

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

Fourth session

Chisinau, 29 June - 1 July 2011

General Segment

Item 6 (b):

Promotion of the Convention and relevant developments and interlinkages:

Awareness-raising and communication

**Communication strategy
Statement by Belgium**

We live today in what we call the information society where a lot of knowledge and information are made available to the public, through particularly information and communications Technologies.

In this context, it makes sense to consider developing a communication strategy for the Aarhus Convention and its PRTR protocol as a mean to increase, at national and international level, their better knowledge and understanding.

It is why, when adopting its work programme for 2009-2011, the Meeting of the Parties -at its third session- decided that future activities under the Convention should address a communication strategy in the context of the awareness-raising and the promotion of the Convention.

The Working Group of the Parties, at its eleventh meeting, mandated an expert group to draft this strategy upon agreed terms of reference. A first draft of the strategy was submitted to the Working Group of the Parties at its thirteenth meeting last February 2011. This work was coordinated by a consultant. A commentary period was launched just after it and comments provided were taken into account in the new draft. This new draft was then sent to national focal points to the Convention and to the PRTR Protocol for comments. A third version of the draft was finally circulated to the Expert Group for further comments as well as to the Aarhus Convention and PRTR Bureaux.

Before going into the content of the draft communication strategy, it should be first noticed that it has to be considered as a “living” document that could be reviewed when required. Secondly, it is a pragmatic document taking into account budget constraints when proposing mean of communication to be favoured.

Objectives, key messages, target audiences and information channels and Communication products are the 4 main areas of work reflected in the communication strategy.

The overarching objective of the strategy is to provide specific information to specific audiences. This means to provide appropriate options for communication work to national focal points, environmental NGOS and other stakeholders.

It should be recalled that the objectives of the strategy are informed by the objectives of the Strategic plan 2009-2014 as adopted in Riga at the occasion of the third meeting of the Parties.

They can be grouped in two main areas referring to the rights and obligations under the Convention and the Protocol.

The strategy makes a distinction between the convention and the protocol in order to provide key messages tailored made to each instruments. For both of them, an overarching message complemented by a selection of general messages is provided. Amongst them, we can highlight for example :

- the specific nature of the convention linking human rights and the environment
- the facts that it grants public rights and imposes obligations on Parties
- or the fact that it is also a convention about Government accountability, transparency and responsiveness

It is important that Governments are being considered as the first priority target audience because there are in the frontline of the implementation of the Convention given their obligations. This means not only the environmental administration but also other sectors of activities like agriculture, industry or economy. Different level of government should also be concerned, from the local to the subnational.

NFP are information multipliers and key person in spreading information and communication activities. It is so important for them to be in touch with colleagues from other departments due to the wide scope of the convention.

The strategy proposes different kind of activities to be implemented by NFP in order to promote the information of policy-makers when acting at national or international level.

Environmental NGO's are also key actor according to the communication strategy given their important role in making the convention closer to the public and because they often play as interface between the government and the public. For many communication programmes, they take over what is done at governmental level.

The private sector is also an important target audience particularly in the context of the PRTR Protocol.

The strategy refers also to Aarhus centres and Regional environmental centers as inescapable informational multipliers.

Members of the public, and particularly amongst them the woman and the youth, are the cornerstone of the communication strategy since it is essential for an effective implementation of the convention and the protocol that they are aware of their rights under both instruments. The strategy here proposes a particular approach since it is necessary to use a simple language and to convey clear communication messages. The fact that not everyone has an access to the internet should also be taken into account and it is therefore important that appropriate means of communication could be developed, like –If needed- storytelling or direct dialogue.

The strategy also refers to donors, international forums and education providers.

Communication products have been prioritized in the strategy to ensure greatest efficiency, effectiveness and economy, by focusing on those which reach the widest audiences at the lowest economic and environmental costs.

The focus is first given on electronic tools and particularly the internet sites which should be regularly updated and be better known through appropriate communication to the public. Social networks are also referred as interesting modern information tool.

Amongst all possible communication products, priority should also be given to a general promotion pack designed in the form of the leaflet, written in a journalistic style and produced in the six United Nations languages. Translations in order languages should be promoted at national level.

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The MOP is expected to consider the Draft Communication strategy and to endorse it.

Thank you Chair.