



Science REPORTER

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REACHING SCIENCE TO THE LAST PERSON STANDING

IN a country as huge and diverse as India, where cultures and languages change every few hundred kilometres, communication of scientific information in English alone cannot be expected to serve the intended purpose – that of making every Indian citizen scientifically aware. In India, just about 14% of the nation's 1.3 billion citizens can speak and write in English. It stands to reason, therefore, that science communication activities need to be supported and promoted in regional languages, and possibly even local dialects, to expand the reach of scientific content and make science more inclusive.

While several efforts are being attempted worldwide, and in India too, to communicate science in regional languages, challenges still remain. For one, a lack of scientific resources for communication in regional languages. Often, translations of English published resources are attempted but these fail



to have the desired effect since the context may not be culturally situated. Original content in regional languages imbued with its cultural flavour and set amidst the local contexts has much more appeal and impact and elicits much more understanding from the target audience.

These were some of the issues that were deliberated and discussed during the recently concluded two-day National Urdu Science Congress held in Srinagar during 22-23 September 2021. Organised by Vigyan Prasar, Department of Science & Technology, Govt of India and the Central University of Kashmir, the conference was attended by scientists, students, teachers, science administrators and practitioners of science communication.

The conference was a part of the nationwide programme of Vigyan Prasar to launch efforts in science communication in regional languages. It has already made a beginning by launching science magazines in languages such as Gujarati, Kannada, Konkani, Urdu, Tamil and others. In fact, at the culmination of the conference, Dr Nakul Parashar, Director, Vigyan Prasar and Prof Mehrajuddin Mir, Vice-Chancellor, Central University of Kashmir announced the intent of both the organizations to launch a programme for the creation of science communication content in the Kashmiri language.

It cannot be denied that scientific discourse in the native language leads to much more acceptability and audience engagement. So, there is a need to generate more content in print and electronic media in the regional languages and explore the possibility of communicating regional language scientific content through social media as well. Having extended the reach of information to the palmtops of the mobile-owning population, social media channels have become powerful tools and could be exploited to expand the reach of science communication and science popularization.

The journey to equip and empower the last person standing with scientific information and awareness cannot be performed without extending support to science communication efforts in regional languages.

Hasan Jawaid Khan

Science Reporter is published monthly by the National Institute of Science Communication And Policy Research (NIScPR), CSIR, Dr K S Krishnan Marg, New Delhi-110 012. NIScPR assumes no responsibility for statements and opinions advanced by the authors or for any claims made in the advertisements published in *Science Reporter*.

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