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IPCC Expert Meeting: Climate research community looks into future scenarios

GENEVA, May 18 – Climate experts will meet near Vienna, Austria, on 18-20 May 2015 at an Expert Meeting of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to discuss and further develop new socioeconomic scenarios as shared tools for climate research.

Experts from the climate change research community will meet with representatives of the IPCC at the meeting hosted by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) in Laxenburg, Austria.

“We use scenarios much like testing probes to explore future societal developments and their consequences for climate and the environment,” said Keywan Riahi, who leads IIASA’s energy program and is convening the Expert Meeting. He is also a lead author of the IPCC’s Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) on the mitigation of climate change. “The scenarios that were assessed by the IPCC have proven vital for the AR5. This expert meeting will have a detailed look at a new generation of scenarios and framework that the climate change research community has adopted to facilitate the integrated analysis of future climate impacts, vulnerabilities, adaptation, and mitigation,” said Riahi.

Scenarios, as used in research with integrated assessment models, are stories about potential ways that the future might develop. They feature specific quantitative elements and details about how sectors such as the economy, climate, and the energy sector interact. By looking at scenarios, researchers look for insights into the paths and circumstances that might lead to specific objectives.

“The scenarios from the research community form the backbone of our analysis of potential climate change impacts as well as mitigation and adaptation solutions,” said Ottmar Edenhofer, Chief Economist at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany and Co-Chair of IPCC Working Group III, which deals with the mitigation of climate change. The IPCC facilitated the development of the new scenarios in AR5 and assessed their results in the report, but the process is coordinated by the research community.

The Expert Meeting is being convened to continue the dialogue with the research community, to take stock of the achievements of the process during the AR5 cycle, to share available information across scientific disciplines, and to discuss the role of scenarios in future IPCC products.

With the meeting the IPCC intends to bring together scientific groups with diverse expertise and backgrounds to share experiences and expectations related to the scenario community’s activities and to facilitate further development of common scenarios in climate change research. This will allow a more integrated assessment of mitigation, adaptation, and climate change impacts across the entirety of IPCC work in the future.

The development of the new socioeconomic scenarios, called ‘Shared Socioeconomic Pathways’ (SSPs) complements the Representative Concentration Pathways already used in AR5; these are previously developed trajectories for future levels of greenhouse gases that are being explored in experiments by the climate modeling community.

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The SSPs enable researchers to conduct related studies across a broad range of topics. Just before the IPCC meeting a new generation of SSP scenarios has been made publicly available for review by the community (see below). The research communities will continue to investigate the implications of various socioeconomic developments on the local, regional, or global scale for the impacts of climate change and the costs, risks, and benefits of a range of possible policies.

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Notes for editors

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the world body for assessing the science related to climate change. The IPCC was set up in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly, to provide policymakers with regular assessments of the scientific basis of climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation.

It released the Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) in four stages over 2013 and 2014, finishing with the AR5 Synthesis Report in November 2014.

The IPCC organizes Expert Meetings and Workshops to facilitate discussions of topics relevant to the assessment process and to receive early input from the scientific community. In order to enhance coordination across the Working Groups in the preparation of the IPCC Assessment and Special Reports, topics of a cross-cutting nature are of particular interest. Proposals for Expert Meetings and Workshops are approved by the IPCC Plenary. The nomination process for the two kinds of events differs, as governments nominate experts for Workshops, while for Expert Meetings, attendees are nominated by the Working Group Co-Chairs.

About IIASA:

The International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) is an international scientific institute that conducts research into the critical issues of global environmental, economic, technological, and social change that we face in the twenty-first century. Our findings provide valuable options to policy makers to shape the future of our changing world. IIASA is independent and funded by scientific institutions in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Oceania, and Europe. www.iiasa.ac.at

Database for the SSPs:

<https://secure.iiasa.ac.at/web-apps/ene/SspDb>

Scenario database of the IPCC AR5:

<https://secure.iiasa.ac.at/web-apps/ene/AR5DB>