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IPCC COMMUNICATIONS - LOOSE THOUGHTS FROM A HEAVY USER

Claudio Angelo

The IPCC *thinks* of itself only as a scientific panel, but it is actually a communications organization as well. Part of its core business is to communicate climate science to non-specialists (policymakers). So communications should be at the heart of every IPCC meeting.

But don't take my word for it. See, for instance, Barkemeyer et al.:

Engaging professional science communicators as part of the negotiation of SPM texts could improve the readability of these documents, in particular given that we found that this negotiation between countries and scientists at the IPCC AR5 WG3 plenary had a further detrimental impact on the readability of their SPM.

However, topic 17 of the Panel's comms strategy has it all backwards:

"approved IPCC reports and other products form the basis for communications materials"

Telling scientists to mind their language and letting comms people in only afterwards, as a mitigation measure, won't cut it. Steps need to be taken to integrate communications to the process as it evolves, as fully as possible and without compromising the known IPCC constraints. For that to happen, the problem must be broken down in at least three parts, according to three major audiences of the IPCC, as hinted at in the comms strategy:

- Policymakers (prime target);
- The general public;
- The media

POLICYMAKERS (THE SPM)

Just by looking at the AR5 WG1 SPM (the most readable of the three, according to Berkemeyer), one can notice several things that could be improved:

- *"So what"?:* Conclusions about several aspects of the climate system that seem obvious to the specialist might not be so to the politician. Right, the ocean stores 90 percent of all energy. And...? How does it affect my constituency? What does it *mean*?
- *Avoid different metrics* (or explain them): GT C x GT CO₂, end dates for projections (2081-2100 changes compared to 1986-2005, then 2100 compared to pre-industrial for the same projections – very confusing!). Why so many different periods are used as references? Is it a lack of communication among the own WGs and lead authors?
- *Help politicians gauge risk.* Mortals don't get statistics, so it's hard for a politician to judge based on confidence intervals and sigma levels. Even though the IPCC can't be policy-prescriptive, it can explain the odds of a given finding or the likelihood of a scenario in a way that politicians

understand – for instance, a color code for confidence intervals or risk (eg. AMOC collapse in the 21st century is a potentially catastrophic – red light on risk –, but unlikely event – green light on probability).

THE GENERAL PUBLIC (WEBSITE)

The IPCC website is functional and relatively easy to navigate. However, it is still too shy and sober. As the public face of IPCC, the prime interface between the panel and society, it should invite people to understand climate change.

- Can the website be made sexier? A prime instance of “sexification” was carried out by the UNFCCC (subject to similar constraints), with a “public interface” portal in addition to the traditional website.
- Can the IPCC create a hub for climate information derived from the IPCC reports and presented in a “Nasa Climate” kind of way? Hire science writers and multimedia people to convert content to videos, short texts, infographics (not just graphics!)?
- Packages of “active” communication (eg. what do the models say for South America, East Africa, or Oceania? Can those be bundled into regional communication kits and made available for download, in accessible language – “for dummies”?). That could be a way to test integration between WGs 1 and 2.

THE MEDIA

Specialized media don’t seem to have much trouble reading IPCC materials, but would profit from measures taken towards readability for policymakers. The challenge seems to be how to maintain interest of the media in times of “normal science”, when for practical purposes the big picture on the science is sorted. On the other hand, the UNFCCC’s assignment to the IPCC on 1.5 degrees scenarios, for instance, is bound to raise fresh media interest – and call into question the panel’s relationship with governments.

- An emerging theme, that may demand reactive communication, is the “scientific integrity” of mitigation policy assessments (is 1.5 degrees ruled out in realistic scenarios? Can we really install all that BioCCS? What are the limitations that the climate modeling community faces and what are the difficulties to generate more regionalized information at a more refined scale? Can the role of the IPCC be clearer with regard to the scenarios construction and modeling exercises?)
- On active communication: does it fall outside IPCC’s constraints to produce “downloadable” and “shareable” content for on-line media?

Claudio Angelo is the communications coordinator of the Brazilian Climate Observatory, a network of 38 civil society organizations. His book *A Espiral da Morte (Death Spiral)* draws heavily upon AR4 and AR5.