

Module 3 & 7: Developing an impact strategy and creating communication out put of the IEA (DRAFT)

Overview

This module will focus on methods to position and deliver a national IEA findings and recommendation and creating communication of it. This can have real impact on environmental policy and practice at a series of levels, ranging from local to national.

Why bother with developing an impact strategy and creating communication of the IEA outputs?

Each day the general people and decision-makers get numerous text information. This involves times to read out of 24 hours of his day. Simply providing yet another report to your senior bureaucrats and political leaders won't be enough to ensure that they read your findings, let alone act upon them.

Before you start producing your main report and other products, you need to make a series of important decisions. By identifying your target audience(s), you will be better able to shape your message and select the right content, and later, the right presentation format. By carefully considering our budget, you will be better and more able to make realistic decisions about the kind of product you feel will be most beneficial. You will have to decide what kinds of information products best suit your message.

We want to take you through the steps that will help you determine how to engage the right people to listen to you and respond to your work. This impact process takes time; and involves a real emphasis on being clear and strategic in identifying the changes that you want to see as a result of your assessment and how well the findings can be communicated. The module discusses strengths and weaknesses of different channels and how to go about approaching the media.

The process focuses on building relationships with key people, finding out what they know already and what they need to know and how best create the communication of the IEA outputs. With that understanding, you can then seek out and create the opportunities to get your messages across, to generate dialogue, and gain the attention and support of those who may have in the past appeared non-responsive to your work.

A portion of this training will be presentational in nature. However, most of your time will be spent in pairs or small groups to discuss local political and social factors that could affect whether and how your reports are used. Small groups also will be used to practice building the components for an impact strategy for your reports where assessment output communication will be the major focus.

Outputs of this training module

- The primary output should be an outline of communication and impact strategy for your next state of the environment (SoE) or GEO-based national integrated environmental assessment (IEA) report.
- At the end of this module, we anticipate that you will see yourself as someone capable of having ability to build long term communication strategy to have real impact on decision-making.

Course Materials

1. Introduction and learning objectives

This module will focus on methods to position and deliver a national IEA outputs so that it can have real impact on environmental policy and practice at a series of levels, ranging from local to national.

At the end of this module, you should have increased your ability to ensure that an IEA has an impact.

1. You will be able to articulate reasons for doing an integrated environmental assessment that can cover but also go beyond mandated requirements.
2. You will have a greater understanding of the political process and context of what you are doing, such as how changes are made in policy and practice.
3. You will be able to develop effective communications strategies to achieve impact by systematically implementing the most important steps of a dissemination plan, while choosing the most appropriate communication outputs, and ways of reaching audiences;

4. You will be able to demonstrate an ability to link target group(s) and content with their choice of presentation format and communications channels, considering budget constraints;
5. You will understand that achieving your desired impact requires more than the production of a report at the end of the assessment. Strategic positioning of your work and planned communications are essential components of your work that should be undertaken in parallel with all stages of the assessment.
6. You will understand the importance of production and distribution/dissemination process, with special emphasis on approaching the media.

2. Understanding impact

In this section you will learn:

- why it is important to have an impact strategy;
- how to understand the external environment (context) for an assessment;
- how to recognize an issue cycle (using media, polling data, etc.); and
- how to communicate the output of the assessment.

2.1 What is an IEA output communication and impact strategy?

A communication and impact strategy consists of the steps you take to ensure that the work you do will lead to real progress on key issues or concerns. It is proactive in nature, and adaptive in a public policy environment where priorities of governments and citizens can shift and change.

2.2 When do you prepare an impact strategy and who is responsible for it?

An impact strategy should be prepared once you have initiated the process for an integrated environmental assessment. It is initiated as part of the “institutional setup” stage of a GEO-style IEA process. It is formalized in the “scoping and design” stage, implemented stages 4 through 6, and regularly monitored, assessed and improved (see Module 2). The manager, or management team, for the IEA process should be responsible for:

- developing the impact strategy, or ensuring that an impact strategy is developed;
- implementing the strategy; and
- monitoring performance on the strategy to ensure that it is achieving the results you are seeking, and modifying or adjusting it, if necessary.

2.3 Why do you need an impact strategy?

In many jurisdictions, SoE assessment or sustainable development reports are now mandated by statute and regulation. In others, there may be a strong policy context that has led to a government undertaking or participating in an assessment as a voluntary initiative.

By their nature, most SoE/integrated environmental assessments are not detailed scientific assessments. They may, however, lead to more attention being paid to problem areas, and they may recommend a more detailed scientific assessment of root causes and downstream effects. The result of an assessment can shift the mood of the public, and lead to political pressure. It may educate a wide range of audiences on key issues, and as a result it may trigger further detailed studies that are more directly linked to specific issues and decisions.

It is often an underlying assumption of reporting that good information will lead to good decisions. But while good information is necessary, it does not follow that decision-makers will act on it. Decision-makers are often quite well informed, but their priorities and intentions may be different from yours. The challenge is to take proactive steps to ensure that your assessment doesn't sit on a bookshelf once it is done, but that it provides good input to decision making. Your assessment will lead to recommendations for actions that may require changes in policy and practice by the government. Consider from the outset how the findings from your

assessment might be used, and how the priorities you identify can become the priorities of your government and your country.

An impact strategy begins with articulating the changes sought as a result of the assessment. This provides purpose beyond simply following through on the mandated requirement for the assessment. For those conducting an IEA for the first time, it may not be possible to articulate a specific policy-related change that might be necessary as there is no prior assessment which identified priority issues. For first timers, seeking better linkages between the findings of the report and formal decision-making process in government (e.g., departmental strategic plans, policy, priorities, and budgets) may be the main objective. Those who are conducting an assessment for the second or later rounds might be able to think more specifically about issues and necessary policy changes identified from the process.

2.4 Understanding public environment on assessment

There are many ways to get a sense of the external political and public environment in which the assessment is taking place.

- Review not only the relevant statutes and regulations that govern the assessment, but also review the debates in parliament and parliamentary committee minutes. Find the background white/green papers, or other relevant policy documents.
- Investigate with current/former bureaucrats their recollection of the process involved in securing the mandate to do the assessment.
- Review current debates in parliament. What are the hot button issues among the members?
- Monitor political and social coverage in the national media and what they think is worth reporting?
- Chat with colleagues in other departments about what the key issues are that they are addressing.
- Attend meetings of non-government organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations within and outside of the environment sector. Find out what their priorities are. Hold focus groups to identify user needs and interests.
- Look at polling data. If you have the resources, commission a public opinion poll, or work with the government's communications department to commission a poll to find out what is important at the present time for the citizens of your country.

Be aware that if your assessment process serves only to produce a report simply to comply with a legal or policy instruction, then the impact—the ability to have the findings used to effect change—will be severely limited.

EXERCISE

Form groups of three–four with your neighbours and discuss the following questions. Be prepared to share your answers in plenary.

1. What was the context for previous assessments with which you are familiar? Are you operating under a legal or policy mandate? Is your assessments part of a larger programme for government accountability?
2. Why were your assessments mandated, directed or commissioned? Were your assessments a high priority for your superiors? What other things concern them?
3. How did/will higher-level decision-makers use your findings?

2.5 Understanding issue attention cycles

In preparing an impact strategy, it is important to be aware of levels of public, political and bureaucratic attention to current issues, and to the issues being explored in the assessment. Levels of attention will influence the choice of actors to engage (and the likelihood of getting their support), and how to engage them. Understanding what is on the public radar screen will also help identify where your assessment might be useful in bringing new knowledge and recommendations for action.

It has been found that for environmental risks there is generally a pattern that resembles a “classic” issue attention pattern initially identified by Downs (1972) and subsequently confirmed by many scholars (e.g., Baumgartner and Jones 1993). Social attention to global environmental risks has tended to lag years and even decades behind scientific and technical developments. At some point,

it rises relatively rapidly, remaining high for a short period of time, and then drops off again (Social Learning Group 2001). In some cases, as with stratospheric ozone depletion in the United States, attention to the issue can occur in just two such cycles.

The research of the Social Learning Group suggests three phases of issue development (Figure 1).

During the first phase, before the issue first achieves widespread public attention, the principal functional change is the gradual build-up of scientific and analytic capacity through research, monitoring and assessment activities. Over a long period characterized by relatively low public attention, society's capacity to address new issues gradually accumulates within a relatively fixed group of institutions, largely determined by historical circumstances and the way the issue is perceived.

It is unlikely that new institutions will become involved to a major extent with the issue during this period of low attention.

The subsequent period of rapid rise in public attention marks a second phase in issue development. During periods of rapid rise in public and political attention to a new issue, there will be a renegotiation of leadership within already engaged institutions, and a need for new institutions will emerge. At this stage of issue evolution, it is important to recognize the need for coalitions of actors to push the issue forward. These coalitions provide the basis for a shared understanding of the problem and its possible solutions. Effective management of emerging issues will therefore encourage this coalition building rather than encouraging generally increased participation by individuals, or isolated groups of actors.

A third phase of interactions among management functions is associated with the period following the peak in public attention and continuing through the subsequent decline in attention. During this period, the linkages between the knowledge-intensive and action-intensive management functions increase in frequency and run in both directions: knowledge influences action and vice versa.

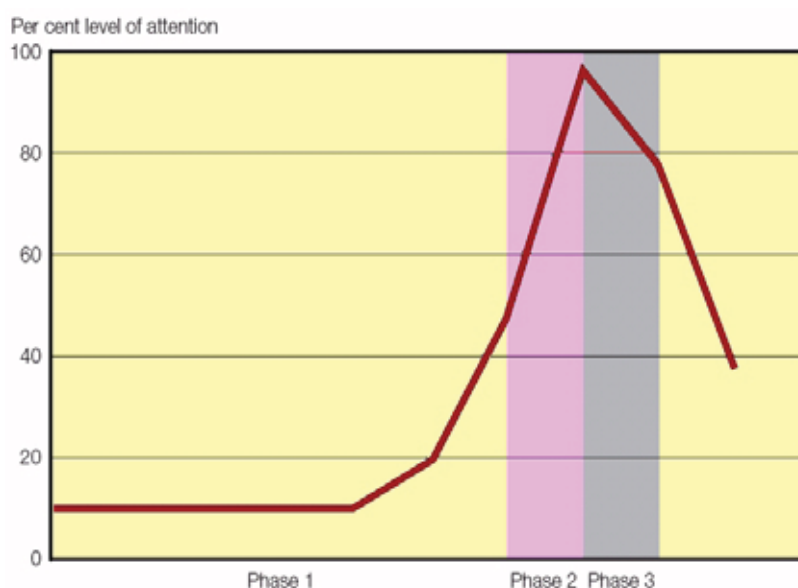


Figure 1: Phases of an issue attention cycle (adapted from Social Learning Group 2001).

EXERCISE

In preparing for this assignment, you were asked to:

- review the number of stories in your newspaper related to environment, health and development in the week prior to your training; and
- find sources of public opinion polling data in your country and review them for the current year.

Based on your "homework:"

- what issues are of most concern to citizens in your country right now?
- how is your political leadership responding and;
- how might you align findings from your assessment with these concerns?

A case study of the climate change issue attention cycle

The case of attention to climatic change is illustrated in Figure 2. This graph charts levels of public interest in climate change as indicated by coverage of the issue in the elite newspapers of several countries. While the graph only shows the media coverage, additional research carried out by the Social Learning Group suggests that the levels of attention accorded to climate change in the elite media correlated strongly with levels of attention shown to it at the same period in time by other actors such as parliaments, industry groups and the scientific community. The media data can thus be taken as a rough reflection of overall changes in levels of attention to global environmental risks among actors.

Of particular interest in this graph is the one- or two-year period of rapidly increasing attention, then a year or two with the issue in high profile, and finally a slow decline of public attention back to lower levels. Over sufficiently long periods, recurrent cycles of public attention are possible (possibly indicating that lower attention levels have more to do with the emergence of new priorities, or media and public fatigue, rather than a resolution to the problem).

Much as in the cases of acid rain and stratospheric ozone depletion, climate change was an expert issue long before it became a public one. There was relatively little attention to climate change in the press of any arena prior to 1988, despite decades of sustained scientific work. In this case, “issue linkage” appears to have been a critical factor in getting climate change onto the agenda of the public and policy-makers. The rise of stratospheric ozone depletion to the political agenda forced a certain amount of political attention in at least some national and international arenas to the issue of global climate change. Also important was the role of political leadership.

In the late 1980s, high-ranking politicians in many of the politically powerful arenas started to speak about the need to take action regarding a global warming threat. Their attention was secured by proactive, strategic and personal efforts on the part of scientists and concerned citizens working in NGOs. This put political momentum behind scientific developments in several arenas, and the issue appears to have caught on in several of the other arenas. By 1989-1990 there was a relatively high level of attention to the issue of global climate change in the media of almost all countries. Climate change remained on the public agenda even when media attention to stratospheric ozone depletion began to decline. In the period after the data collected for Figure 2, evidence suggests that attention dropped sharply in most arenas towards the mid-1990s before rising again in the run-up to the Kyoto Conference 1997. This might signal that once an issue receives a high level of both public interest and political support, it will remain on the bureaucratic agenda even though public interest may shift to other concerns. For the impact strategy, it is important to be aware of where the issue that is to be assessed lies with respect to the attention cycle. If the issue is in the first phase, in which most attention to the issue is in the scientific and technical realm, the impact strategy should consider that the audience most likely to be interested in the IEA will be in this area. It will take more concerted effort to gain the attention of the general public, private and political interests.

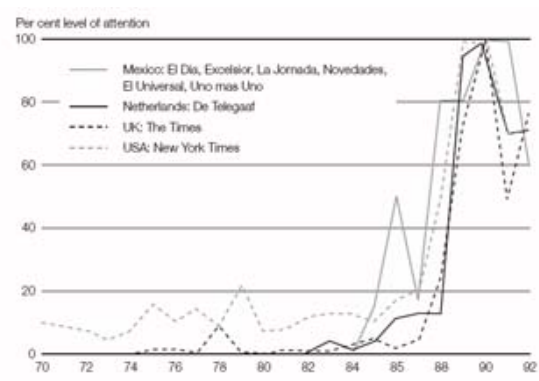
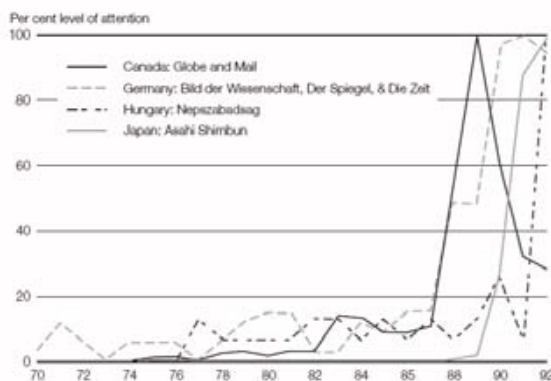
During the second phase in which there is a rapid rise of public and political attention to the issue, there is a “window of opportunity” in which the impact strategy can consider the possibilities of reframing the issue and attracting new actors to become involved in dealing with the issue. If the issue is in the third phase, where the issue is on both the scientific and political agendas and there is considerable interaction between these communities, the impact strategy will be able to address the broader communities of concerned actors, when scientific analysis, public interest and political agendas are closely linked. It is at this stage that an impact strategy may have its most obvious and immediate results. Keep in mind though, that an impact strategy developed at this stage will be ineffective. The strategy must be developed early; it will just have its greatest impact at this stage.

There is a certain inevitability that issues will recede from the attention of the general public. An impact strategy may help to:

- mitigate the falling off of public attention by focusing on more direct engagement of target decision-makers; and
- shorten the issue attention cycle by moving a relevant issue back into the public eye more frequently.

There will always be unexpected catastrophic events that can play a major role in tectonic shifts in public policy. In these circumstances, public interest and policy response may peak simultaneously, with pressure placed on knowledge seeking efforts for rapid response. One has only to consider, for example, the effect of the 2004 tsunami in Asia on policies to implement early warning systems. These events can have two outcomes for your own impact strategy.

- You can seize the opportunity to relate your assessment findings with the catastrophic event. For example, in 1997, one could have tied SoE report findings on land management to the massive land-clearing fires and resulting haze blankets across Asia that led to \$US1.4 billion in short-term health costs and fire damage (IISD 2002).
- Your work will be moved off the political and bureaucratic radar screen for the immediate future. You will need to complete your mandated requirements for the assessment, but continue to foster the relationships built through the process, and be ready for the time to advance the findings.



Source: Social Learning Group 2001

Figure 2: Country comparison of newspaper attention to climate change

3. Model for an impact strategy

3.1 Attributes of impact strategies and traditional communications activities

An impact strategy incorporates communications activities combined with a good understanding of government relations as practiced by advocacy groups and professional lobbyists. With communications

An impact strategy builds on communications activities in several key respects.

	Impact Strategy	Traditional Communications activities
Purpose	Goal is to effect change, and to identify your potential role as a change agent.	Goal is to ensure people understand the findings and recommendations.
Audience	Small group of key actors and those who have access to those actors.	Broader audiences
Timing	Developed at the beginning of the assessment process, monitored and adjusted throughout the process.	Part of the impact strategy; usually implemented towards the end of the strategy when findings and recommendations are known.

strategies, it is necessary to identify key recipients of the assessment, prepare key messages and products that will help them grasp the essentials of the research, and identify appropriate channels to deliver those messages and products, including the media, participation in events (e.g., conferences, workshops), and electronic delivery via e-mail and web.

EXERCISE

- Share a story from your own experience about how assessments have been communicated in the past to decision-makers and to the public.
- Discuss in particular the roles of different players: who was responsible for delivering the final report, what were their tasks, who were their target audiences, who handled the release to the general public and what vehicles or channels did they use to get the information out?
- Were you satisfied with the responses to the assessment?

3.2 Steps in building an impact strategy

There are five main steps to creating an impact strategy, as illustrated in Figure 3.1. These steps are elaborated below.

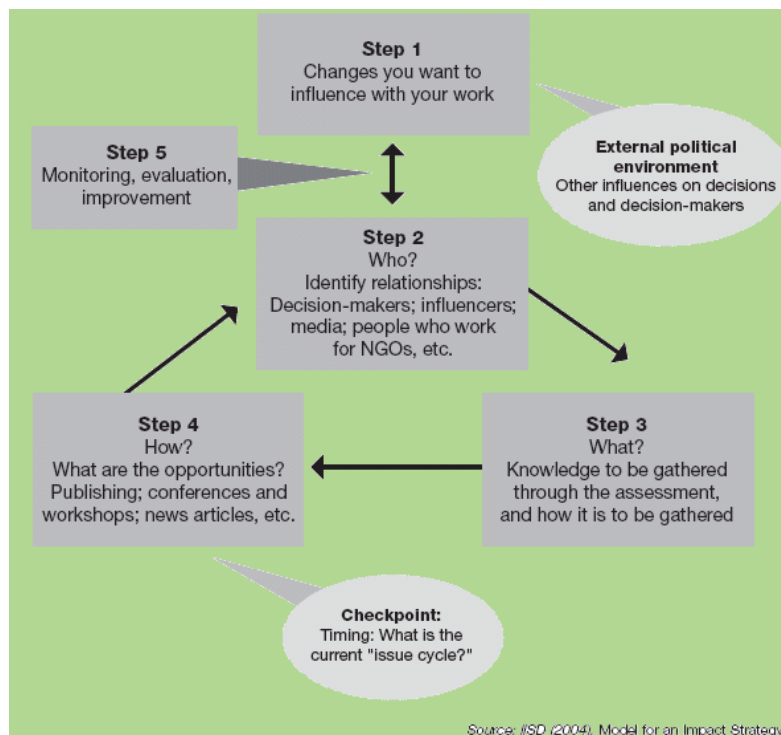


Figure 3: Model for an impact strategy

Step 1: Creating a “change” statement to anchor the impact strategy

An impact strategy is anchored by its “change statement.” This is an articulation of what the impact of your assessment should be. What should be changed or done differently as a direct result of the assessment?

The change statement may be fairly broad, focused primarily on getting people in positions of authority to actively use your report. For example:

Key departmental decision-makers will use the information gathered during the assessment to develop policy priorities, departmental strategic plans and budgets.

Or

State, as well as national, level planners will review the findings of the assessment, and prepare internal policy briefs on how they will address the recommendations of the assessment.

Remember that an important part of the IEA process is a scan of the issue and policy priorities. In the context of any given priority issue to be reported, major policy mechanisms that could or should be influenced can also be identified.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper planning and implementation process is adjusted to increase attention to environmental degradation, protection and rehabilitation, based on the findings of the assessment.

An impact strategy is a dynamic process. The change statement may start off fairly broad or general, but as more data become available and analysis is carried out, the change statement can be revisited and refined. Based on the findings of previous assessments, or on the new data being analysed, you may wish to focus on one key priority that you want your findings to inform and address, e.g.:

The government institutes a national watershed management plan that takes into consideration the responsibilities and capacities of local villagers to protect and rehabilitate their water sources.

You can still reach out to broader audiences to inform and engage them in the report findings. Impact in this context may be an aggregate of actions that individuals may take in response to the report. But there may be little that they can do on a personal level. The impact strategy will help you work towards leveraging real policy change on a key issue.

EXERCISE

- How you would like to see your assessment used?
- Describe a situation (a government policy or practice) that could be improved as a result of your assessment.

Step 2: Relationship management

Too often, people move immediately to the information gathering stages of the assessment, without due consideration of Step 2. Careful thought should be given to who will be in a position to take the findings of the assessment and use them effectively. Information by itself doesn't leverage change, but relationships do, and this involves people communicating ideas, analysis and data to other people. This step involves identifying the individuals and groups you most want to reach. Consider how these decision-makers acquire information, who do they trust, what information source do they trust and how do they make decisions? How can you get to those people? If you can-not reach them directly, who are the people they do listen to, and can you reach them instead?

This step is designed to identify those who are in positions to make the decision or effect the changes including those who can influence the decision-makers directly. These include: intermediaries, civil society, academic community and other research institutes, and media. Central to determining who to reach is the concept of relationship management: maintaining the connections and influence over time

Step 3: Knowledge management

Once you have articulated who will help with achieving the decision you seek, you need to analyse both what they need to know, and what you need to know that will help them take or influence the decision. This is the knowledge management process of the assessment. The remainder of the Resource Book will provide you with the tools you need to gather, analyse and process your information.

You will need to consider how to build trust in your final product, including the data, the analysis and the recommendations. Participation by the key decision-makers in the actual process of the assessment ensures saliency and relevancy to the finding. This could include not only leading scientists who ensure the assessment reflects the latest scientific results, but also others such as indigenous people whose traditional ecological knowledge can broaden the assessment's perspective or corporations that may have access to more in-depth and privileged information. Generally, the constructive collaboration of a wider set of actors may increase not only the credibility of the IEA but its legitimacy in the eyes of a broader set of social stakeholders.

Step 4: Opportunity management

This step involves moving that knowledge into the hands of those you want to influence. There are many tools available to do this: the products to be released, the conferences and workshops to hold, and the amplifiers, including electronic mailing lists and websites, which get replicated throughout much wider audiences than may have been targeted.

An important part of this process is the development of "key messages," a series of short, simple, plain language statements that capture the essence of the work.

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