will be coordinated by the Cambodia Media Forum on the Environment, and a regional conference that will bring together journalists from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos for discussions on how they can cooperate.

In addition, EJN will support baseline studies on the current level of environmental journalism in Vietnam and Cambodia, and fellowships for journalists participating in the workshops.

“The story of our environment may well be the most important story of the coming century.”

—Eric Newton, Director of Journalism Initiatives
The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

REGIONAL ASIA and the MEKONG DELTA

In October 2005, EJN brought together five of the leading environmental journalists from around the region for an intense and frank discussion on how to improve the field. Representing journalism networks from China, India, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam, the group identified numerous obstacles to overcome and several strategies to be pursued, including capacity-building through workshops and the training of trainers, regional and local fellowships that would support coverage of key stories, and co-production work that would appear in local media and also on the web. Ultimately, the participants agreed to work together to advance environmental journalism in Asia, beginning with plans to collaborate in the coverage of some key trans-boundary issues.

In May and June of 2006, EJN helped to sponsor a month-long journalism workshop organized by the Indochina Media Memorial foundation that focused on environmental issues surrounding the Mekong River.

The course brought together journalists from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Burma and is particularly noteworthy for the inclusion of three journalists selected from China, which has built a series of dams on its portion of the river that is now having serious impacts downstream. EJN supported the presence of the Chinese journalists, and Fahn served as a resource person for the course.

MEXICO

EJN's work in Mexico began in February 2005 when Fahn participated in a training workshop organized by a women's radio journalism network called CIDEM (Colectivo de Investigación, Desarrollo y Educación entre Mujeres). Fahn introduced some basic concepts of environmental journalism and sustainable development to the 20 trainees present, most of whom work in community radio.

In December 2005, CIDEM and EJN jointly organized a four-day workshop in Xalapa that brought together ten women radio journalists to study community-



JAMES FAHN/INTERNEWS

Internews' Earth Journalism Network conducts journalism classes in Thailand.

based forestry and gender issues. The participants engaged in a healthy discussion on sustainable forestry, visited a highland forest community seeking to follow a sustainable approach to natural resource use, and produced a series of radio stories that are being collated onto a DVD.

SPONSORS AND PARTNERS

The activities of the Earth Journalism Network have been funded by the Marisla Foundation, the V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation, the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Rockefeller Financial Services and the Ford Foundation.

EJN has a strategic partnership with the non-profit television production company Environment News Trust, headed by veteran environmental journalist Gary Strieker.

“Environmental journalists in Indonesia and other developing countries are often quite isolated. They operate with few resources and face enormous pressures from vested interests, from advertisers, even from their own editors. So professional organizations like the SIEJ can provide crucial technical, financial and moral support.”

—James Fahn, Executive Director
Internews' Earth Journalism Network (EJN)



Internews Administrative Headquarters

P.O. Box 4448 • Arcata, CA 95518 USA • Telephone: +1 707 826-2030 • Fax: +1 707 826-2136

Email: info@internews.org • Website: www.internews.org