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The role of the IPCC and key elements of the IPCC assessment process

The IPCC is an intergovernmental body sponsored by UNEP and WMO. The main decision-making body is the “Panel” which meets at regular intervals in plenary sessions at the level of government representatives of all 194 IPCC member countries. Its role as defined in the “Principles Governing IPCC Work” is *“to assess on a comprehensive, objective, open and transparent basis the scientific, technical and socio-economic information relevant to understanding the scientific basis of risk of human-induced climate change, its potential impacts and options for adaptation and mitigation. IPCC reports should be neutral with respect to policy, although they may need to deal objectively with scientific, technical and socio-economic factors relevant to the application of particular policies. Review is an essential part of the IPCC process. Since the IPCC is an intergovernmental body, review of IPCC documents should involve both peer review by experts and review by governments.”*

The IPCC fulfills this role by preparing reports at regular intervals, including assessment reports, methodology reports and special reports. The drafting and review of these reports follows clear procedures. Key elements of the IPCC process and procedures include:

Development of the scope of a report in consultation between experts and governments and decision on the outlines by the Panel

- This step should ensure that relevant scientific developments as well as the information needs of policymakers are reflected in the upcoming reports.

Author teams that reflect a wide range of expertise and views and work on a voluntary basis

- Author teams for the chapters of IPCC reports should represent a range of views and expertise as well as appropriate geographical representation. The IPCC also aims for gender balance. This is achieved through a wide nomination and selection process, as is currently ongoing for the Fifth Assessment Report (AR5).
- More than 450 Lead Authors and more than 800 Contributing Authors (CAs) have contributed to the Fourth Assessment Report (AR4). They were selected from around 2000 nominations.
- All experts contributing to the report work for the IPCC on a voluntary basis and are compensated by the IPCC only for their travel expenses to the necessary meetings, including that of the Chair of the IPCC and all of the elected leadership.

A writing process based as far as possible on peer-reviewed and internationally available literature

- The authors will work on the basis of peer reviewed and internationally available literature, including manuscripts that can be made available for IPCC review and selected non-peer reviewed literature as necessary.
- Materials relevant to IPCC Reports, in particular, information about the experiences and practices of the private sector in mitigation and adaptation activities, are also found in sources that have not been published or peer-reviewed (e.g., industry journals, internal organisational publications, non-peer reviewed reports or working papers of research institutions, proceedings of workshops, etc.). A lot of relevant information appears also in

government reports and publications from international organizations. To make all references used in IPCC Reports easily accessible and to ensure that the IPCC process remains open and transparent, additional procedures have been agreed for the use of such sources, often referred to as “grey literature”.

- Authors who wish to include information from a non-published/non-peer-reviewed source, are requested to critically assess and review the quality and validity of each source before incorporating results into an IPCC Report.
- The Co-chairs have to collect and index non-publicly available sources as well as the accompanying information received from authors about each source and make copies available to reviewers upon request during the review process.
- The IPCC uses also expert meetings and workshops to support the assessment process.
- Conclusions in IPCC reports are based on multiple lines of evidence and a wide range of scientific technical literature.

A multi stage and transparent review process involving experts and governments

- The IPCC Review entails multiple stages aimed at ensuring that the best possible scientific and technical advice be included, so that the IPCC Reports represent the latest scientific, technical and socio-economic findings, and are as comprehensive as possible. Draft reports are circulated among independent experts from all relevant fields of expertise and all regions, and in a second stage to government reviewers as well. Experts can send comments on the draft text. It is a process with a very wide circulation, which in principle any scientific expert can join.
- Normally two Review Editors per chapter ensure that all substantive expert and government review comments are afforded appropriate consideration so that IPCC Reports provide a balanced and complete assessment of current information.
- To ensure objectivity and transparency, review comments are made available to reviewers on request during the IPCC review process. On completion of a Report all review comments and responses by authors are retained in an open archive (AR4 comments are linked from the IPCC website and respective Working Groups' websites¹) for a period of at least five years.
- In preparing the draft and final report, authors should clearly identify and describe different (possibly controversial) scientific, technical, and socio-economic views on a subject, together with the relevant arguments, particularly if they are relevant to the policy debate.

Approval, acceptance and adoption of IPCC reports and their summaries by the Panel

- The Summaries for Policy Makers (SPM), which summarize the key findings of each report, are prepared concurrently with the preparation of the main Reports and are subject to simultaneous review by both experts and governments. They are subject to a final line-by-line approval in a Plenary Session, which all IPCC member countries are invited to join. In case of Report prepared by one or two Working Groups this will be done at a Working Group or joint Working Group Session or a Panel Session - in the case of reports being prepared by all WGs or the TFI.
- Approval of the Summary for Policymakers signifies that it is consistent with the factual material contained in the full scientific, technical and socioeconomic assessment. During the Session, Coordinating Lead Authors may be asked to provide technical assistance in ensuring that consistency.
- The Synthesis Report (SYR) synthesizes and integrates materials contained within the IPCC Reports (Assessment and Special Reports) and addresses a broad range of policy-relevant but policy-neutral questions. The SYR SPM is approved line-by-line and the longer report adopted section by section to ensure consistency with the SPM and the underlying Reports.
- The *underlying* Reports (of Assessment, Special and Methodology Reports) are accepted at a Session of the Working Group or Panel. While they are not subject to line-by-line discussion and agreement, approval by member countries signifies that the material presents a comprehensive, objective and balanced view of the subject matter.

Consistent communication of uncertainties

¹ For WG I: <http://hcl.harvard.edu/collections/ipcc/index.html>

For WG II: http://www.ipcc-wg2.gov/publications/AR4/ar4review_access.html

For WG III: <http://www.ipcc-wg3.de/publications/assessment-reports/ar4/forth-assessment-review-comments>

- To assist Lead Authors of the Fourth Assessment Report in the consistent presentation of scientific uncertainties, uncertainty guidelines were prepared. They address approaches to developing expert judgments, evaluating uncertainties, and communicating uncertainty and confidence in findings that arise through the assessment process.
- Based on these guidelines, the AR4 authors assigned confidence levels to the major statements in the Summary for Policymakers. These range from very high to very low confidence.
- Authors also evaluated the likelihood, which refers to a probabilistic assessment of some well-defined outcome having occurred or occurring in the future, for certain outcomes in the Summary for Policymakers, with a range from *virtually certain* to *very unlikely*.

A budget based mainly on voluntary contributions from governments and in kind contributions from governments, research institutions and researchers

- The IPCC Budget is based on regular contributions from the two sponsoring organizations WMO and UNEP, which provide cash and one senior post in the IPCC Secretariat and regular contributions from the UNFCCC as agreed by the Parties. The largest share of contributions comes from governments on a voluntary basis.
- The contributions are managed under the IPCC Trust Fund. Annual expenditures are decided and reviewed by the Panel, consistent with the IPCC financial procedures and WMO Financial Regulations.
- Main items of expenditure are travel support for experts from developing countries and from countries with economies in transition (EIT), meeting costs, interpretation and translation, information and outreach activities and staff in the IPCC Secretariat.
- Large additional contributions to the work of the IPCC are provided by the governments who host Technical Support Units (TSUs) for IPCC Working Groups and the Task Force on National Greenhouse Gas Inventories (currently Switzerland, US, Germany and Japan).
- Further in-kind contributions are provided by countries hosting IPCC Sessions and meetings, hosting the Data Distribution Center and through their support for expert participation in IPCC work.
- Authors and elected members of the IPCC Bureau (currently 31 persons) work on a voluntary basis and do not receive any honoraria or compensation from the IPCC. The IPCC only provides travel costs for experts and members of the IPCC Bureau from developing countries and countries with Economies in Transition for participation in IPCC meetings or for giving presentations on behalf of the IPCC. A small contribution for administrative costs incurred is provided for Co-chairs (currently 5 persons) from developing countries.