

**Training Workshop for Journalists based in Tribal Areas**  
**What makes news and how to structure a news story?**  
**By Shafqat Munir**

**What makes news?**

A fresh piece of information which affects the lives of the people or which is in the interest of the people makes news.

It involves:

**Freshness (Timeliness)**

Information (with right to know of the people's perspective) or what is new to the people of a certain locality or community.

**Nearness (Closeness or proximity of the event):** Any happening or generation of information, which is, close or near to people. Example: A local minor level accident near Hyderabad will not be news for the people of Islamabad unless it is a big event of national importance.

**Conflict:** Conflicts and disputes on water, human relations, resource distribution and allocation, material, customs and societal norms, village level petty disputes always make news.

**Personality:** Interviews of personalities of the environmentalists, experts, stakeholders.

Indigenous knowledge system: This is very important in the village context; particularly the farming communities do have this capability. The journalists can make news stories based on the indigenous knowledge system prevailing in their areas regarding farming and agriculture and local level cottage industry and their impact on environment.

The elders can provide sufficient knowledge on the growers and farmers' issues of concern and their solution. They could advise how in the shortage of water, the communities could conserve water and reuse the water resources amid depleting reserves of water.

**How to construct a good news story?**

Constructing news story is a technical matter. For constructing a news story, first of all the relevant material regarding the environmental issues must be sorted out, properly read and analyzed. The information collected should be true. To judge the authenticity of the information, we should follow the ABC of news.

**A: Accuracy**

**B: Balance**

**C: Clarity**

When you are sure that you have authentic and sufficient information, then you have to write/construct a story.

The writing and constructing a news story, you have to follow the inverted pyramid style of writing. Which means the very important and revealing information should be at the top, rest of the relevant information and details should follow and gradually least important details should be at the bottom.

**Structure of a story**

Basically news story has two major parts:

I) INTRO

II) BODY TEXT

Further in the inverted pyramid style, INTRO comes first and the second paragraph, you have to set the scene and then the details in the third, fourth and fifth paragraphs. A news story has to provide information as to what happened, where and when happened, who is involved or who said and why did it happen. How it happened should also be covered.

**It mean five “W”s and one “H” are necessary for constructing a news story.**

**What is difference between active and passive reporting?**

Active reporting is basically a pro-public on the spot truthful reporting while passive reporting is hazy and dull reporting. In active reporting, journalists try to protect the right to know of the people, particularly of environment and development concern.

How a rural journalist can identify and address unreported and underreported issues of public interest?

Since journalists are the agents of information and free flow of information, they are supposed to pin point what affects the lives of the people and what is in the interest of the people. Journalists can dig out information particularly regarding rural political economy, about power of the landed elite and exploitation of the working classes.

They can identify and address the unreported and underreported issues only by avoiding their biases, interests of their relatives and the influential people. They have to be careful while reporting such stories because some time they could prove to be dangerous for them. So they should first get hold of the authentic information substantiated by documents. They should avoid alleging one or the other party. They should be independent. They should have good and credible sources in the public offices and public interest organizations and the communities.

**What is the relevance of environmental and development journalism in rural context?**

Environmental and development journalism is very much relevant to rural communities. Since environmental hazards damage the health of the people, environment and development journalists can highlight these hazards and the developmental needs of the area. Rural communities are required to be informed about the happening around them. The rural communities do not only need to have information regarding the political elite rather they would be more interested in how can they grow crops with more yield and with less water consumption. They need to know how water shortage and degradation and desertification of land is causing drought like situation and what would be the impact of market forces on the development sector. By telling about environment and development to the rural communities could better serve.