Subject to revision

Advance paper submitted to the
IPCC Expert Meeting on Communication, Oslo, Norway, 9-10 February 2016

Exploring Trans-Disciplinary Approaches to Communicating the IPCC Assessment Reports

Jessica Asne Dator-Bercilla with Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, Gemma Narisma, Rosa T. Perez, Emma Porio
Christian Aid, Manila Observatory, Ateneo de Manila University

Over the past decade, the Philippines was hit by powerful and devastating hazards. Farmers, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples observed significant changes in climate patterns that challenged their indigenous knowledge on seasonal climates. This resulted in uncertainty and loss of livelihoods and assets for many and, in communities exposed to these hazards, loss of lives. Community partners asked a very simple question, "Why is this happening to us?". This question started our journey that eventually led us to the IPCC Assessment Reports and the journey to trans-disciplinarity.

Apart from the concept of an ecological "karma", Christian Aid and its partners thought there must be a scientific explanation to all these. A Learning Circle involving scientists and local community practitioners paved the way for a more trans-disciplinary way of understanding climate change and risks. We asked climate scientists to explain to us the physical evidence of change and they started characterizing the hazards, explained risks, deepened our understanding of vulnerabilities and what can be done. The IPCC assessment reports were always a reference. In its written form, many can barely understand nor had the patience to read voluminous document. Some of us saw practical use in the Summary for Policy Makers. Still, for a non-physical scientist, the documents were not very easy to comprehend.

A strategy that worked for us is facilitating the coming together of scientists, development practitioners, policy advocates, local communities and local governments to discuss the content of the Assessment Reports. This practice has evolved since 2007 and allowed us to deepen the understanding on the science of climate change as we went through AR 4, SREX and AR5 with scientists who were also involved in the assessments.

For the AR 5, CORDEX-SEA explained AR5 to CSOs in various fora in Asia. Some scientists involved in the preparation of the report shared the application of the findings in very specific development contexts (i.e. coastal, urban, agriculture) so that other stakeholders can identify with the report. CORDEX-SEA also made sure they invite practitioners to their scientific meetings where the complexity of the climate science is discussed. Manila Observatory, on the other hand, took the communication of the AR 5 reports to another level by finding ways to enable scientists to share their knowledge in a language that can be better understood by various stakeholders --- ie development practitioners, military, business, local urban and rural communities, the Church, youth, national and local governments, international humanitarian organizations among others. The climate scientists patiently explain the climate system, the interaction of elements, characterized the potential hazards, the challenge of emissions, what radiative forcing means and how these elements interact with vulnerabilities to create risks. Beyond these, they are willing to discuss with development practitioners and partners how these risks can be

addressed through mitigation, adaptation, risk reduction, resilience. They were also willing to expose their science to legislative scrutiny and the dynamics of governance, so that the recommendations in the AR 5 can be translated into policy and practical applications. A key example is using key AR5 findings in an action-oriented research on Coastal Cities at Risk that exposed policy makers and implementers to the relevance of science in governance and informed policy formulation.

In brief, the most powerful media for communicating the AR5 for us did not come through written, digital nor animated form. The media of communication were the scientists and other stakeholders who were willing to search for a common language, subject themselves to a dynamic process of dialogue and learning where no one has the sole monopoly of knowledge. They made other stakeholders feel that they were part of an inclusive knowledge building process rather than mere recipients of knowledge. The modality had to be trans-disciplinary if the science were to become relevant to non-scientists and find space in development aspirations. In the process of doing so, the exchanges did not just transfer information, rather, it created a social capital that was and can be used for policy reform, empowerment and development. These, too, will be the recommendations I will make for the effective communication of subsequent AR reports.