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Raising awareness of climate change

A handbook for government focal points



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I The importance of outreach

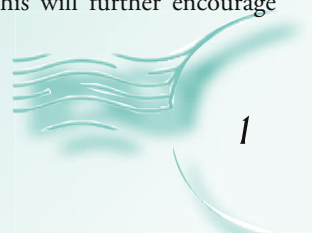
The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol can only succeed if the general public and key stakeholders support effective action. Since governments are directly responsible for only a small proportion of greenhouse gas emissions, they must persuade businesses, communities and individuals to adjust their behavior in ways that limit emissions and promote adaptation.

Fortunately, governments have several tools at their disposal for motivating people to make these changes. Policies and legislation can be used to raise the cost of activities that emit greenhouse gases or create vulnerabilities to climate change impacts. They can also be designed to reduce the costs of activities that lower emissions and promote adaptation. Regulations and standards can mandate changes in products and practices. Taxes and subsidies can also be adjusted to influence behavior.

Such policies and measures, however, can encounter inertia, passive resistance or active opposition, particularly from those concerned about the imposition of a new cost. Providing information and explanations is therefore vital for generating public and stakeholder support for government policies and regulations. Public outreach can also encourage voluntary changes in habits, address the arguments of those who oppose specific actions and help to prepare the younger generation for living in the climate-change world that they will soon inherit.

Many governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are already working actively to raise awareness. The scale of the change required, however, and the vast number of people and interests that must be influenced, calls for outreach activities of a much greater magnitude. National governments will want to encourage local authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), educators, the media, the entertainment industry and individuals to play a role. They may also consider building partnerships with many of these diverse actors.

UNEP has prepared this “handbook for government focal points” by drawing on a recent series of UN-sponsored workshops and its own experience in supporting outreach activities. The handbook gathers together a range of practical experiences and common-sense lessons in the field of awareness-raising from Africa, the Asia-Pacific, Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean. It is UNEP’s hope that this will further encourage



governments to strengthen their national climate outreach programmes and engage their citizens in the campaign to address climate change.

How the Convention helps

The importance of communicating with the general public and engaging stakeholders is fully recognized by the Climate Change Convention itself. Article 6 on Education, Training and Public Awareness urges governments to develop and implement educational and public awareness programmes on climate change and its effects, to ensure public access to information and to promote public participation in addressing the issue (see Annex I).

More specifically, Article 6 commits Parties to *“promote and facilitate at the national and, as appropriate, subregional and regional levels, and in accordance with national laws and regulations, and within their respective capacities”* the following outcomes:

- a) *“The development and implementation of educational and public awareness programmes on climate change and its effects.”* Some governments have already developed such proactive programmes, while many others have not. *Public awareness* aims at early results and is often pursued via the media and outreach campaigns. *Education* aims at a more profound, long-term change in habits, particularly among the young. It tends to use formal methods and settings to transmit a more substantial understanding of the climate change problem and its potential solutions.
- b) *“Public access to information on climate change and its effects.”* Information should be freely available to those who seek it out, in libraries, on the Internet, from government offices, and so forth.
- c) *“Public participation in addressing climate change and its effects and developing adequate responses ...”* Popular involvement in shaping policy and implementing climate change programmes can contribute enormously to effective action.

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