Fact Sheet

Science Policy Interface

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INTRODUCTION

The complexity of global environmental challenges has meant the interface between science and policy has become increasingly important in shaping coordinated global policy response to the world's most complex environmental issues. The establishment of a new International Legally Binding Instrument (ILBI) to end plastic pollution presents the opportunity to ensure that the most up to date science and knowledge are a fundamental part of the institutional framework and decision-making process.

Relevance to the Pacific Context

- Data on plastic pollution in the Pacific is severely lacking, a new Science Policy Interface (SPI) could ensure research and analysis is focussed on the region. An SPI could strengthen research around Pacific-relevant policy objectives and build capacity in that engagement and collaboration
- The mandate of a Science Policy Interface ensure that particular focus is placed upon small island developing states (SIDS), developing countries and countries with economies in transition.
- Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) are the holders of a vast amount of traditional knowledge, a well-designed SPI has the potential to ensure this knowledge and the IPLCs holding such knowledge to be recognized appropriately.
- The necessity of independent evidence-based policy to help tackle the urgent needs of PSIDS, including geographic vulnerabilities to climate change and oceanic pollution including disrupting natural ecosystems and loss of oceanic resources.

Key Considerations

In 1972, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment agreed the Stockholm Declaration, set out 26 principles concerning the environment and development. Principle 18 stated that "*Science and technology, as part of their contribution to economic and social development, must be applied to the identification, avoidance and control of environmental risks and the solution of environmental problems and for the common good of mankind*". Since then, the global community has worked to facilitate constructive exchanges at the interface of science and policy arenas. The formal mechanisms that aim to bridge gap between science and policy are now called science policy interfaces (SPIs); many operate in the arena of global environmental governance either as standalone bodies with a dedicated governing body, or subsidiary SPIs to a treaty with their agenda set by the governing body of the treaty.

Examples of SPIs include:

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Standalone body).
- The Stockholm Convention's Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee. (Subsidiary body).
- The Technical and Economic Assessment, Scientific Assessment and Environmental Effects Assessment Panels to the Montreal Protocol (Subsidiary bodies).

The establishment of Subsidiary SPIs as subsidiary bodies under a treaty or convention has, in many cases, proven to be an effective measure to deliver accurate, up-to-date, robust scientific and technical information.

Subsidiary Bodies

Subsidiary bodies responsible for the SPI is considered a successful model, particularly in the instance of the Montreal Protocol. The success of the Montreal Protocol has been attributed to the constantly updated scientific information, coordinated by its subsidiary bodies, and the interaction between science, policy and diplomacy. Subsidiary bodies may play a variety of roles under the ILBI, including the following:

- **Scientific assessment** providing relevant, timely and robust scientific review and information pertinent to the objectives and implementation of the ILBI, considering the best available science, traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems.
- **Technical assessment** providing relevant, timely and robust technical review and assessment of the ILBI's implementation, considering the best available technologies and practices.
- **Economic Assessment** to provide relevant, timely and robust economic review and assessment of the implementation of the ILBI, considering socio-economic matters.

These roles have been distinguished from one another, given the different considerations and expertise needed for each category; however, they do not necessarily require separate subsidiary bodies. These roles form an essential part of the institutional framework of the new ILBI, fulfilling critical functions. These can be incorporated into the ILBI as key components under the authority of the governing body.

Standalone Bodies:

The IPCC is perhaps the most recognised standalone SPI and has overseen the preparation of periodic assessment reports as well as an array of specialized technical guidance on climate change. The IPCC is well known for its "policy-relevant but not policy prescriptive" assessments. In 2007 its work and impact were recognized when it was jointly awarded the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize with former US Vice President Al Gore. It has led to other SPIs developed in it's image such as the Inter-governmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) was established in 2012. IPCC assessments provide governments, at all levels, with scientific information that they can use to develop climate policies. IPCC assessments are a key input into the international negotiations to tackle climate change. IPCC reports are drafted and reviewed in several stages, thus guaranteeing objectivity and transparency.

1. The scientific understanding of current and future climate change, including access to observational data and implementation/application of modelling, analytics, and assessments, is critical to informing the IPCC assessment reporting cycle. These assessment reports in turn provide the science-based evidence informing:
   - broader UNFCCC processes and associated international negotiations, including as relates to 'loss and damage'
   - strategic policy development, mitigation and adaptation planning, climate-related disaster risk reduction and associated decision-making at global through to regional and national/sub-national level.

The IPCC is not without criticism however, with some studies pointing to the political approval of scientific outputs and close connection between science and government as reasons for or the Panel's inability to help bring forth an effective policy response against climate change. As it relates to the ILBI, some countries have proposed the new standalone body being negotiated, the Science Policy Panel on Chemicals and Waste, could play the role of the SPI in the new instrument.

Other considerations for establishment of SPIs

Code of Conduct and Conflicts of Interest

Countries may wish to take measures to protect the legitimacy, integrity, trust and credibility of subsidiary bodies established under the ILBI. It is essential that conflicts of interest do not compromise such bodies, and the nature of this work necessitates special attention to these issues.

Composition of the Bodies

Members of the committee may consider several factors when comprising the membership of the bodies to ensure fair geographic representation, a broad range of multi-disciplinary experts to ensure the widest representation of knowledge, skills and practices including traditional and indigenous knowledge, and promotion of geographical, gender and expertise balance when selecting co-chairs of the bodies.

Summary

Ensuring the most up to date science and evidence are available to policy makers operating within the ILBI through a well designed SPI could set the instrument up for success in the future, the exact nature of design is to be determined.

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