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Seven recommendations for improving IPCC communication and policy impact

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In this paper we sum up the main conclusions and recommendations from a research project⁵ that has followed AR5 from publication to policymaking in five European countries: The UK, Norway, Spain, the Netherlands and Poland.

1. Acknowledge that there is no straight line from science to policy.

Our point of departure is that there is never a linear relation between science and policy or between science and users, that language, framing of issues, and institutions do have critical importance. It is within this complex setting where we see a potential improvement of *communication*, as part of a wider effort to understand how the different contexts and national policy traditions have enormous influence on how scientific information is received.

2. Pay attention to contexts – use focal points as communication hubs.

Contexts matter – and are usually decisive. An analysis of the policy contexts in the different countries has revealed a huge variance, from coal-dependent and reluctant Poland, to the UK with its Climate Change Act, oil rich Norway, and to Spain still coping with the economic crisis. Although climate science is assessed and synthesized by a global community, the uptake is local, conditional to cultures and socio-economic and political particularities. Similarly, an analysis of the institutional setting of the IPCC focal points revealed large differences between the countries, from meteorological offices to environmental protection agencies to Ministries. This diversity of institutional settings has consequences for how the climate issue is institutionalized in different countries, the IPCC Focal Point's role as boundary organization and for their role as communicators of science results to policy and to the public. Focal points can be a valuable hub for improved communication of IPCC results in different countries, with Norway as a leading example.

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3. Risk language is effective

Each Working Group's SPM reflects not only the WG distinctive mandate but also a distinctive intellectual framing, reflected in differences in categories, vocabulary, and scope of attention. Although there is a predominance of natural sciences language and logic, the Synthesis Report offers a unified narrative framed as risk, implying not just an unknown outcome but possible damage to important human values. There are major absences, such as a thin understanding of critically important human factors. Human factors are important for communication and uptake.

4. SPMs are great science products but low quality communication tools.

Interviewees convey that The Summary for Policymakers (SPMs) are perceived as high quality science reports used for many different purposes from policy formation to awareness raising. The general view of the interviewees is however that they are low quality communication tools, where the language and figures are difficult, complex and too scientific for policy makers. Much more attention needs to be paid to the clarity and accessibility of the language used for policy makers and other non-expert audiences.

5. IPCC will benefit from the use of professional writers.

Both advantages and risks are entailed in bringing in professional writers. However, there are many specialists available who know and respect the primacy of the science. Procedures and safeguards can be put in place to ensure the appropriate clarity of roles for such writers. We suggest that specialist writers and communicators should be introduced early as part of the writing and reviewing process. Clearly, scientists and governments should have the final sign-off.

6. Derivative products and targeted reports work.

To increase the policy relevance of IPCC knowledge, important users (such as the private sector) must be involved at earlier stages, for instance in the scoping process. The IPCC should consider supporting external actors in producing derivative products, a process that seems effective for increasing the usability of IPCC knowledge. There is also a demand for more targeted reports.

7. Learn from other experiences and research.

The IPCC as a whole, including the communications team, needs to draw more heavily and in a systematic way on the experiences gained from designing, producing and communicating other reports, including social science research on these topics.