

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report asks a simple question: what responsibilities, challenges and opportunities does climate change present for TV producers and executives?

The Paris Agreement, signed in December 2015, marked a major global commitment to decarbonise economies and societies within decades, and has been supported by all major international economic, business and policy bodies. And yet there is a lack of public understanding of the scale of change required.

TV remains one of the most influential and accessible ways that people make sense of change in the world, and receive and respond to new knowledge. But climate change is generally considered to be an ‘awkward’ topic for broadcasters.

The lack of clear and direct attribution to human suffering in the here and now, and the very dispersed distribution of responsibility make it difficult to develop the human angles that are so central to the majority of broadcast storytelling.

Nevertheless, television has a good track record of making climate change related issues accessible to a range of audiences – and lessons have been learnt about what works and what doesn’t. Above all, broadcasters emphasized the need to avoid anything that could be construed as ‘preachy.’

Many of those we interviewed wanted a nuanced conversation about whether to pursue climate change *on* TV or *in* TV. It was argued by several that headlining too much content as ‘about’ the topic would result in rapidly diminishing returns, whereas finding the right places to plant relevant storylines within existing strands or magazine programmes had been shown to work.

Natural history, travel, adventure and landscape shows all draw good audiences, and often weave in appropriate reference to climate change. This can be seen in the BBC’s *Countryfile* and *Springwatch*, and Channel 4’s *Grand Designs* and *Food Unwrapped*. Simon Reeve’s travelogue/current affairs hybrids for BBC Two frequently feature climate change related issues with notable success.

A recent body of ‘living off grid’ shows including Channel 4’s *Eden* has prompted audiences to consider questions about consumption. *Hugh’s Fish Fight* (Channel 4) and *Hugh’s War on Waste* (BBC One) offered a different, more campaigning model of programming and *Arctic Live* (BBC Two) has demonstrated that event television can have a real impact.

So how could television do better? While there were a number of positive examples of the embedding of relevant threads within existing shows respondents suggested there were opportunities to push this principle further. They referenced *The Apprentice*, *Top Gear*, food and home improvement shows and natural history and travelogues as places in the schedules where good creative judgment can deliver appropriate references and raise pertinent issues.

Innovation in storytelling and form offers another route to embedding sophisticated climate change related content in the schedules. In international content there are powerful recent examples of creative approaches that have served diverse audiences with ‘difficult’ stories. *The Chronicles of Nadiya*, *Exodus*, *The Refugee Camp* (all BBC) and *The Tribe* (Channel 4) are instances of experiment and innovation in making ‘other people’s lives’ more familiar to wider audiences. These examples prompt the question: where are the parallel innovations around climate change coverage?

Several interviewees suggested that broadcast ‘champions’ could make a big difference. Senior executives making a clear invitation for ideas to be offered in this area would incentivise producers to develop and pitch more climate-centred content. Broadcasters could commit to experiment with innovative new climate related content, and to reflect upon and share what they learn.

Media executives acknowledged that they needed to be consistently brought back to the topic in order that they are reminded to ‘keep trying’ with innovative ideas. There was recognition too that producers and commissioners need to spend more time with specialists, keeping up with this broad and fast-moving field.