

How to: Documentary Filmmaking Guide Road to COP26 x Camera Sika





About Camera Chica – Camera Sika

Cámara Chica—which broadly translated in English means ‘Little Cameras’—aims to develop the knowledge of educators and community leaders in various countries, equipping them with the skills needed to teach digital filmmaking to young people, and to introduce young people to filmmaking and visual storytelling. Each country’s Cámara Chica is given a locally tailored name.

In Nepal, the programme is dubbed Camera Sika, which means to “learn the camera” in Nepali. Camera Sika was introduced in 2019 and has since worked with more than 150 children across Nepal with independent film and media professionals to develop original creative content on a range of issues. Through Camera Sika capacity building and collaborations, children use filmmaking as a way to develop critical thinking and social skills while schools and educators are introduced to arts-based approaches to learning.

About Climate Change Films

The UK will host the 26th UN Climate Change conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland on 1-12 November 2021. The summit will bring together heads of states, experts, campaigners, and others to envision and accelerate towards a zero-carbon economy.

To support the UK government’s aim to make the next COP the most inclusive ever, British Council in Nepal is implementing the Road to COP26, which aims to strengthen capacities and amplify voices of those most impacted so that they can engage national and international stakeholders of climate change response in the lead up to COP26.

To support young people’s agency in climate dialogue British Council and Into Film have reprised the Camera Sika in a crossover with the Road to COP26 campaign. We are calling for climate change young films (those made by or with under 18 creators) from educators, students, schools and independent film/media professionals/artists and offering grants, capacity building and screening opportunities through our official platforms and events. Through these engagements the project will bring the perspectives and concerns of young people to stakeholders of climate action.



[About Into Film](#)

Into Film is an education charity that puts film at the heart of children and young people's educational, cultural and personal development. Into Film's work is supported principally by the BFI through the National Lottery, and by the film industry through Cinema First.

[About the British Council](#)

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. Since 1934, the British Council has created friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and the wider world. Our work in the arts has been central to this mission for more than 80 years, seeking new ways of connecting with and understanding each other through creativity.

Our work in arts creates new relationships between artists, organisations and audiences to develop stronger creative sectors around the world. We help artists to break new ground, support creativity and innovation, increase capacity by building skills to support livelihoods and cultural enterprise, extend safe spaces for creative exchange and contribute to research and policy.

Camera Sika in Nepal is supported by Nepal Film Development Board and UNICEF Nepal and is made possible with the collaborative efforts of Camera Sika mentors, participating schools and young people.

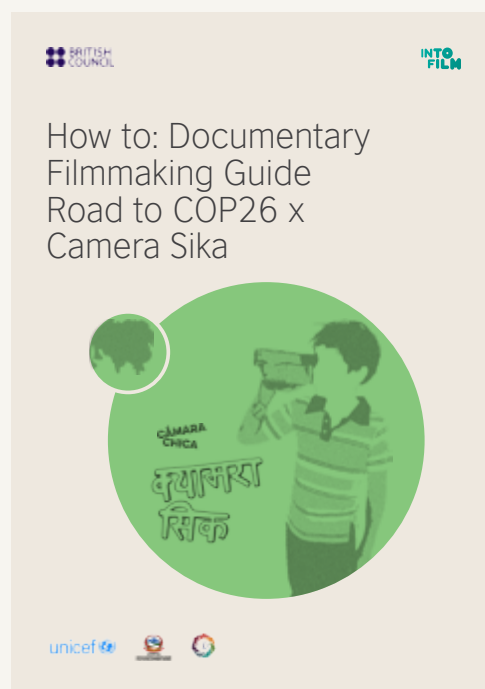
The current mentoring team is made up of Kishore Acharya, [Sudin Sundar Bajracharya](#), Devaki Bist, [Manoj Bohara](#), Prasuna Dangol, Manindra Singh Danuwar, Patrika Ghimire, Gaurav Dhvaj Khadka, Bhagwati Nepali, [Mahesh Shrestha](#), [Shrijana Shrestha](#), [Rabik Upadhyay](#) and Pradhanya Yonzon.



Safeguarding

Please watch all films in this resource prior to delivering these activities in class to ensure content is appropriate for your students. We also recommend you view content on external links in advance of sharing these with children as we are unable to accept responsibility for the content which may change, move or become unavailable without our knowledge.

Remember, when engaging students in a filmmaking project consent will be required from their parent/guardian. Please contact the British Council or Into Film for further information.





Documentary filmmaking

Documentary films can be created in a wide variety of ways and the following is a guideline of some of the most important elements to include. Please note that this resource has been created specifically for the Camera Sika, Road to COP26 documentary filmmaking project – with all films focusing on the issue of Climate Change.

Structure and form

When making a documentary it can be very useful to stick to the following structure:

1. Introduce the problem
2. Explain the impact
3. Suggest a solution
4. Explain the benefit

But how you present this, the form of your film, can be created in different ways. We're going to look at 4 forms your documentary could take:

- Presenter led
- Voiceover led
- Information led
- Without narration (note – for advanced filmmakers only)

Presenter led film

A film where you have a Presenter who speaks to the camera, explains the situation, and interviews participants. You should be familiar with this form, we see it often on television.

In this format the audience learns about the topic either with the presenter as she or he learns more from talking to other people (experts, professionals, etc), or from the presenter as she or he explains the topic from their own knowledge.

If you're making a presenter led film, then it's important that your presenter is engaging, confident, and passionate about the topic. They should speak clearly and be someone that your audience can understand easily and sympathise with.

[Here's an example of a Presenter led documentary.](#) 

In this film our presenter teaches us about the topic and explores it. She doesn't speak to any other experts or attendees of the Jatra to get information from them, she simply shows us what the experience is like, and what kind of costumes and activities the attendees wear and do (as well as what kind of food is available).

You may also notice that the Presenter in this film also provides a voiceover at times, which leads us into the next form of documentary...





Voiceover led film

This is similar to the presenter led film, except we never see the presenter, we only hear their voice.

If you're making a voiceover led film then it's important that you choose a voice that's clear to understand, and is able to create the right amount of emotion or authority on the subject.

Also, it's very important that you record the voiceover in a quiet room. And it's best to choose a room that doesn't have an echo. Try recording some audio in different rooms to find the best option available to you.

[Here's an example of a Voiceover led documentary.](#) 

You'll notice that although you never see the presenter in this film, he illustrates his words with shots that explain what he's saying.

It's also a good example of youth-filmmaking that doesn't have much equipment. The filmmaker is only using his phone, no tripod or any other equipment. The camera work is quite shaky at times too – but because he is so interested in the topic, and so engaging to listen to, his film becomes much stronger.

This film is an excellent example of an authentically youth-made film – this young filmmaker has made a film about exactly what he wanted to say, and that feeling comes across very strongly to the audience.

Because this film is about a personal response to the Covid lockdown in the UK, it doesn't feature any statistics or information on the screen, and if you want to do something like that then you'll need to follow the form of the next style of documentary.



Information led

This kind of documentary has no presenter or voiceover – it simply uses written information on the screen.

If you're making this kind of film then make sure the written information is in a font which is easy to read, and make sure it's on the screen for enough time for people to read it, but not for too long.

Also, if you're using statistics or information from a source then make sure you credit that source (we'll talk more about this later)


[Here's an example of an Information led documentary.](#) 

What's interesting about this documentary is how the young filmmakers have shot some observational scenes that might look like they're from a fiction/narrative film, and have mixed this with shots of the young people holding up information on the topic (with the source in the bottom right hand corner of the frame).

There are no interviews, instead the young filmmakers have chosen to blend the form of narrative/fiction filmmaking with documentary filmmaking, and the result is fantastic. It shows the day-to-day life of the young people at school and gives the topic extra importance to young people, because we see how distracted the children are at school with their smartphones.

Without narration or text

Finally, this is a format that features none of the above – it’s a documentary that works in a purely visual way, with no presenter, no voiceover, and no writing. This can be a difficult film to create, because you don’t have a presenter, voice, or information on the screen to explain the situation – but it can be very powerful as it asks the audience to start thinking about the topic deeply, or to create their own connections and understanding. This is a very good format to follow to create a more balanced film (more about balance later).

[Here’s an example of a documentary without narration where the subject of the film becomes a bit like a presenter.](#) 

This kind of film is easier to achieve, and easier for an audience to understand – but you will need to make sure that the subject of the documentary has a warm personality, or is interesting for the audience.

You can see in *The Art of Parkinson’s* that only one interview has been done with the subject – all of the shots of the subject telling his story are from the same angle. Then the filmmaker has followed the creation of one piece of art and mixed the shots of the interview with the shots of the artwork being created.

This creates a journey to the story – not only do we have the story the subject is telling us about how he deals with Parkinson’s Disease, but we also have the journey of the creation of an artwork. Combined this creates a story which is much more uplifting and positive than you might expect – it creates a strong feeling of hope.

It’s also very well shot – notice how steady the camera is for the interview, and how much thought has gone into the interview shot: it’s bright, colourful, and well-composed.

[Here’s another example of a documentary without narration.](#) 

You should notice that this is a much more difficult form to use, and very difficult to give information or statistics to the audience.

Gramps is a very ‘impressionistic’ documentary – it gives us a feeling for what this man’s life has been like, instead of giving us direct information. We hardly see him, just his hands, him in the darkness, and corners of his home and pet cat.

It’s very artistic, and is also a film about objects from the past, empty spaces, and what is not there, because this man’s wife of many years recently passed away. This is an advanced level film, and we do not recommend this approach for the Climate Change film call, but it might be something young filmmakers would like to work towards in the future.

A mixed bag


It is also possible for a filmmaker to make use of elements and the various documentary filmmaking approaches and combine it together. This is an advanced approach which requires more planning and script on the end of the film director, and can be tried out once the filmmaker has a grasp of the other approaches.

Documentary films do not just have to be limited to interviews and supplementary visuals that explain the topics, but might also have reenactments of certain incidents or could have animations and create images that help explain certain content or concepts. For example, the life cycle of a frog might be difficult to film, so it can be shown through a clay-animation or through a white board drawing.

Here's an example of a documentary that uses animation to recreate what can't be filmed: [The Great Fire](#) 

Here are two films—produced by film educators Hafsah Nibe and Mark Bishop that explain voiceover led and presenter led films in more detail.

[English Subtitles](#) 

[Nepali Subtitles](#) 



Recommendations

For your first films we would strongly recommend using either the Presenter led form, or the Voiceover led form, or a combination of the two.

Information-led or Without-narration films are much more difficult to make, but will be a good challenge for your filmmaking groups in the future as their skills grow and develop. For now though it's best to stick to using either a Presenter or a Voiceover. In addition, we recommend that you film interviews for your Climate Change film, and try to make them as professional as possible.

That said, it would be great for young people to try out the form if they so wish to. Let their imagination run free!

Additionally, whichever form you follow, we strongly recommend following the 4 step structure mentioned above. This will ensure that your film and argument are easy for an audience to understand.




Suggested Viewing

Here is a suggested viewing activity you can do with your students for the example documentaries we have selected to get them focused on different documentary forms (you may want to focus on only the first 3, and save 4 and 5 for when your group are more advanced):

[Panga Jatra 2019](#) 

[Ted's Lessons from Nature](#) 

[Focus](#) 

[The Art of Parkinson's](#) 

[Gramps](#) 

Suggested activity

- Play the first 30 seconds of one of the five films. Pause the film and ask your students what they think the film is going to be about, what images they expect to see and what they think is going to happen.
- Play the rest of the film. Ask your students to think, work in groups/pairs and create one sentence that they would use to describe the film and encourage someone else to watch it.
- Ask your students to share what they think we can learn from a piece of film like this and why film is an interesting piece of evidence. You may wish to give guidance by asking how film is similar or different to other pieces of evidence like photographs, letters and newspapers.
- Explain that we are going to watch the film again, either as a whole group or in small groups using a tablet or media player. If you are watching the film as a whole group explain you will stop it three times for two minutes so that pupils can discuss and write notes.

NOW THAT YOU KNOW MORE ABOUT STRUCTURE AND FORM, WE CAN TALK ABOUT CAMERA AND SOUND...

Camera and Sound

You can make a documentary with any kind of technical equipment, from an expensive camera, to a tablet, or even a smartphone. Whatever device you have that can capture video and sound will work, but it's important to know a few technical terms.

Know your shot types:

There are a small number of basic camera shot types:

Wide shot – used to establish a location, to show as much as possible

Long shot – used to see a full figure of a person, from their feet to the top of their head – often used to show people walking from one location to another

Medium Shot – Used to show people from the waist to their head – often used to show two (or more) people talking together

Medium close-up – used to show one person talking, from approximately their shoulders to the top of their head

Close-up – again, used to show one person talking, but this time just a shot of their face

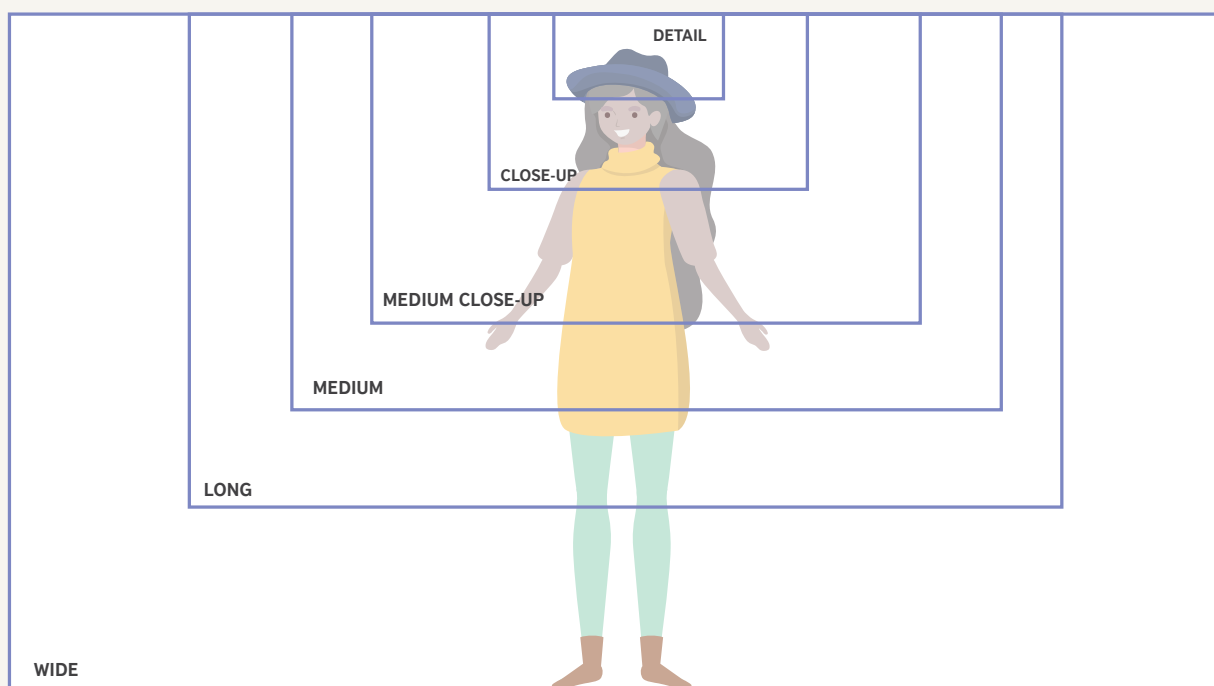
Detail shot – this is very close up, and is usually only used to show important details, for example writing, a watch, someone's eye, etc.

[You can learn more about shot sizes in this explainer video](#) 

You'll probably need to use all shot types for your documentary, Wide shots to introduce the location, long shots to show people moving around, medium shots to show people meeting, and medium close-ups and close-ups for interviews, or people talking.

You'll also need to keep your camera as smooth and steady as you can. If you have a tripod then use this for interviews. If you don't then perhaps balance your device on something steady while you film, or lean against a wall, door, tree – whatever you have around you – to ensure that your camera work is as steady as possible.

SHOT SIZES



Interviews:

No matter what the topic is, documentaries often feature interviews with people, and we recommend doing this for your Climate Change film. But it's important that you consider a few basic elements before shooting:

Sound – make sure that the sound of your interview subject is as clear as possible. If you have a separate microphone then use that, if you don't then make sure your device (tablet, smartphone, etc) is as close to the subject as possible.

Also try to find the quietest location you can so the dialogue is clear. And if you can avoid wind then this is always recommended – wind can distort your sound when recording.

Eyeline – you'll need to decide where your interview subject is looking when they talk to the camera.

If you're making a presenter led film, then the usual format is for the interview subject to be looking to the left or right of the camera while they speak – it creates the idea that they are talking to the presenter.

If you're following a presenter led format then it's a good idea to sometimes include reaction shots of your presenter as they listen, or ask questions.

If you're following a voice-over led structure then you can choose whether you want your interview subject to look to the side of the camera, or straight into the lens. Looking to the side (as though the interview subject was talking to another person) is the standard format – but feel free to choose.

B-roll footage

Filmmakers have a term called 'A-roll' and 'B-roll' footage. A-roll is everything they have to film so that their story makes sense, and B-roll is extra material that they shoot and can be included if they find a nice place for it (like a sunset, water dripping from a leaf, a factory, a river flowing, etc). The video of a person being interviewed might not be enough to tell the whole story.

The interview is the A-roll, but what if it's not quite enough to tell your story with as much detail as you want? Well you can try inserting extra shots that you record of the location, or objects in the room, or processes being described before, in between or after the interview to give the viewer a better picture of what is happening.

Be as creative as you can - if you see something that looks nice to your eye and is related to your topic in some way, then film it! Make sure you get at least 10 seconds if not more, because you never know how you may want to use your B-roll footage in the edit. After all, film is a visual media and a lot can be shown through what you have filmed around you.




Dialogue

It's important that everything the people you interview say makes sense to the audience.

If you're following a presenter led structure then this is usually simple – the presenter asks a question, and the subject answers it, and it's easy to follow for the audience.

But if you're using a different form for your documentary then the audience won't hear a question being asked. One way to ensure the audience fully understands the meaning of what your interview subject says is to ask the interview subject to include the topic in their answer. For example, instead of them saying "It's a problem." have them say "Climate change is a problem."

Talk to your interview subject before filming to make sure they understand this point. An easy is to ask them to answer in full sentences so that they include a part of the question in the answer itself. For example the answer to "What is a problem?" would be "Climate change is a problem."

For a good overall example of how to record interviews professionally, [this film is an excellent example.](#) 

Music

If you're using music in your documentary then it's necessary that this is 100% copyright free.

The best solution is to create your own soundtrack by playing instruments. If this isn't possible then use a copyright free source to download music—sites such as [Incompetech](#), [Bensound](#), [Purple Planet](#), and the [YouTube Audio Library](#) are all good sources of copyright free music.

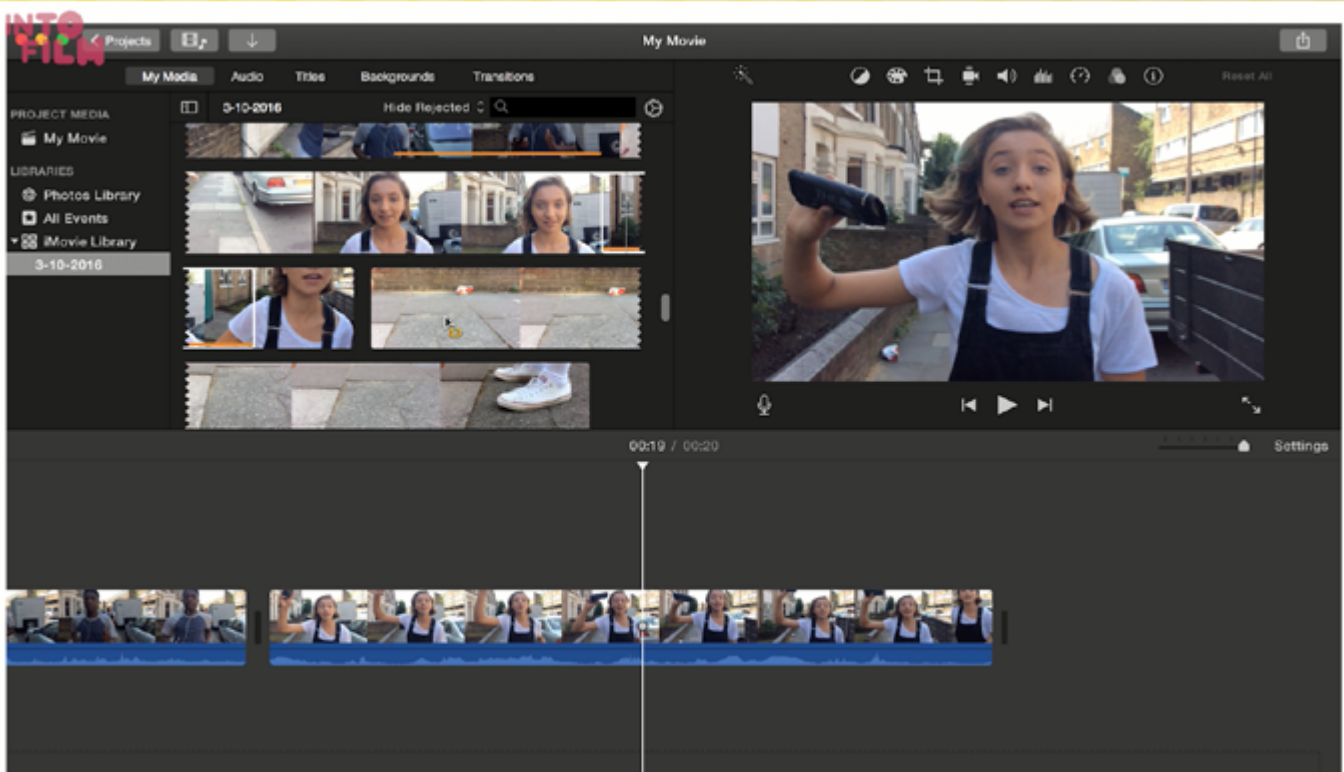
Editing

After your documentary has been filmed, you will need to edit the footage together. You don't need expensive software to do this. Apple products all have iMovie included, which is very simple to use.

We recommend finding a free editing app if you're using a PC or android device, and speak to your students as they may already know a lot about editing software, and probably have a lot of skills already.

Some additional tips to get your started:

- Editing is about telling a story effectively. An editor should prioritise on this rather than making use of fancy effects and transitions, which used out of context can be distracting
- Guidelines are immensely helpful to edit a good film. That is why most professionals refer to a script and/or a storyboard as reference
- Show, don't tell: Editing a good film is not about putting whatever is shot in one video. It is about deciding what to include to tell a story. A good editor is not afraid to cut parts out to make the story concise. A longer (more descriptive) edit might feel boring and preachy
- There are a lot of video editing tutorials on the Internet that might help improve your skills. One can learn a lot by simply following the instructor step-by-step.



Themes

Within the Road to COP 26, Climate Change documentary filmmaking programme, we recommend following one of the following themes in your film about Climate Change:

- Recycling (keeping Nepal clean)
- Gender (land ownership, etc - ow might this be connected to climate change?)
- Zero carbon economy/Circular economy (fashion, technology, and so many industries create emissions — how can we change this but still live in a world we enjoy?)
- Mental wellbeing (how can we make small changes to our daily routine that can benefit our mental wellbeing and the wellbeing of those around us, as well as making a positive impact on reducing climate change/pollution?)
- Individual connection to nature – how we all play one brick in a wall protecting nature. Or the links in a chain holding us all together, or threads in a tapestry.
- Water – water pollution, and the right to clean water.

Including a theme will give your film a stronger focus – so make it about Climate Change, but with a focus on one of the above themes.



Some more points

Apart from camera, sound, structure, form, and interviews, there are a few other elements that are important to consider when making a documentary – these include:

- Balance
- Statistics
- Inclusivity

And we'll explain them in more detail here.

Balance:

Documentaries need to include both sides of an argument, so it's important that you look at the topic as broadly as possible and include every perspective to ensure a balanced documentary.

This can be difficult sometimes, as there are some topics that you will immediately think of as being 'wrong,' but it's important to think more deeply.

For example, if focusing on pollution make sure you include mention of why this pollution is happening, and the difficulty that the people creating the pollution are experiencing. For example, if a factory is creating pollution, consider the jobs that are at stake at the factory – or the competition the factory is facing from other larger organisations, etc.

The more balance you have in your documentary the more persuasive your argument will be.

Social Media

Because so many of us are on social media these days you may want to include information, videos, or pictures from people you have connected with online.

If you do, make sure that you respect their privacy and only share their name if they approve.

Social Media is a fantastic tool for connecting us, and sharing and obtaining information – but you must make sure people's privacy is respected.

If you share your COP 26 documentaries on social media when they are finished you must ensure you do not use the full names of the young people included in the film.

Statistics

If you're including statistics or information from another source in your documentary then it's important that you cite where you found it. For example, if you find some information about COVID 19 on the WHO website, then make sure you put that information on the screen when you share the statistics/info.

A documentary that uses statistics/information without citing (saying) where they came from is less trustworthy. Always cite your sources on the screen. You just need a small reference as to where you found your statistics/information – here's an example of how it might look – you can see the source given in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen:





Inclusivity:

It's important that in today's world that we include as many different perspectives as possible in our films.

So when speaking to people, or including advice from experts, make sure you include both men and women, boys and girls, old people and young people, and people from different ethnic backgrounds.

The more diverse your interview subjects and experts are the more perspectives (ways of seeing) you're covering – and this will make your documentary stronger, and more relatable for a wider audience. Inclusivity also means in terms of gender, caste/ethnic background, age, ideology, etc. Working with a diverse group of people strengthens the narrative and authenticity of your work.


Credit and Consent

People who are participants of your film—both on screen and offscreen—put in their time and effort into making your project possible. So please be sure to credit them in the film.

People who appear on screen are allowing you to record their physical appearance and voice. In order to avoid issues in the future, make sure you ask them to sign a release form that provides you with consent formally. For people below 18 years of age, you need to request consent from their guardians. Do get in touch with us if you require help in designing a consent form.

Through the British Council's Country Innovation Fund, Camera Sika is bringing a new round of grants, capacity building opportunities and the production of original outputs. These engagements will help amplify the voices of young people —through film—on issues of climate change in the lead up to COP26 in November 2021.

Upcoming activities and programmes include:

- [Climate Change Film competition](#) 
- Climate change film grants
- Documentary filmmaking workshop

You can get more information about the programme at britishcouncil.org.np and intofilm.org

