

IPCC 33rd SESSION, 10-13 May 2011, ABU DHABI
DECISIONS TAKEN WITH RESPECT TO THE REVIEW
OF IPCC PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Decision

Recalling the recommendation of the InterAcademy Council (IAC) on IPCC communications that the IPCC “should complete and implement a communications strategy that emphasizes transparency, rapid and thoughtful responses, and relevance to stakeholders, and which includes guidelines about who can speak on behalf of IPCC and how to represent the organization appropriately”.

At its 33rd Session the Panel decided:

To accept the “*Guidance on IPCC Communications Strategy*” as provided in Annex A to this decision;

To request the Secretariat to elaborate an IPCC Communication Strategy in line with this *Guidance*, and to deliver the Strategy, accompanied by an analysis of financial implications, for approval by the Panel at its 34th Session;

To request the Secretariat include in this Strategy a proposal for a formal set of procedures, including the role, tasks and responsibilities of the involved individuals, to allow the IPCC to make timely and effective responses to urgent inquiries. These procedures should include a contingency plan for managing rapidly-escalating communications needs, such as when individual queries gather momentum and risk causing serious reputational damage; and

To request the Secretariat report back to the Panel with regard to planned evaluation metrics for assessing the effectiveness of the IPCC communications, as well as the results of any evaluation exercises that have already taken place.

The Panel further decided:

That the “Guidance on IPCC Communications Strategy” should guide the communications work of the Secretariat, Bureau, and the Executive Committee while the IPCC Communication Strategy is in development.

REVIEW OF THE IPCC PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

Guidance on IPCC Communications Strategy

Preamble

This document was produced to address the IAC recommendation on communications:

The IPCC should complete and implement a communications strategy that emphasizes transparency, rapid and thoughtful responses, and relevance to stakeholders, and which includes guidelines about who can speak on behalf of IPCC and how to represent the organization appropriately.

Communication is a key issue in IPCC activities and has been subject to discussions during several IPCC Plenary Sessions. As the recognition of the IPCC and the profile of its work have grown over time, so, too, have the requirements placed on the organization to communicate effectively, particularly with the media.

In 2005, a consulting firm developed a Framework Communications Strategy for Release and Dissemination of the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report (AR4)¹. In 2008, the Panel established a working group on “the future of IPCC”, in anticipation of the Fifth Assessment Report (AR5). The working group presented its findings², including recommendations on communications, during the 28th Session of the Panel.

Starting in 2006, the IPCC has addressed some of the recommendations made in these reports, such as recruiting a communications officer, and discussed how to strengthen internal communication and enhance transparent dissemination of IPCC products.

At the time of drafting this document, the IPCC is in the process of recruiting a Senior Communications Manager who will report directly to the head of the Secretariat. This document provides guidance to the Secretariat, who is expected to develop and deliver a comprehensive communications strategy that reflects the expectations of the Panel in respect of outreach and media communications.

The Plenary is ultimately responsible for ensuring that IPCC Communications are appropriate and that the Strategy meets the requirements of the Panel and is being delivered suitably although between Plenary sessions the Bureau and the Executive Committee will act on the Plenary's behalf. The IPCC leadership will rely on the Senior Communications Manager, who reports to the Secretary, for expert advice as necessary and the coordination and coherence of IPCC communication. Decisions regarding fundamental communications issues, according to their importance, should be debated and approved within the framework of the Bureau and/or the Plenary.

¹ <http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/session24/inf3.pdf>: This report was intended to be a framework proposal for an AR4 communications strategy but not the final communications strategy for the IPCC. With this report, the Secretariat invited the Panel to consider the observations and recommendations contained in the report and provide guidance to the IPCC Secretariat on next steps. Then, at the next Panel Session (25th Session) in 2006 the Secretariat submitted a strategy (Document entitled: "IPCC Communications Strategy and Outreach") <http://www.ipcc.ch/meetings/session25/doc6.pdf>

² At the 29th Session (August – Sept 2008) the Task Group that was set up at P-28 presented its findings: <http://www.ipcc.ch/meetings/session29/inf5.pdf>

1. Principles

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

- **Objective and transparent.** The Panel's communications approach and activities should, at all times, be consistent with the IPCC overarching principles of objectivity, openness and transparency.
- **Policy-relevant but not policy-prescriptive.** It is an essential quality of the IPCC 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 communications approach and activities should be consistent with these qualities.
- **Drawn from IPCC Reports.** While the IPCC work and process of preparing reports aim to reflect a range of views and expertise, its communications should reflect the language that has been subject to the IPCC review process and has been accepted, adopted or approved by the members of the Panel.
- **Recognizing IPCC as a unique organization.** IPCC unique 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.

2. Defining the scope of IPCC communications (overall IPCC and report-specific)

The scope of IPCC expertise is diverse and multi-disciplinary, spanning physical science, impacts, adaptation, and mitigation. The overall picture of IPCC communication should fully represent this range of knowledge.

The IPCC primary communication outputs are its assessment reports, special reports, technical papers, and methodology reports, which authors should strive to make as comprehensible as possible without sacrificing scientific accuracy.

The scope of wider communications activities is to support good understanding of these reports, and the processes that generated them, among IPCC primary audience of governments and policy-makers. Specifically, the communications activities of the IPCC should include:

- Raising awareness of new reports, and the major conclusions thereof, among IPCC primary audiences.
- Ensuring that the content of IPCC reports is readily available to interested parties – including those who will use these reports as a basis for their own communications with wider audiences.
- Clearly communicating how IPCC functions, how IPCC is governed, and how IPCC reports are produced. Working Groups are encouraged to continue their ongoing efforts to explore engagement with wider audiences as they develop their reports. These efforts are an important way of communicating the work of the IPCC and increasing transparency.

- Proactively providing information and responding to media queries – including at short notice – about IPCC activities and processes, and the content of published IPCC reports.
- Responding effectively to incorrect representations of the IPCC and its processes, where these could be damaging to the IPCC reputation.

Global engagement

To ensure that information produced by the IPCC is widely distributed, the IPCC Secretariat should engage Bureau members and government Focal Points and – while recognizing budgetary restrictions – consider capacity-building relating to the role of Focal Points in communications and outreach activities.

Bureau members and Focal Points should be sent all relevant information and reference materials around the release of reports. Equally, when the IPCC Secretariat issues a statement, press release or other materials intended for a wide audience, this should be shared with Bureau members and Focal Points so that they are informed of the IPCC central conclusions and messaging for public statements.

By engaging Bureau members and Focal Points, important relationships will be built, which deepen reciprocal understanding and ultimately help the IPCC achieve its wider communication objectives.

The IPCC plenary should consider whether there should be enhanced media access to its meetings. To facilitate this consideration the Senior Communications Manager should consult with other United Nations (UN) organizations, such as WMO, UNEP and UNFCCC and the Secretariat should bring forward a proposal at the appropriate time.

Web presence

The IPCC website should serve its target audiences as well as government Focal Points. It should effectively communicate the organization's nature and mandate. For the purposes of outreach efforts, it is important that a strong web presence be maintained.

Special attention should be dedicated to up-to-date information and reports, a well designed search function, content in the six official UN languages (engaging member governments when necessary), user-friendly navigation and accessibility features.

Up-to-date leaflets and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) from IPCC assessment and special reports should be prominent. In addition, consideration should be given to archiving on website communication products dating back to the beginning of the last assessment cycle.

The Senior Communications Manager of the Secretariat should work to ensure consistency across all the official websites of the IPCC, including those of its Working Groups and Task Force.

The Secretariat and its Communications Team should recommend to the Bureau the use of appropriate technologies to implement the agreed communications strategy.

3. Target audiences

The primary target audiences of the communications efforts of the IPCC are governments and policy-makers (including the UNFCCC). 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.

Broader audiences, such as the UN, IPCC observer organizations, the scientific community, the education sector, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the business sector and the wider public, also have an interest in the work and assessments of the IPCC. While these are not primary audiences of the IPCC communications efforts, the IPCC should look for ways to ensure that

information is available and accessible for these audiences. While the IPCC itself does not produce derivative products aimed at specific audiences, it may engage with organizations that take elements of IPCC assessments and communicate them in more audience-specific formats. However, such products must not be considered joint productions or in any way products of the IPCC.

4. Languages of communication

Consistent with its status as a UN institution, its reports should be made available in the six UN languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish) to the extent possible according to the IPCC Principle #13³. IPCC communication practices should follow this model, and IPCC communications products, including brochures and press releases, should be translated and made available. The standards for quality control of all translations need to be enhanced and maintained at high levels.

A number of countries have undertaken translation of IPCC reports into languages, which are not UN languages. The IPCC will continue to welcome these initiatives and provide IPCC documents as appropriate, while noting that the translations have been prepared under the responsibility of the respective country or institutions. The Secretariat can support national focal point efforts to translate IPCC documents into non-UN languages by providing guidance on good practice for their translation. Countries that undertake to translate reports into non-UN languages could be assisted by IPCC to translate the key graphics (diagrams, etc.) into their languages, thus guaranteeing the accessibility of IPCC products.

5. Guidelines

How authorized spokespersons should represent the IPCC

The ability of IPCC spokespersons to provide neutral and objective statements that are grounded in the assessments reports and other products adopted by the Panel will be essential to preserving the trust and confidence placed in the IPCC by decision-makers and other key audiences. Authorized spokespersons should act in accordance with the guiding principles that have been set out for IPCC communications, most notably maintaining policy neutrality, scientific balance, and refraining from, or being perceived as advocating or communicating personal views on climate policy while speaking in their official IPCC capacity.

Selecting authorized spokespersons for the organization as a whole, and for individual reports

The objective of these guidelines is to identify a group of authorized spokespersons allowing the IPCC to speak credibly to its products and processes. The primary spokespersons have a mandate from and accountability to the Panel by virtue of the election process.

- The Chair, IPCC Vice-Chairs, or their appropriate designate, are the lead spokespersons for the organization as a whole. This applies to topics including but not limited to IPCC operations, proceedings of IPCC Panel Sessions and Bureau Sessions, Synthesis Reports, principles governing IPCC work, IPCC rules of procedures, etc.
- Co-Chairs are the lead spokespersons for the activities and content of their Working Group or Task Force on National Greenhouse Gas Inventories (TFI). The Co-Chairs may also engage spokespersons from among the Working Group Vice-Chairs, the authors and contributors to the reports with the best knowledge of the subject matter and the best media/presentation skills. Other factors could include meeting language requirements, adequate regional representation and timing/availability.

³ As defined in the Principles Governing IPCC Work

- In the case of media contacting a Coordinating Lead Author (CLA) or Lead Author (LA) to make inquiries concerning IPCC matters, the CLA or LA should clarify that he or she is not representing IPCC but answering as a research scientist involved in writing of the IPCC assessment report.
- Effective communications can only be assured if there is centralized coordination of the message. Consistent with the common practice of other organizations, the Senior Communications Manager should be the initial point of contact for the media, and to provide on request background and technical information based on approved reports and materials. The Senior Communications Manager should ensure the relevant and appropriate coordination of messages within the leadership and spokespersons of the Panel, and keep the Bureau, the Executive Committee, the Secretariat and government Focal Points informed of communications activities.

Rapid response

The IPCC sometimes needs to respond rapidly to media enquiries or breaking stories. This is important in order to maintain the reputation and credibility of the IPCC. This guidance is principles-based and does not provide an exhaustive list of situations justifying pro-active engagement with the media. These responses will often require inputs of both scientific and communications expertise and the organization needs to find a balance between the need to ensure approved language and the need to respond to the media cycle.

As an urgent and immediate priority, the Senior Communications Manager should make proposals to the Executive Committee for a set of procedures, including the role, tasks and responsibilities of the involved individuals, to allow the IPCC to make timely and effective responses to urgent inquiries. The Executive Committee should inform the Plenary about these procedures, as well as future revisions. These procedures would allow a response to be developed using appropriate subject knowledge (including the expertise of the most relevant working group), but incorporate redundancy to prevent individual absences from stalling a response. A critical analysis of the media occurrences involving the IPCC over the last two years would be helpful in developing these procedures.

It is the responsibility of the Executive Committee to ensure such circumstances are handled appropriately and in a way that protects the reputation of the IPCC. If the enquiry concerns a Working Group or Task Force product, at least one of the Co-Chairs from the relevant Working Groups or Task Force must be involved. Before and after the response, the Senior Communications Manager should maintain open channels of communication with the Executive Committee and provide updates as appropriate.

The procedures must ensure that real-time demands of the media are taken into consideration while remaining robust enough to guarantee accuracy and consistency with IPCC reports.

Errors

The IPCC is in the process of developing a formal procedure for acknowledging potential errors of fact that might change the scientific content of assessments. In the case of addressing such a potential error of fact, the Executive Committee, which has the responsibility of overseeing the process of handling errors, as identified by the IPCC Protocol for Addressing Possible Errors in IPCC Assessment Reports, Synthesis Reports, Special Reports or Methodology Reports, should work closely with the Senior Communications Manager on a timely and cogent response. If an error is identified, it should be addressed in a forthright manner, corrected, and formally acknowledged.

Though a full response is likely to take more time than allowed by the media cycle, it is however important to quickly communicate to the Media, as well as government Focal Points, that the issue is being examined according to the forthcoming IPCC Protocol for Addressing Possible Errors in IPCC Assessment Reports, Synthesis Reports, Special Reports or Methodology Reports.

Planned communications materials

An overall strategy for planned communications materials (i.e., those associated with a planned report release) should be prepared by the Secretariat and approved by the Chair together with the Co-Chairs of the applicable Working Group and/or Task Force well in advance of the planned release date. Specific products (i.e. press releases, media lines, key messages and slides for presentations prepared by the Working Groups and Technical Support Units (TSUs)) will be approved by the Co-Chairs of the applicable Working Group and/or Task Force.

Spokespersons will play a key role in the communication of IPCC reports. For the release of each report, the Senior Communications Manager will engage with the Working Groups and/or the Task Force, as appropriate, to identify content-specific spokespersons to work on outreach. For the release of a report, the Bureau and identified spokespersons should be kept well informed about the planned communications materials.

Press-releases prepared for IPCC communications should be disseminated to all relevant people, including the government Focal Points, the IPCC Bureau, Task Force Bureau, the Secretariat and the TSUs.

Media and presentation training

The Secretariat in conjunction with the Working Groups and/or the Task Force, as appropriate, should strongly consider media and presentation training to enhance the ability and effectiveness of spokespersons in communicating the messages of the IPCC to the media and presenting the findings of the IPCC as part of general outreach activities.

6. Limits of IPCC Communication

It is an essential quality of the IPCC that its reports are policy-relevant but not policy-prescriptive. When speaking on behalf of the IPCC, individuals should take care to stay within this mandate – and not to express views beyond the scope of the IPCC reports, or to advocate specific policies. IPCC communications should be drawn from IPCC Reports; the IPCC does not issue statements updating scientific conclusions unless these come from formal IPCC assessment documents.

All those associated with the IPCC should be clear to distinguish in which instances they are speaking in an official IPCC capacity and in which instances they are speaking personally or on behalf of other organizations. Similarly, those associated with the IPCC should use their appropriate professional affiliation in activities unrelated to the IPCC. For example, an individual should not be listed by an IPCC title in a non-IPCC report, as this might inadvertently link the report to the IPCC or be misinterpreted as an IPCC endorsement. Honors accorded to the IPCC should be attributed to the organization and not to any individual.

The Panel recognizes that a large number of individuals participate in IPCC activities without compensation from the IPCC. These guidelines are not intended to restrict these volunteers from referring to their past or present IPCC roles, nor to their own professional activities. However, it is vital to retain clear boundaries around those activities and conclusions that were subject to IPCC process of review and adoption, recognizing that this distinction is not always clear to the public.

Those holding the most senior positions within the IPCC are most readily associated with it and should be aware that the public and the media often do not differentiate among the various functions a person might have. It is expected that persons working at the highest levels take the most care in avoiding confusion or misinterpretation in their public statements. The senior leadership should be mindful that publicly advocating or expressing personal opinions about climate policies may jeopardize the reputation of the IPCC, even if unintended. It is important that the IPCC leadership is not perceived as taking positions or making statements that would have the appearance of reflecting bias in the work of the IPCC.

While recognizing that the scientific content of reports remains private until they are released, contributors to IPCC reports are encouraged to respond to interest in emerging reports or emerging science, as an opportunity to communicate how the IPCC works and to emphasize the need for careful assessments of emerging science. The IPCC encourages the science community, including those involved in producing its reports, to engage with wide audiences on an ongoing basis. When doing so, those involved with the IPCC should be mindful to make clear the distinction between their roles inside and outside the IPCC.

The IPCC Bureau will keep the implementation of these aspects of the strategy under review in respect of the activities of IPCC Bureau Members.

7. Implementing the new strategy

Executing external communications effectively will require coordination of an extensive network within the IPCC, including government Focal Points. Successful internal coordination is central to the success of external communication, and should be considered a priority by IPCC leaders.

There are significant resource implications in communicating IPCC work effectively, and the Panel will require regular updates on the financial implications of implementing the strategy.

IPCC communication load varies greatly – depending both on the cycle of its Reports, and the level of external interest in the IPCC. The Secretariat will need to have the flexibility to respond to this changing cycle of activity, including by engaging additional temporary staff, including consultants, when necessary. All contractors, temporary staff and occasional contributors to the external communications of the IPCC must have a clearly defined and centrally coordinated mandate – in line with the communications strategy to be developed by the Secretariat – and respect that the external communications activities of the IPCC are under the authority and coordination of the Senior Communications Manager. In addition, the outreach and communications activities of the TSUs should be carried out in cooperation with the Senior Communications Manager.

8. Evaluation of IPCC Communications

The objectives set out in the Communications Strategy to be drafted by the Secretariat before the 34th Session of the Panel should be used as a guide to evaluating the IPCC communications.

The Secretariat should facilitate appropriate evaluation of the IPCC communications and report to Plenary Sessions, including the type and extent of outreach and media coverage. Evaluation reports should also be made to the Bureau and to the Executive Committee at regular intervals. These reports should be informed by feedback from the government Focal Points where possible.

Specific metrics for evaluation might be used so that the Panel is clear about the overall effectiveness and impact of communication efforts.