**Educating for Sustainability Action**
International Conference Celebrating 40 Years of CEE
CEE, Ahmedabad, India, January 9-11, 2025 www.ceeindia.org

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## Creating Impactful Public Communication Strategies



### Speakers

- Ms Kalpana Sharma, Independent Journalist, GC - CEE
- Mr Dilip Surkar, Executive Director of Vikram A Sarabhai Community Science Centre (VASCSC) and the Director of VIKSAT
- Mr Ajai Saxena, Blue Flag Jury member (Goa)
- Ms Pankti Pandey - Founder – zerowasteadda
- Ms Tanishka Kachru, Associate Senior Faculty in Communication Design at National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad
- RJ Pooja Dalal Dolakia, Radio City
- Mr Abhinav Kumar, Programme Director, UNESCO

### Presentations and Key Messages

*Ms Kalpana Sharma,* with over five decades of experience in journalism across print and digital platforms, highlighted the dominance of political and celebrity news over environmental issues in mainstream media. She shared the challenges of publishing original environmental reports due to a lack of focus and financial constraints. Sharma stressed the importance of reaching out to local-language newspapers (Hindi, Tamil, and Malayalam) to amplify environmental issues.

*Mr Dilip Surkar (VASCSC and VIKSAT)* highlighted the decade-long journey (2007-2017) of the Science Express, a mobile exhibition housed in a 16-coach train. The initial four phases concentrated on general science, while the subsequent three years were dedicated to the Biodiversity Express.

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Conceptualised by the CEE team led by Kartikeya Sarabhai, this initiative attracted an impressive 18.2 million visitors, establishing itself as the largest mobile exhibition globally. The Science Express achieved 12 records in the Limca Book of Records, having visited 529 stations and travelled 1.6 lakh kilometres across India.

*Mr Ajai Saxena* worked extensively on marine life interpretation activities and facilities. He developed a marine aquarium featuring an interactive coral reef diorama and hands-on learning opportunities. He advocated the philosophy that "nothing is wasted in nature; all is utilised," emphasising sustainable practices. He initiated virtual safari experiences using powerful new technologies to enhance public engagement. He also conducted guided tours focused on birdwatching, connecting communities with biodiversity.

*Ms Pankti Pandey (zerowasteadda)* discussed her work in waste management and sustainability education, highlighting her 14 years of experience and the "Zero Waste Adda" initiative. She shared strategies for educating communities about composting and reducing waste, and promoted her Instagram platform "Zero Waste Adda" as a resource for sustainability enthusiasts.

*Ms Tanishka Kachru (NID, Ahmedabad)* focused on how to design and create exhibitions that effectively communicate environmental messages, sharing experiences of working with fragile ecosystems like Ladakh.

She highlighted collaborative skills development with students, enabling them to develop ideas and use tools to communicate effectively. Kachru discussed fieldwork, workshops, and interactions with communities, monks, and local schools to build global connections and empower communities to tell their stories.

She shared insights from the Himalayan Institute of Ladakh workshops on sustainability storytelling, emphasising the importance of categorised stories and trained professionals delivering these stories effectively. Kachru also emphasised the role of exercises like model-building to empower communities and students to share their narratives confidently.

*RJ Pooja Dalal Dolakia (Radio City)* advocated sustainable patterns inspired by Hindu dharma, such as feeding animals and preserving natural resources. She highlighted the impact of globalisation, industrialisation, and internet usage over the past 30 years in diluting ancestral sustainable habits.

She emphasised radio as a far-reaching medium to promote sustainability campaigns and engage rural communities where internet penetration is limited. Dolakia conducted campaigns like "City Chalo Ayodhya" (fact-checking needed for name accuracy) to teach Ayodhya shopkeepers and locals about sustainability. Through this, she distributed 5 lakh eco-friendly bags and interacted with locals about alternatives to plastic. She reached 20 million people through initiatives like "Sitting in Bhaithal," inviting eco-friendly start-ups for public engagement.

*Mr Abhinav Kumar (UNESCO)* emphasised how interpretation can simplify complex environmental and nature education topics. He highlighted UNESCO's role in working with 43 UNESCO sites in India, such as eco-hydrological parks and biosphere reserves.

He discussed the "Murmurs of Mountains" toolkit for environmental education, which includes a simple wooden box containing educational materials, a Toda-embroidered pouch for schools, activity sheets, posters, quizzes on ecosystems, and a storybook featuring the gaur animal and Nilgiri

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Biosphere Reserve (NBR). This toolkit is designed as an exhibition-in-a-box concept to educate about sustainability and keystone species.

Kumar further highlighted the importance of connecting teachers and students with nature through storytelling, visual aids, and hands-on activities. He also showcased the Keystone Foundation's efforts to explain changes in food crop patterns and nutrition.

**Session Highlights**

- Environmental issues require better representation in mainstream media through original reports and investigative journalism.
- Leveraging digital platforms and local-language publications can amplify sustainability stories effectively.
- Community-driven approaches and inclusive design are crucial for impactful communication in fragile ecosystems.
- Promoting environmental awareness through innovative interpretive media is essential for engaging diverse audiences.

**Quotes with attribution**

*"The process is more important than the result, yet it often gets left out in environmental reporting."* — Ms Kalpana Sharma, Independent Journalist, GC - CEE

*"YouTube and digital platforms are becoming the go-to source for news among the general public. Let's use them effectively for environmental communication."* — Ms Kalpana Sharma, Independent Journalist, GC - CEE

*"Interpretation is the key to breaking the complexities of environmental education, making it accessible and impactful for teachers and students alike."* — Mr Abhinav Kumar, Programme Director, UNESCO

**Key Remarks from the Participants**

- Emphasised the need to train young journalists in investigative reporting on environmental issues.
- Suggested creating a repository of innovative communication strategies and successful case studies.
- Discussed the potential of gamification to engage youth in sustainability actions.

**Key Recommendations from the Session**

1. Encourage partnerships between journalists, civil services, and environmental organisations to highlight critical issues.
2. Invest in local-language media and digital storytelling to reach underserved audiences.
3. Develop targeted campaigns to showcase success stories in sustainability and environmental restoration.

**Who Acts?**

- Journalists and media professionals

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- Civil society organisations and educators
- Policy-makers and government agencies
- Local communities and youth groups

**Referred Case Studies**

- Project Kanchan: A grassroots initiative promoting composting and waste management.
- Community-driven exhibition designs in Ladakh showcasing sustainable practices.
- Science Express: A mobile science and biodiversity exhibition with hands-on activities and workshops, reaching millions of visitors across India.
- "Murmurs of Mountains" Toolkit: A UNESCO initiative connecting students and teachers to environmental education through creative tools and resources.