

The latest IPCC report calls for concerted climate action

The challenge of communicating the science and consequences of climate change to the public at large continues to remain a key concern. The role of policy writers, scientific community (both social sciences and fundamental sciences) and the media in addressing this is critical. The problem at large remains that all these above-mentioned groups, work in silos and do not engage with each other, leaving many gaps in communication. This affects the narrative when there is a large summit like the COP or an impending IPCC report release. The large chunks of research that are being carried out and conducted do not seamlessly fall into the alignment of the goals – leading to lack of concerted climate action. What can be done to integrate these different schools of thought? How can the key message be made relevant for policy makers? And how do we ensure that governments address these key issues?

Build the next generation of climate leaders

One of the main components is “impact”, which often gets overlooked or lost in this process of deliberation. Assessing impact is critical to view from the perspective of the following stakeholders- youth, vulnerable communities, and indigenous communities. During my recent book talk events, specially to the above-mentioned groups, I can see a considerable amount of awareness and stoicism in these groups which stem from the fact that these groups have been consuming information that points dismally toward the fact that the brunt of the impact of climate change will be borne by them. Hence it becomes imperative to engage and enthuse them in the efforts towards climate action.

If the bastion of climate change research has been within institutes and universities that had access to resources both monetary and manpower, these bastions must open their doors and minds to accepting the thoughts and approach toward technology that the millennials and indigenous wisdom can bring in. Approaches to modelling, qualitative research methods to ascertain the outcomes of marginal groups can lead to a more collaborative effort – which is necessary for the public to make rational decisions rather than being bogged down by compliance towards climate goals.

Become a publicly engaged scholar

When the pandemic struck, and the uncertainty and lockdowns were creating much more chaos, many well-known scientists and medical experts took to Twitter and YouTube, talking about the symptoms, line of treatment, predictions, and modelling of events. This meant that the media was no longer the gatekeeper of information and that the public had direct access to the most credible and honest communication coming from the experts.

In the area of climate change, the complexity and nature of information meant that it could be processed either through the voice of a scientist or his interpretation to the media. Often the message was lost in translation. Today, it is not just the mainstream media, but any individual – a blogger, vlogger, a podcaster who can become a climate reporter and steer the conversation towards these issues.

It is critical that climate change scholars become more publicly engaged by contributing to policy, key action reports and interact with businesses, social scientists, climate scientists, instead of working in silos.

Managing the narrative is key – problems of painting a doomsday narrative – in the form of a lonely polar bear sitting on a drifting ice shelf in the Arctic, a distant corner of the world, doesn't galvanize behavioural change in the local populace.

Be pro-active in networking

When there is an upcoming COP summit, release of IPCC report, relevant forums, pitch in to align the discussion to that of your country's persistent messaging. Should there be a focus to increase the avenues for renewable energy in the region in the next COP summit? How can this action be communicated in the policy document and how will it ensure that this message is amplified and becomes the message that stands out from the rest at the negotiating table. Climate scientists, policy analysts and communicators must be relentless in this exercise. Steps towards this goal can include building a consortium of like-minded institutes that can bring about a multidisciplinary approach towards the problem, creating frequent, yet consistent forums to amplify this message and finally ensuring the all these efforts either resonate with the overarching narrative that the country's Government conveys or nudging it towards the direction that can mean a win-win situation for all stakeholders.