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PROGRESS REPORTS

Communication and Outreach Activities

IPCC Communications Strategy Update

(Submitted by the Secretary of the IPCC)

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PROGRESS REPORTS

Communication and Outreach Activities

IPCC COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Adopted by the Panel at the Thirty-Fifth Session (Geneva, 6–9 June 2012), amended at the Forty-Fourth Session (Bangkok, 17-20 October 2016) and Fifty-Third (bis) Session (virtual, 22-26 March 2021)

Introduction

The IPCC at its 33rd Session in Abu Dhabi in May 2011 approved the *Guidance on IPCC Communications Strategy*¹ following the recommendations of the InterAcademy Council (IAC) in August 2010 to develop a communications strategy. This Guidance continues to serve as a framework for IPCC communications and relevant parts of it have been taken up in this document.

The 35th Session of the IPCC in Geneva in June 2012 adopted the “*IPCC Communications Strategy*” and requested the Executive Committee to elaborate an Implementation Plan for the Strategy. At its 43rd Session in Nairobi in April 2016, in Decision IPCC/XLIII-10, the Panel requested the Secretary of the IPCC, in consultation with the Communications Action Team, to update the Communications Strategy and its Implementation Plan in the light of the experience of communication and outreach around the Fifth Assessment Report and the recommendations of the Expert Meeting on Communication, held in Oslo in February 2016². The Communications Strategy supports the IPCC in its work of providing robust assessments of climate-related science for sound policymaking.

Goals

- 1) The IPCC has two main communications goals:
 - to communicate its assessment findings and methodologies, by providing clear and balanced information on climate change³, including scientific uncertainties, without compromising accuracy;
 - to explain the way the IPCC works, selects its authors and reviewers, produces its reports and other products, and other aspects of the IPCC’s work. This will promote the understanding of the reports and underpin its reputation as a credible, transparent, balanced and authoritative scientific body.

Principles

- 2) IPCC communications are based on the Principles Governing IPCC Work².

¹ http://www.ipcc.ch/meetings/session33/ipcc_p33_decisions_taken_comm_strategy.pdf

² http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/supporting-material/EMR_COM_full_report.pdf

³ “The role of the IPCC is to assess on a comprehensive, objective, open and transparent basis the scientific, technical and socio-economic information relevant to understanding the scientific basis of risk of human-induced climate change, its potential impacts and options for adaptation and mitigation. IPCC reports should be neutral with respect to policy, although they may need to deal objectively with scientific, technical and socio-economic factors relevant to the application of particular policies.” (Principles Governing IPCC Work, paragraph 2). (<http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/ipcc-principles/ipcc-principles.pdf>)

Communications are an important aspect of the work of the IPCC, essential to its mission of providing decision-makers and other stakeholders with rigorous and balanced scientific information on climate change² and its impacts. The following set of principles should guide the IPCC's approach:

- **Objective and transparent.** The IPCC's communications approach and activities should, at all times, be consistent with the IPCC's overarching principles of objectivity, openness and transparency.
- **Policy-relevant but not policy-prescriptive.** It is an essential quality of the IPCC's work that it is policy-relevant but not policy-prescriptive. The presentation of its assessments and reports should remain policy-neutral and maintain scientific balance. The IPCC's communications approach and activities should be consistent with these qualities.
- **Drawn from IPCC Reports.** While the IPCC's work and process of preparing reports aim to reflect a range of views and expertise addressing some highly specialized scientific matters, its communications should reflect the language that has been subject to the IPCC's review process and has been accepted, adopted or approved by the members of the Panel.
- **Aiming to establish the IPCC as the key science/policy interface organization for climate change.** The IPCC's process of international assessment by scientists and review by the scientific community, governments and stakeholders is central to the authority and quality of IPCC reports. The IPCC should always seek to be clear in its communications about what the organization is and what it does – providing up to date assessments of the latest authoritative science. The objective is to ensure that the IPCC provides a context to guide the interpretation of its reports and to ensure that the public has unbiased information about the IPCC.
- **Timely and audience-appropriate.** In order to be effective, the IPCC communications approach and activities should be aimed at ensuring that timely and appropriate information enters the public domain – both proactively to communicate reports, and reactively in response to questions or criticism.
- **Consistent messages.** To ensure that the IPCC delivers consistent messages externally, it is essential that internal communications and decision-making are disciplined and well coordinated.

Activities

3) IPCC communications address four main groups of activities:

- Day-to-day communications, both proactive and reactive;
- Planned activities including:
 - the launch of reports,
 - outreach activities to present the work of the IPCC to the audiences described below,
 - other communications from the IPCC to present its work, and
 - participation in major international conferences;
- Rapid responses, which require particular procedures to ensure they are handled in a timely manner that is representative of the whole Panel, and
- Contributing to better communication of scientific and technical advice and guidelines to the UNFCCC and other relevant UN intergovernmental processes.

Audiences

- 4) The primary target audiences of the communications efforts of the IPCC are governments and policymakers at all levels, the UNFCCC, and the UN-wide system intergovernmental processes more broadly.
- 5) Broader audiences, such as IPCC observer organizations, the scientific community, the education sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the business sector, youth and the wider public also have an interest in the work and assessments of the IPCC. While these are not the primary audiences of the IPCC communications efforts, the IPCC should look for ways to ensure that information is available and accessible for these audiences.
- 6) Third parties can play an additional valuable role taking elements of IPCC assessments to create accessible products aimed at specific audiences. The IPCC takes note of such derivative products and may engage with relevant organizations that produce them. However, such products must not be considered joint productions or in any way products of the IPCC.
- 7) Engaging and building relationships with the media is an important way in which the IPCC can communicate the information contained in its reports, as well as its processes and procedures.
- 8) IPCC audiences are truly global in extent and are therefore very diverse. In its communications and outreach activities, the IPCC will take the specific context of different countries into account, which may require tailor-made outreach activities. For instance, communications needs of developing countries may be different to those of developed countries.

Governance and management

- 9) The Plenary is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the Communications Strategy is appropriate, that it meets the expectations and needs of the Panel and is being delivered suitably. Between Plenary sessions, the Bureau and the Executive Committee will act on the Panel's behalf, in accordance with the Communications Strategy, as appropriate. Decisions regarding fundamental communications issues, according to their importance, should be debated and approved within the framework of the IPCC and/or the IPCC Bureau, as appropriate.
- 10) The Working Group/Task Force Co-Chairs are responsible for the substantive aspects of communications activities around reports in their areas of responsibility, while the IPCC Chair is responsible for the substantive aspects of communications on the Synthesis Report. The Executive Committee oversees the implementation of the Communication Strategy.
- 11) The IPCC Chair, IPCC Vice-Chairs, Working Groups/Task Force Co-Chairs, members of the Bureau and National Focal Points will rely on the Secretariat, for expert advice related to communication as necessary. The Senior Communications Manager at the Secretariat is responsible for the day-to-day coordination and coherence of IPCC communications.
- 12) The Executive Committee will maintain an Implementation Plan that gives effect to this Strategy. This Plan will identify, in accordance with this Communications Strategy, those groups or individuals that can approve different types of communications materials and activities in different situations, including rapid response. The Executive Committee will update and develop this Plan as circumstances require and report to the Panel on any updates.
- 13) The Secretary of the IPCC will evaluate IPCC communications and report to the Panel, including the type and extent of outreach and media coverage. Evaluation reports should also be made to the Bureau and Executive Committee at regular intervals. The Secretary will investigate the use of metrics to support evaluation.

- 14) The Executive Committee should consider how to ensure continuity of outreach and the website between assessment cycles, and elaborate this in the Implementation Plan.

Methods and tools

- 15) Consistent with its status as a UN body, the IPCC's reports should be made available in the six UN languages to the extent possible according to IPCC Principles. IPCC communication practices should follow this model where possible, and communications products, including brochures and press releases, should be translated and made available.
- 16) The Secretariat will support National Focal Points in communications activities in their countries, and will encourage the translation of texts into local languages, by providing IPCC materials, where practical. The National Focal Points will receive communications materials and information about events in a timely manner, and may seek advice from the Secretariat on IPCC communications-related matters.
- 17) Approved IPCC reports and other products form the basis for communications materials. These materials should be developed to facilitate greater understanding of the IPCC's work among governments, media and other non-specialists unfamiliar with scientific terminology⁴. When preparing the final draft of the Summary for Policymakers, Overview Chapters of Methodology Reports and the Synthesis Report, Working Group/Task Force Co-Chairs, the IPCC Chair and authors should be aware of the need to produce clear, comprehensible, accessible and user-friendly texts and graphics that support the key findings in the report. Communications specialists in the Technical Support Units may play an important role supporting the preparation and communication of their respective reports.
- 18) The IPCC website showcases the work of the IPCC and serves its target audiences (see 'Audiences' above) by providing access to all public IPCC material in a consistent and user-friendly manner. The Secretariat is responsible for ensuring that the IPCC website is reviewed regularly to ensure content is up to date, to improve user-friendliness and navigability and to benefit where useful from the latest technology and practices, including access on different platforms, and will budget to fund incremental and substantive upgrades.
- 19) Social media provide important tools for the IPCC to reach and amplify its communications to civil society, the scientific community and other audiences directly. The Secretariat will keep the appropriate use of social media under review, bearing in mind the specific scientific and intergovernmental nature of the IPCC and the accessibility of some tools in some groups of countries. It will monitor the evolution of new technology and media, including video and infographics and develop a digital strategy to take advantage of social media and other digital tools for IPCC communications as appropriate. In consultation with the Communications Action Team, it will prepare guidelines on the use of social media for the use of all those working for the IPCC.
- 20) Broadcasters are the main source of news for people in many countries, and the IPCC will work closely with them, including in developing countries, to communicate its work and products.

⁴ Decision IPCC/XLI-4, §10: "To enhance the readability of IPCC products, advice from various specialists should be sought."

IPCC spokespeople

- 21) To ensure objectivity and scientific accuracy, as well as efficiency and timeliness, authorized spokespeople must be designated for various situations. The Chair of the IPCC and IPCC Vice-Chairs are the lead spokespeople for the organization as a whole; the Working Group/Task Force Co-Chairs are the lead spokespeople for the activities of their Working Group/Task Force; the Secretary and Senior Communications Manager may speak on activities and the procedures of the IPCC as well as on institutional matters.
- 22) Besides these designated spokespeople, authors or Working Group Vice-Chairs will often be the most appropriate people to speak on their area of science or provide regional perspectives and may be delegated by the Working Group/Task Force Co-Chairs, the IPCC Chair or the Secretary to talk to the media or represent the IPCC at conferences.
- 23) People speaking on behalf of the IPCC in an official capacity must focus on communicating a factual, objective presentation of information from the approved IPCC reports and refrain from public statements that could be interpreted as advocacy and compromise the IPCC's reputation for neutrality.
- 24) Those who represent the IPCC in an official capacity are strongly encouraged to undergo media training. Such training should include specific guidance on how to approach speaking on behalf of the IPCC versus speaking in other capacities. The Secretariat will arrange this training as opportunities allow, subject to available resources, and will provide guidelines on communicating with the media and public. Outreach activities may benefit from training on presentations.

Resources

- 25) Communications activities must operate with the resources available in the IPCC. These may be augmented by additional funding or support from external communications experts, in coordination with the Secretariat, including for specific communications activities at times of heightened media activity, such as around the release of a report or in rapid response. This must not compromise the independence of the IPCC or cause a conflict of interest. External human and financial resources must be reported to the Panel at the earliest session following the provision of these resources.