

FUTURE WORK OF THE IPCC

Summary of the debate at the 37th Session of the IPCC

This brief summary of the debate held in plenary at the 37th Session of the IPCC (Batumi, Georgia, 14 - 18 October 2013) was prepared by the IPCC Secretariat and is intended to assist governments in their further considerations.

Background and general comments

Governments discussed the process for further considering future work of the IPCC and key inputs to this process. It was agreed to set up a Task Group. The Terms of Reference of the Task Group and a timetable were developed by a contact group and agreed by the Panel in plenary session.

Most governments agreed that the basis for the discussions should be from the government submissions (both the previous ones and a new round of government submissions) but that the Task Group would also seek and consider input from scientists, observer organizations and other stakeholders and users of IPCC products.

It was agreed that the Task Group would develop options and recommendations for consideration of the Panel on the future products of the IPCC; the appropriate structure and modus operandi for the production of these IPCC products; and ways to ensure enhancement of the participation and contribution of developing countries in the future work of the IPCC. The summary of the discussion is therefore structured around these objectives.

1. Types of future IPCC products and timing/staggering

Options and views on future products:

- Several members expressed the view that the IPCC mandate continues to be relevant and appropriate.
- Some members wished to maintain basically the same process and type of reports that we produced during the fifth assessment cycle.
- Other governments wished for more topic focused reports produced more frequently, combined with a comprehensive assessment report.
- It was also requested by some developing countries that the IPCC should develop more regional products in addition to the topic reports.
- Some support was expressed for preparing during an assessment cycle one major climate science report (perhaps combined with climate impacts) and several well planned topic reports which would focus on the solutions side.
- Several governments expressed strong interest in more cross-Working Group Special Reports, such as the successful Special Report on “Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation” (SREX) released in 2011.
- Several governments called for further work on adaptation and vulnerability.

Duration of an assessment cycle and frequency of reports:

- Many speakers expressed the view that the current assessment period is about correct, especially for the physical science basis, as it relies heavily on modeling exercises and if combined with impacts and adaptation would rely on inter-community collaboration which takes time.

- Some members also noted that climate science findings do not change rapidly over a period of a few years and therefore there is no need for more frequent reports on climate science.
- Many members expressed the view that more frequent reports, for example on solutions and strategies, such as adaptation and mitigation, would be helpful to the policy-making community.
- It was also mentioned that the audience for IPCC reports is increasingly the public, the business community, which requires an adjustment of reporting and communications by the IPCC.

Staggering versus simultaneous release of reports:

- Some preferred more staggering between Working Group reports (ranging from releasing a major IPCC report every one to three years).
- Others preferred about the same staggering as the Fifth Assessment Report (AR5), with some adjustments.
- Concerns were expressed about sufficient time in the research community for scenario development and use, and about how to deal with the trend of exploding literature on climate change which authors have a harder time dealing within a short amount of time.

2. Modus Operandi and Future Working Group structure

Mandate, structure and number of Working Groups:

- Several governments expressed support for the existing Working Group and Bureau structure.
- In the spirit of achieving more cross-Working Group collaboration and elimination of artificial barriers between topics, others suggested changes in the structure. Some proposed to set up only 2 Working Groups, where the Working Group I assessment could be combined with some elements of the current Working Group II mandate while the remaining aspects of Working Group II be combined with Working Group III to address the solutions space in comprehensive manner.
- It was noted that a change in the Working Group structure would require further consideration of the regional balance in the IPCC Bureau.

Administrative, procedural and governance matters:

- Governments suggested to consider carefully which changes may be required in terms of structure and process to prepare more frequent thematic reports.
- Others raised the question what would be the role of the Technical Support Units (TSU) in the future, and how would their role and composition need to be adjusted to support more frequent and cross cutting reports.
- Possible changes in the role of the Secretariat to support a new approach and structure were mentioned.
- Some governments suggested to revisit the Terms of Reference of the Bureau in light of duration of the assessment cycle and to ensure continuity.

Other issues related to the modus operandi:

- Different views were expressed regarding the need for a further review of procedures and processes. Some proposed to evaluate the changes introduced after the InterAcademy Council (IAC) review with a view to further enhance and improve the processes.

- Governments seem to agree that regardless of the structure, there is a need for more cross-working group collaboration in the future (whether via innovative Working Group structures, modus operandi, or via other means).
- Many governments expressed the need to consult with authors and the research community to understand their views on future work of the IPCC, as they essentially produce the IPCC reports, face increasing challenges due to the fact that literature on climate science has exploded over time, and the IPCC and its authors are under increasing public scrutiny.
- The volunteer status of authors was also discussed and concern was expressed that continuing with the author role on a voluntary basis may be increasingly more difficult over time. This was especially seen as a barrier for experts from developing countries which often do not receive additional national support for their activities with the IPCC.
- The need for further improvement of the regional balance in author teams was mentioned.
- It was also suggested to involve experts working with traditional and indigenous knowledge.

3. Ways to ensure enhancement of the participation and contribution of developing countries in the future work of the IPCC

Supporting active participation of developing countries in all author teams and IPCC products and processes:

- It was noted that it was difficult to accomplish a significant increase in developing country expert participation in the AR5 especially for areas like the physical science basis, due to computing needs, data availability, and large financial and human resources required for such studies.
- Issues like data availability to experts in developing countries could be addressed partly by the IPCC, e.g. via the work of Task Group on Data Scenario Support for Impact and Climate Analysis (TGICA), or collaboration with other UN entities or international research programs.
- The fact that developing country experts often work under the umbrella of other countries was also noted and may need to be reflected clearly in IPCC statistics.
- It was noted that many papers from non-English speaking countries are not communicated or shared, leading to an even lower number of studies from developing countries being covered in the assessment reports.
- Appreciation was expressed for the Scholarship Programme as a small contribution to this issue.

How to facilitate and strengthen active participation of developing countries as Bureau members and Co-Chairs:

- It was recognized that developing country/EIT Bureau members require support beyond Daily Subsistence Allowance (DSA) and travel.
- Adequate technical support for Co-chairs from developing countries was repeatedly mentioned and various suggestions made including TSUs lead by developing countries, international recruitment and more participation of experts from developing countries in the TSUs.

Other questions raised in the context of developing countries:

- What could be achieved via collaboration with other bodies to increase the active participation of experts from developing countries in research areas where participation

levels are low, such as physical climate science, impacts, scenarios, and economic analysis. How could cooperation with other UN and international organizations lead to improvements in this area?

- It was also requested by some developing countries that the IPCC should develop more regional products in addition to the topic reports, in particular reports that cover the problems of the high vulnerability regions.