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FUTURE WORK OF THE IPCC

Chairman's Vision Paper on the Future of the IPCC

(Submitted by the Chair of the IPCC)

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Chairman's Vision Paper on the Future of the IPCC

1. PREAMBLE

In the past whenever the Panel discussed the future of the IPCC the Chairman prepared a paper for consideration along with other material prepared for the purpose.

This vision paper has been drafted as an input for the participants of the 41st Session of the IPCC being held during 24-27th February 2015 in Nairobi, Kenya. It may be considered in conjunction with other documents provided for the session. The contents and areas of emphasis in this paper draw on the extremely valuable and extensive work achieved since the 37th Session of the IPCC held during 14-18 October 2013 in Batumi, Georgia, in anticipation of the 41st Session and spearheaded by the Task Group on the Future of the IPCC. The material in this paper is also based on previous experience and practices followed by the IPCC right from the production of the First Assessment Report to the Fifth.

The contents of this paper are structured around the three main elements of the mandate of the Task Group on the Future of the IPCC, namely (i) future products of the IPCC; (ii) the appropriate structure and modus operandi for the production of IPCC reports; (iii) enhancement of developing country participation.

2. FUTURE PRODUCTS OF THE IPCC

- **MANDATE** – It is essential for the Panel to keep in mind that any decision taken with regard to the future products and activities of the IPCC is fully in keeping with IPCC's mandate. In this context, it is useful to remind ourselves of the original UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution No.43/53 which forms the charter of the IPCC, and which stated that the IPCC was established "to provide internationally coordinated scientific assessments of the magnitude, timing and potential environmental and socio-economic impact of climate change and realistic response strategies". To some extent the outcome of 21st Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) can be seen as reflecting the findings of AR5, and particularly the contents of the Synthesis Report (SYR), which was distributed to all the delegates at COP 20 in Lima in December, 2014. Past IPCC reports have also been an important input for activities under the UNFCCC. But is there now a need to reflect on the issue of "realistic response strategies" and see how the IPCC could fulfill this mandate more effectively.

For instance, COP 21 and the completion of the AR5 also provide a unique opportunity for aligning the work of the IPCC with activities and decisions being undertaken under the UNFCCC. In the decision taken at COP 20 in Lima paragraph 7 states that it "Invites the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to continue to provide relevant information to parties on the scientific, technical and socioeconomic aspects of climate change, taking into account the work of the UNFCCC in determining its future products and assessment cycles". There is currently considerable debate on whether the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) which would be the foundation of any agreement and action under the UNFCCC should be subjected to ex-ante review. The UNFCCC Secretariat is charged with preparing a synthesis report, which would essentially be a summation and aggregation of all the INDCs to be submitted before COP 21. As of now there is no agreement on an ex-ante review of INDCs, but the IPCC is well within its right to use the summed up value of reduction in emissions as provided in the INDCs and see how it relates to RCP 2.6, which is the scenario used in the AR4 as the most assured pathway to keep temperature increase below 2°C by the end of the century.

The IPCC, therefore, now has a unique opportunity of “taking into account the work of the UNFCCC in determining its future production and assessment cycles”. The Panel, of course, would be discussing the issue of assessment cycles, but an extremely valuable product that it could produce to serve progress under the UNFCCC is to bring out a brief and accurate report annually indicating how the INDCs when summed up relate to the RCP 2.6 scenario. Such a product would be of enormous value to the global community. The manner in which this report is to be produced can be determined, and ideally could be entrusted to a task group to be set up by the Panel, which would have sufficient scientific expertise and which would function within a short deadline, beginning with information being made available on all the INDCs received by the UNFCCC Secretariat and being completed before the start of each successive COP.

- **IPCC BRAND** – Specifically, when deciding on the format and approach for future products of the IPCC, it is useful for the Panel to keep in mind what makes the essence of IPCC assessments, namely scientific rigor and comprehensiveness. It is essential that any format decided for the future products of the IPCC does not allow for any compromise on their robustness, comprehensiveness, rigour and transparency, as these qualities guarantee the authority of IPCC assessments as providing the most up-to-date and best scientific information available in the field of climate change. The Panel must consider flexibility for additional future products which respond to emerging issues that are policy relevant while keeping the comprehensive nature of the full assessment. This would allow flexibility to prepare products useful for policy-makers and a source of valuable knowledge for scientists. It is therefore desirable that the Panel critically and realistically assesses the value of regular comprehensive assessments following the past practice of a 5-7 year cycle against the value of more frequent thematic reports, in order not to forego the benefits of adequate updates of information and knowledge which would ensure the usefulness and policy relevance of future IPCC products.
- **POLICY-SCIENCE DIALOGUE** – It is useful to emphasize, perhaps at the cost of stating the obvious, IPCC’s unique asset in the form of the government-scientist dialogue which takes place throughout the assessment cycle and more prominently during the approval plenaries. This is a unique feature of the IPCC and is the key element to its success. This also ensures IPCC’s credibility and usefulness for the UNFCCC and the public at large, and it would be important to maintain this feature.
- **TARGET AUDIENCE** – Needless to say, the format and type of future IPCC products should align with the requests, needs and time schedule of the our main end user, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change; but not only. In the last decade, the IPCC and its work has come under increased and intense scrutiny from an audience larger than that of policy-makers. This expanded interest has included the media, civil society, business, and other stakeholders. It is important that this is taken into consideration when deciding on the future products of the IPCC, so that the IPCC moves forward with the times and responds to changing expectations and nature and size of the audience to address.
- **OUTREACH** – The underlying question of how far the IPCC can go to present and disseminate its findings must be addressed. First, it would be worthwhile for the Panel to consider increasing the resources available (human and financial) to improve IPCC’s outreach activities. This should start with ensuring that the future products of the IPCC are made more readable and accessible to non-expert audiences, perhaps by receiving inputs from and the assistance of writing or communications specialists during the production at least of the Summary for Policymakers. In addition, it would be useful to ensure that the public understands the role and functioning of the IPCC, its Principles and Procedures, and its position in the UN system. This is essential not only for the public and the media but most importantly for policy-makers. A better understanding of the IPCC’s role would ensure enhancement of its effectiveness and possible ease of approval of its reports notably during approval plenaries.

While significant progress has been made under outreach by the IPCC recently, and this has undoubtedly provided a favourable outcome in respect of awareness being created on the findings of IPCC's AR5, there is a need for a substantial increase and intensification of outreach activities in the future. For this reason there is need to increase the capacity and staffing of outreach specialists within the IPCC Secretariat. This would also enable the members of the outreach team in the Secretariat to assist the Working Group Co-Chairs and TSUs in outreach activities of the Working Groups as well. Through such an arrangement and the acceptance of an appropriate procedure, a coherent and coordinated outreach effort would be possible across every component of the IPCC structure, including the Working Groups.

3. APPROPRIATE STRUCTURE AND MODUS OPERANDI FOR THE PRODUCTION OF IPCC REPORTS

- **THE STRUCTURE** – This will depend of the nature of the future products of the IPCC; however, past experience shows that any future structure should aim at enhanced cooperation and coherence across working groups and scientific disciplines. For example, it would make a great deal of sense for the next assessment cycle to improve the current structure and sequencing of work so as to ensure that much more of the most recent results from the climate-model projections would be ready for impact assessment than was the case in the Fifth Assessment Report.
- **MODUS OPERANDI** – Since the First Assessment Report in 1990, one of the main challenges which has emerged relates to the amount of literature available to be assessed and data to be analyzed, both of which have grown exponentially. This much heavier workload needs to be seriously addressed when thinking up an appropriate modus operandi for the next cycle, especially considering that none of the authors are paid to work for the IPCC. The Panel should give some serious thought to the idea of increasing institutional support through the appointment of full-time post-doc level research assistants as additional support to the authors and especially to the Coordinating Lead Authors (CLAs) who are volunteering their time for the IPCC.
- **CARBON FOOTPRINT** – “Let everyone sweep in front of his own door, and the whole world will be clean” once said Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Reducing the IPCC's carbon footprint should be an utmost priority in the next assessment cycle of the IPCC and should be integrated into the modus operandi. Meeting locations should be decided accordingly, options for digitalization should be seriously considered, and means to hold electronic meetings should be further explored.

4. ENHANCEMENT OF DEVELOPING COUNTRY PARTICIPATION

- **INVOLVEMENT OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES** – It is regrettable but true that despite continuing intent and efforts there is low participation from developing countries in IPCC assessments, even though the situation has been improving. However this Session must consider options to give the extra push required to overcome this unsatisfactory situation. It would be particularly useful for the Panel to set up a task group to go into the question of appropriate and balanced developing country participation and come up with procedures and steps whereby the best possible outcomes in this regard would be reached in AR6, if there is another assessment to be undertaken by the IPCC. The work of this task group should be completed well in time to ensure that its findings and recommendations influence actions to be taken for the constitution of the author team for a possible sixth assessment.

- TSUs AND CO-CHAIRS – It is desirable that some of the Technical Support Units (TSUs) in the next cycle are located in developing countries. Since the main concern around this is ensuring a stable financial situation, it is important that the Panel examines this issue and offers innovative and workable solutions to address this. Further, it would also be important that, in the case where the TSU would be located in a developed country, a scientist/scientists from the country of the developing country Co-Chair would be based in the TSU office itself (and vice-versa) to ensure equal involvement of all the Co-Chairs and their support staff in the assessment.