

A new science-policy interface

The Structured Expert Dialogue of the 2013-2015 Review of the UNFCCC

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Andreas Fischlin¹, February 2016

Abstract

The Structured Expert Dialogue (SED) of the 2013-2015 Review of the UNFCCC held from 2013 to 2015 was a multi session, fact-finding, face-to-face exchange of views between UNFCCC Parties and experts, discussing policy options and policy making questions, based on the best available knowledge. The SED constitutes a new, promising science-policy interface informing not only the policy makers better, but also inspiring experts and scientists for providing more useful policy relevant material in more adequate forms.

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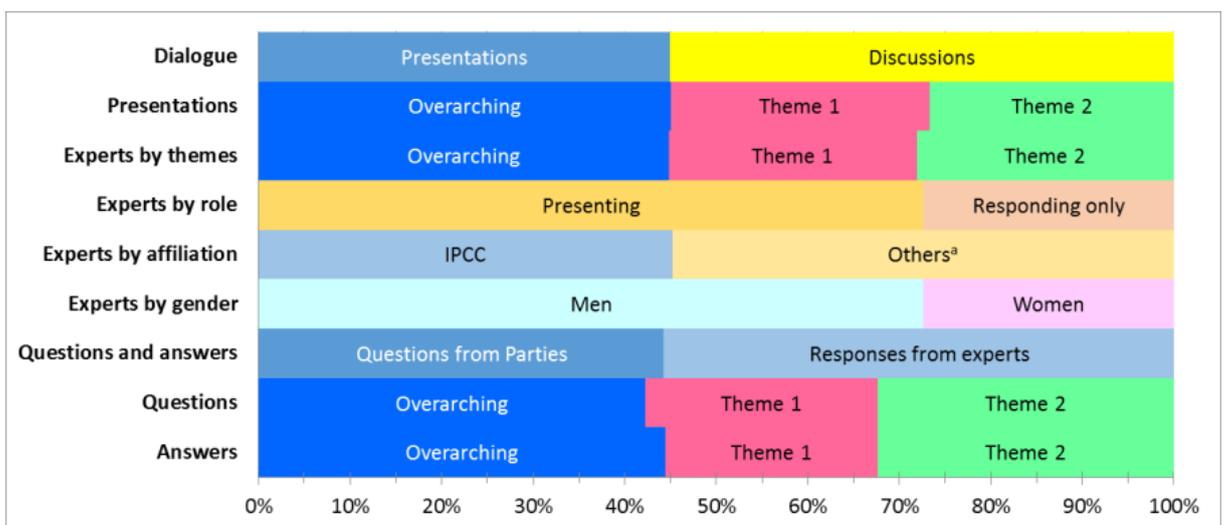
1 SOME FACTS

After the COP15 in Copenhagen 2009, where Parties could not agree on a Long-Term Global Goal (LTGG) of limiting mean global warming to 2°C above pre-industrial levels, governments agreed at COP16 in Cancun 2010 to pursue such a LTGG, but only if this LTGG would be periodically reviewed, preferably in harmony with IPCC assessment cycles. This first review took place in form of the [2013-2015 Review](#) and had a mandate to consider also the possibility to strengthen this limit to 1.5°C. That review consisted of two parts: The [Structured Expert Dialogue](#) (SED) and a negotiating part (joint contact group of the two subsidiaries bodies of the UNFCCC, SBSTA and SBI).

¹ IPCC Vice-Chair WGII, Co-Facilitator of the [Structured Expert Dialogue](#) of the [2013-2015 Review](#) of the UNFCCC. Terrestrial Systems Ecology, Environmental Physics, Institute of Biogeochemistry and Pollutant Dynamics (IBP), Department of Environmental Systems Science, ETH Zurich, Universitätsstr. 16 – CHN E21.1, 8092 Zurich, Switzerland, www.sysecol.ethz.ch
andreas.fischlin@env.ethz.ch

Over the course of the last three years the SED consisted of 4 meetings, several spanning several days and each was devoted to particular themes. Guiding questions sent to participants in advance, based on submissions made by Parties, were used to structure a dialogue among 73 invited experts and delegates from Parties and observers on latest scientific findings as relevant for policy making. These discussions were live videocast, recorded, and the co-facilitators with the support from the UNFCCC secretariat summarized them in reports made available after each meeting. Finally co-facilitators were mandated to prepare a technical summary together with a compilation of all discussions, i.e. the previously published summary reports. This final SED report was presented to the UNFCCC subsidiary bodies (SBSTA, SBI) as of 2nd June 2015 and served as a basis for the negotiations on the Paris Agreement and the decisions taken at the last COP21 in Paris.

Following statistics show how SED discussions were organized as fact-finding, face-to-face exchanges of views between Parties and experts.



During the 4 meetings taking place at 5 locations during 11 days, 60 presentations were made and used as a starting point to launch discussions².

2 A NEW SCIENCE POLICY INTERFACE

The SED was perceived nearly unanimously as serving its purpose well. The [final SED report](#)³ contained ten messages, each with a headline and being made easily accessible within boxes inside the 30 page summary as prepared by the two co-facilitators. Here the headlines of the ten messages:

1) A long-term global goal defined by a temperature limit serves its purpose well

² Details are available in Annex V, p. 180 of the final SED report (see next footnote)

³ FCCC/SB/2015/INF.1 available at <http://unfccc.int/6911.php?preref=600008454>

- 2) Imperatives of achieving the long-term global goal are explicitly articulated and at our disposal, and demonstrate the cumulative nature of the challenge and the need to act soon and decisively
- 3) Assessing the adequacy of the long-term global goal implies risk assessments and value judgments not only at the global level, but also at the regional and local levels
- 4) Climate change impacts are hitting home
- 5) The 2 °C limit should be seen as a defence line
- 6) Limiting global warming to below 2 °C is still feasible and will bring about many co-benefits, but poses substantial technological, economic and institutional challenges
- 7) We know how to measure progress on mitigation but challenges still exist in measuring progress on adaptation
- 8) The world is not on track to achieve the long-term global goal, but successful mitigation policies are known and must be scaled up urgently
- 9) We learned from various processes, in particular those under the Convention, about efforts to scale up provision of finance, technology and capacity-building for climate action
- 10) While science on the 1.5 °C warming limit is less robust, efforts should be made to push the defence line as low as possible

While above headlines provide a gist of the content of the dialogue (the topmost tip of the iceberg only), the purpose is not to replace the wealth of information contained in the underlying report, but to provide an easier overview and to enable a faster access to all the information contained in the 182 page report and the actual discussions summarized there. To this end the report is full of cross-references, and all figures and other material is referenced to the original sources, notably the latest IPCC reports (AR5), including IPCC special reports prepared during the AR5 assessment cycle, and other reports as prepared by invited international agencies and UNFCCC bodies. This allows for any reader to trace statements back to the referenced original data source and scientific research.

3 LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

Presentations were planned to use up only about a third of the 34.5 hours as allocated for the dialogue. While this goal could not be achieved as planned, this planning effort resulted nevertheless in spending more hours for discussions than for presentations, quite a critical aspect of the SED. A fruitful dialogue requires sufficient time so that quick question-answer cycles become possible, which give participants an opportunity to ask follow up questions. Moderation has to pay careful attention to such aspects.



Fourth meeting of the Structured Expert Dialogue (SED) discussing IPCC SYR AR5 during COP20, Lima, Peru, 2nd Dec. 2014

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Another important element for making such a dialogue really a new science-policy instrument, that may carry heavy weighted and substantive information, is to strengthen this bridge by:

- Input sources are determined upfront and need legitimation, e.g. IPCC was decided to be a key input (COP decisions), while clear information on origin, including breadth and depth, of inputs has to be provided to participants for evaluating the robustness of the information
- Guiding questions based on stakeholder inputs (e.g. Party submissions) need to be prepared in advance, help the organizers to choose which experts to invite, inform the experts and finally guide the content of the presentations
- Redundancy in presentations is to be avoided (no slide shown twice)
- The dialogue needs a comprehensive, balanced, and consistent orchestration over several sessions, making it possible for stakeholders to intervene between sessions and formulate further written inputs and the co-facilitators to adjust the dialogue accordingly
- True dialogue is fostered, which will in the end inform not only delegates but also the experts
- The dialogue needs to be broadcasted and recorded (not the least to make accurate post analysis possible) and presentation slides can be watched while viewing/listening a broadcast; finally all presentations are made available in full and recordings with slide synchronisation can be revisited to ensure full transparency of the proceedings
- The dialogue of a session needs to be summarized after each meeting in an accurate and carefully balanced manner
- Every summary needs to be peer-reviewed by experts and professional editors
- To fulfil its mandate the entire dialogue should be completed by an effort to summarize all, e.g. by identifying common, emerging topics, including possible answers to the set of guiding questions

A key aspect is that a true dialogue is enabled and takes place, i.e. the deficit model of unidirectional communication is abandoned, so that in depth, comprehensive, and policy relevant insights are generated through the dialogue. Otherwise neither the decision makers nor the experts can gain much in terms of truly added value.