



STEP



ECOSF

## Science and Technology Exchange Program (STEP)

In Partnership with  
**ECO Science Foundation (ECOSF)**

National policy and  
institutional  
framework for

# Health Communication

Virtual Panel Discussion

November 26, 2020

## Introduction

By continuous coronavirus pandemic, various countries, including Islamic countries, have suffered from enormous public health damage, human mental security, and misinformation.

With regard to this fact that all the individuals have been involved, the necessity of communication among the different parts of society, including medical organs, scientists, and government authorities, is significant. Following that the broadcasting the correct news and cooperation of people seems to be a prior need.

Although the relation among the society organs has been essential in advance, having more connections and more knowledge enhancement becomes vital in these circumstances since everyone is involved in the control of the pandemic. These days health communication is becoming more necessary than before, whereas this is a knowledge base phenomenon and has to go forward with science.

Science and Technology exchange program (STEP) and ECO Science Foundation (ECOSF) emphasize the importance of knowledge exchanging among the policymakers, scientists, physicians, and people. They believe Health communication is a vital way of lessening this pandemic's negative consequences.

Hence, the STEP and ECOSF on November 26, 10:30-13 GMT have held a virtual panel discussion on the subject of "National policy and institutional framework for health communication," focused on:

- 1) National policy on the publishing information and its education methods
- 2) Strategies for COVID-19 Infodemic management
- 3) Policy on preventing to publish or broadcast fake news during the COVID-19 pandemic

This panel had four speakers and a moderator from five different countries. You could find a brief content of the speakers' presentation on the following pages.



**Zeinab Al SAFFAR** 

**TV Personality, Host, Writer &  
Executive Producer  
Lebanon**



**STEP**



## Moderator

Various countries, including Islamic countries, have suffered enormously from damages in the public health sector, human mental security, and misinformation. This prompted the necessity of effective communication among the different parts of society, including the medical body, health care workers, scientists, the public, and government authorities. This goes hand in hand, also with the broadcasting of accurate news and cooperation among people. The need for communication and knowledge enhancement becomes vital under such circumstances for the simple fact that everyone is responsible and is involved in the control of the pandemic.

Today, more than before, health communication is becoming more indispensable. Yet, it has to be in line with science. In partnership with Eco Science Foundation through the Science and Technology Exchange programs that emphasize the quintessential importance of knowledge exchange among the policymakers, scientists, physicians, and people, most of the Science and Technology Foundation believe health communication is vital lessening these

pandemic and negative consequences. One of the themes that we focus on is science communication.

The STEP and ECO Foundation hold this virtual panel discussion on national policy and institutional framework for health communication, geared to focus on the national policy, publishing information, and its educational methods. Strategies for covid-19 infodemic Management Policy on preventing to publish or broadcast fake news during the covid-19 pandemic.





**Prof. Manzoor Hussain Soomro** 

**President of ECOSF  
Pakistan**



## **Bridging Science and Society through Science Communication**

The gaps between science and society and the role of science communication are bridging science and society through science communication. The 21st century is considered the century of knowledge, and the transition process is on science and technology. The paradox of our time is that despite the spectacular advances in science and technology, unprecedented economic progress, and improved quality of life, growing inequalities exist. A new role of science and technology has to take place, and the science and technology needs to have a linkage with the policy as well as social engagement. Sustainable development can only take place if science, technology, and policy support it. Therefore, there is a synergy between scientific and societal progress, which I consider a must. So the cohabitation is required between science and society. The exact communication and understanding become more important. The importance of science communication is better the complex global changes, such as climate change, pandemics, energy, water, food, and nexus. Four main takeaways for pursuing scientist literacy in the population:

1) The practical argument people need to understand science, and even more so the technology to handle everyday life in the science and technology-dominated society that we are in today.

2) The civic argument is that people need an understanding of science to relate to the many complex science-related issues that confront citizens of modern democracies today

3) The cultural argument is that science is a part of our cultural heritage and has profoundly influenced our view of the world and humankind's place in it. That's one needs a grasp of what science is in order to understand the culture. And I think the Islamic world has to go back to look at the roots. And also what I draw inspiration from the Qur'an, which says, why don't you think? And there are indications for those who think and so on.

4) A scientifically literate workforce is necessary for a sound and flourishing economy in most countries. I've seen some of the developed countries' private industry investing in science and education in the STEM education for the surroundings of people they get STEM-educated workforce for their faculties.



**Dr. Zarrin Zardar** 

**Executive Director in UNESCO  
Chair on Communication of Science  
and Technology  
Iran**

## **Learning from COVID-19; Health communication experiences during the pandemic in Iran**

When the first case infected by novel Coronavirus was identified and announced, we needed urgent change in public attitudes and behaviors. So we started with trials and errors. Volunteer groups gathered educational materials for the lay public. These volunteer groups consisted of MD students, healthcare staff, and journalists from both social and mass media. Also, we had heavy coverage of state television and other official channels. With all these actors' contributions, the huge corpus of content translated to Farsi in a short time. Different stakeholders with a lot of conflicts of interest worked together to achieve the same goal. However, this kind of volunteer content production provokes fake news, which WHO called Infodemic. It also leads us to different interactions between key actors by middling amateur and professional media content producers and journalists. The national headquarter fighting the Coronavirus pandemic faced two main challenges for applying its vertical information flow and concentrated media management: social media and international organization. To manage this alternative information flows, the headquarter should establish a media secretariat for monitoring media activities around the country.

All elite media have a representative in this secretariat. Some of the popular social media accounts are the members as well, and this facilitates communication with the most influential social media and control the information flow through them.

With international organizations, the strategy was specified joint work with them and focus on local content production under the health and medical training ministry's umbrella. The ministry started to produce educational content for the wider public and distribute the content through social and mass media. The ministry activated its legal pages and communication channels in social media and tried to strengthen its upper hand position by surveillance on mass media Covid-19 content. To produce the content, they followed three strategies:

- Short term content, including Daily information, sanitary protocols.
- Mid-term content, promoting citizens' public knowledge on novel Coronavirus.
- Long-term content Public should comprehend the multi-dimensional nature of the crisis.

People need to know about the economic, political, cultural, and social aspects of the problem.





Along with strategies, the media secretariat and Corona national headquarters need to fight Infodemic at the pandemic, massive inaccurate data on social and mass media is a severe global threat. Every country has its own ways to stop misinformation; Health ministers, other officials, and healthcare professionals respond to fake news individually. Still, it's not organized even to trace Infodemic in our state TV; people who tell stories about how you can prevent infection or cure easily with unusual methods or herbal medicine. If we want to survive and control the pandemic, we must engage in a conversation with society and other stakeholders. Health communication would be an interdisciplinary academic field of study in our university in less than a year. I guess we will have seasoned health journalists as a result. As a health communication community, we have learned a lot from the novel coronavirus pandemic. Synergies through panels like this will help all of us to promote health everywhere.





**Dr. Mahaletchumy Arujanan** 

**Executive Director of MABIC  
Malaysia**



## Science Communication: An Obligation beyond R&D

WHO introduced the word Infodemic at the start of the pandemic. There was a lot of fake news and pseudoscience. All these things confuse the public, preventing the authorities from the front lines to achieve the target of breaking the chain of transmission. Infodemic, pseudoscience, and myth about science are not new. It was prevalent even prior to covid-19. As a science communicator, I would say scientists are still slow in addressing Infodemic and Pseudoscience. Covid-19 is a great teacher, and the void in science communication cannot be avoided or be left alone, especially after seeing the current damage. Mark Walport says communication to a wider audience is part of the job of a scientist. However, this is not done at the optimum level, especially in developing countries.

Science communication as a discipline is only about 25 years old, and in the developing world, it is still in its infancy. Science literacy among various stakeholders serves many key purposes. It helps policymakers to develop science-based policies and regulations. In most countries, policies and regulations are developed by diplomatic officers and bureaucrats who are not trained in science.

Many regulations stifle emerging technologies like nanotechnology, genetic modification, and pharmaceutical research. This is where scientists have to communicate science with policymakers to make informed decisions. We need to democratize science so that the public can put pressure on the government on the country's funding priorities. What areas require dire funding? It empowers the public to influence policy-making and make informed decisions on a daily basis related to their health, food, and environment, among others.

Bridging the communication gap between scientists and industry supports commercialization and enable investors to fund promising research. Students in developing countries need to be exposed to the potential of STEM so that future STEM talent could be developed. This is important as we see a decline in STEM interest among students.

Richard Feynman says the ultimate test of our knowledge as a great scientist is the capacity to convey our research's impact to others. We do not have enough civic scientists in our countries who are ready to reach out to the public.



More efforts are needed to transform our scientists to become civic scientists. This can be done through science communication training for scientists; including science communication subjects in all STEM degree programs in the universities, incentivizing scientists to engage with society; and establishing a science communication office at all universities and research institutes. These are my wish list.







**Mr. Mohamed Elsonbaty Ramadan** 

**Freelance Science Journalist**

**Egypt**



## Preventing the next Infodemic

When the coronavirus problem became wider, WHO announced it as a global pandemic; it has affected each of our lives; economic, political, and even sports and entertainment sectors. In this situation, broadcasting media, newspapers, and journalists are key players in transferring scientific knowledge from the scientific community to the public. The public is not the only consumer of social media information but also played an essential factor in spreading and redistributing this information through social media. Hence when the public receives a lot of information, as all of them are not accurate, this kind of loop starts; there is a lot of misinformation and fake news, an overabundance of information. From my point of view, some problems happened within this flow that resulted in the current situation: At least in the Middle East, we discovered that the media is not ready to deal with scientific content as they do with other types of content. Non-specialized media covering political, economic news, entertainment, and sports are excellent, but when it comes to science, they were not successful because science was not there before. When we need an expert in media, science, or health, it can be difficult because we don't have many options to be

hosted in such programs. The scientific community is also not well equipped to communicate science to the public and the media. The gap between science and the media is part of the wider gap between science and society and the lack of science and communication skills; it doesn't stop there because the public audience is also media illiterate. If the media was trying to promote or broadcast pseudoscience or some misinformation, the public does not have the ability to judge this information. We should not listen to that, what it is called media literacy, how to deal with information comes from media. On the other hand, the public also started sharing much information through their social media accounts. So the media was a key player in spreading information about Covid. We need to work more or build media capacity in terms of covering science and train journalists and media professionals. Also need to build the scientific community's capacity because there is a clear lack of scientific communication skills among scientists, researchers, and academics in many countries.

While working on building the media and scientific community's capacity, this will allow them to have better involvement and



better connections, helping manage the infotainment. Finally, the social media platforms themselves have to find a better solution as they were not designed to be sources of information. Many people depend on their social media feeds as their source of news, including Facebook, Twitter, or WhatsApp groups; this technology platform starts to put some mechanism to stop the spread of this misinformation by checking or observing accounts spread the misinformation. To prevent the next Infodemic, we need collaboration between all the stakeholders, starting from the scientific communities, scientists, research organizations, and the health authorities. The government works together with civil society, technology platforms, media and journalism, and the public to stop the spread of misinformation and prevent Infodemic that will have better consequences on the individuals' communities' health.



STEP



ECOSF

## Get in Touch with STEP



## Get in Touch with ECOSF

