

Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention
Thirteenth meeting
Palais des Nations, Geneva
9-11 February 2011
Item 5 (b) of the provisional agenda

Draft Communication Strategy for the Aarhus Convention and PRTR Protocol

At its eleventh meeting (Geneva, 8-10 July 2009), the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention agreed to establish an Expert Group on a Communication Strategy for the Convention and its Protocol under the authority of the Working Group of the Parties. It was envisaged that the Expert Group, inter alia, would prepare a draft communication strategy aimed to facilitate promotion of the principles of the Convention and its Protocol and the concrete activities undertaken under their work programmes.

Following the twelfth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (30 June-2 July 2010), the secretariat hired a consultant to prepare a draft outline of a Communication Strategy for further work by the Expert Group. The draft outline of the Communication Strategy prepared by the consultant was then sent to the members of the Expert Group for comments.

Following the receipt and integration of the experts' comments, the draft Strategy is hereby distributed to National Focal Points of the Convention and of the Protocol and stakeholders, and submitted to the thirteenth meeting of the Working Group (9-11 February 2011) for comments. The draft Strategy will then be revised and sent to the Expert Group for further comments, before being finalized by the secretariat and submitted to the fourth session of the Convention's Meeting of the Parties (29 June-1 July 2010) for its consideration.

1. Introduction

The UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Convention) was adopted in June 1998 in the Danish city of Aarhus.

The Convention links environmental rights and human rights, acknowledges that we owe an obligation to future generations, establishes that sustainable development can be achieved only through the involvement of all stakeholders, links government accountability and environmental protection, focuses on interactions between the public and public authorities in a democratic context.

The Convention is an important tool for the development of sustainable communities in member states. Therefore, the Parties to the convention decided to develop a communications strategy to better enable the work of the Convention to be known and implemented.

The Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers was adopted at an extraordinary meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention in May 2003 in Kiev, Ukraine. The Protocol is the first legally binding international instrument on pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs). Its objective is to enhance public access to information through the establishment of coherent, nationwide PRTRs. PRTRs are inventories of pollution from industrial sites and other sources. Although regulating information on pollution, rather than pollution directly, the Protocol is expected to exert a significant downward pressure on levels of pollution.

This is the first communications strategy for the Convention and the PRTR Protocol and like all communication strategies, it should be considered a 'living' document and reviewed, updated or modified when required.

It should be noted that the Convention and Protocol have a limited budget for dedicated communication work. This strategy therefore takes that into account and looks for channels of communication that require minimal resources.

A list of all recent communication activities and products is listed in Annex 2.
A list of possible communication products and activities is listed in Annex 3.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this strategy are informed by the objectives of the Strategic Plan 2009-2014 adopted by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention at its third session in Riga in June 2008.

Many of the objectives in the Strategic Plan relate to communications and can be grouped into two main areas; rights and obligations. This is a simplification of course but it is useful in determining the basic objectives of this strategy.

Firstly, an objective of this strategy will focus on communicating the rights afforded to people under the Convention and the Protocol. The main target audiences for this objective will be NGO's (environmental, youth and industry-related), Aarhus Centres and the public.

The second objective will be to communicate the obligations of the Convention and the Protocol to the main target audiences of Focal Points of Parties and non-Parties, other government authorities, intergovernmental organisations and stakeholders.

3. Target Audiences

Target audiences for communications strategies can be determined by dividing people into groups based on their age, gender or spending habits to name just a few. However, those traditional divisions are not useful for the Convention's communication strategy.

It is clear that children and the elderly are not key targets for our communication work, any more than a specific gender. The ability of the Convention's communication strategy to reach a wider audience is also limited by resources and the government-focused nature of UN Conventions. Therefore, the audiences are chosen based on their importance and also for the ease of access.

The main target audiences for the Convention and the Protocol are National Focal Points, authorities (responsible for environment, justice and foreign issues), environmental NGO's, Aarhus Centres, donors, international organisations, government, education institutions, media and the public. For the PRTR Protocol industry is one additional important target audience.

Audiences could be distinguished based on the status of the Convention and the Protocol in their country (ratification or accession by the country, or lack thereof).

National Focal Points

National Focal Points are a main channel of communications in countries (both in Parties and non-Parties to the Convention and to the Protocol).

They are information multipliers and, via their promotional and communication activities, can reach and motivate important target groups and potential supporters, e.g. policymakers, national counterparts, donors, the media, other stakeholders and the general public, to get them interested and involved in implementation of the Convention and the Protocol.

National Focal Points will already have a good idea of the work of the Convention. Therefore, the communication strategy should focus on providing relevant, up-to-date information about the Convention and its activities for use by the Focal Points to improve and expand their communications regarding the Convention. For this to occur, an in-depth survey of national focal points is required to determine their needs.

Government Authorities

Government authorities (responsible for environment, water, agriculture, transport, industry, health, justice, education and foreign issues) are key to the successful implementation of the Convention and the Protocol. Access to senior officials and the Ministers within the authorities can be difficult and all communication to them will have to be via a senior UNECE Director. To make it easier for communication with Ministers and senior officials, a simple information pack about the Convention and Protocol and their obligations can be created.

These can be sent, through the appropriate ECE director, to all the environment, water, agriculture, transport, industry, health, justice, education and foreign ministers and senior officials in member states or potential member states. To make the information more likely to be seen, producing the materials in languages other than the official UN languages should be considered.

NGO's (environmental, youth and industry-related organisations)

Environmental NGO's were instrumental in the creation of the Convention and remain important supporters of the Convention and Protocol and sources of information (for the Aarhus Clearinghouse for example). Keeping NGO's informed of the work of the Convention and Protocol is relatively easy, given that many of the NGO's regularly contribute to the Aarhus Clearinghouse.

Youth NGO's are more and more involved in UN negotiation processes. They can be a very useful stakeholder regarding communication on the Aarhus Convention and they have a good and credible reputation with young people.

For the PRTR Protocol it is also important to keep industry-related organisations informed of current and planned activities and relevant developments.

Aarhus Centres

The Aarhus Centres also act as informational multipliers and can easily reach a wide audience within governments and civil society organisations.

Donors

Fundraising allows the Convention to extend its work and is important for the continued development and expansion of the Convention. It is strongly preferable that any fundraising efforts on the part of the Convention be part of a coordinated ECE Environment Division fundraising strategy.

Firstly, it is easier and more efficient to keep an existing donor than to create a new donor relationship. Even past donors are easier to raise funds from than a new relationship. Therefore it is very important to communicate effectively with your donors.

Key issues to keep in mind are staying positive, frequent updates and personal relationships. To build confidence in the Convention's ability to manage the projects and to produce the desired outcomes requires communicating positive messages about the work of the Convention and also the role of the donor in the work.

Staying positive and emphasising the role of the donor in the Convention's work will not only make the donor happy about funding the work or project, but will make it easier to solicit additional funds for further work in the future.

Keeping the donor informed about the progress of the work they are funding is also very important. Communicating with the donors doesn't have to be daily or too

detailed or formal. A regular email detailing the latest work inspires confidence in the ability of the Convention to complete the project. Donors, whether they are countries or foundations, will often have to provide regular updates on the status of projects they are funding to satisfy the donors own stakeholders. Ensuring that the information is readily available makes it more likely to receive funding for future projects.

Successful fundraising is all about personal relationships. Each current or potential donor should have the contact details of one person in the Convention. This person will communicate regularly with the current or potential donor about the work of the Convention.

International Organisations

International organisations offer communication opportunities due to the occasional overlap of activities and projects. Other international organisations are unlikely to directly promote the work of the Convention the way National Focal Points or Aarhus Centres will. It should be noted, however, that IGOs play a strong role in the development of PRTRs.

There are opportunities for National Focal Points, the secretariat and stakeholders to promote the work of the Convention and the Protocol alongside other organisations during formal sessions of the major international events, as a priority.

Side events could also be used to promote the Convention and the Protocol and their activities, but any side event or display should be consistent with the overall theme of the main conference or event and be cost effective. Getting side events on the official schedule often requires personal contacts within the host organisation, as there is usually strong competition from other organisations and NGO's for an official side event. Operating stalls or creating displays at major events is usually easier but will often carry a fee, based on the size of the stall or display, and requires people to attend to the stall or display.

Education Providers

University departments for law, environmental studies, ICT and journalism can be a great way to get information regarding the Convention to legal practitioners and other relevant professionals. With respect to the PRTR Protocol, university departments for technical studies relevant to PRTRs could be used as a communication channel, e.g. environmental science, chemistry, engineering and ICT. In recent decades, there has been an increase in international legal instruments from UN Conventions and Protocols to the expansion of the EU. The Convention is uniquely placed in being an international legal agreement that can be utilised by law professionals in local and national legal systems.

Getting access to law students doesn't need to be difficult. Many university lecturers are pressed for time and would welcome information about the Convention which would enable the Convention to be used in University courses.

To improve the chances of the Convention being included in the university materials, Convention staff can arrange for a presentation to students.

The Public

Communication with the public is mostly achieved via the Aarhus website, Aarhus Centres and occasionally through radio interviews and newspaper articles. Particular attention should be paid to e-communication, bearing in mind the increasingly important role that social networks and other electronic information tools play today, especially among young people.

When communicating with the public, it is important to keep the content relatively simple. This can be done by using direct and everyday language, focusing on easily digestible parts of the bigger picture, and making clear distinctions between the various elements covered by the Convention and Protocol. It is best to avoid speaking in ‘jargon’, because that will only be understandable for relatively few people.

4. Key Messages

The key messages can be split into the overarching message, to be used in general communication, and the specific messages that will be used to communicate individual areas of the Convention and the Protocol.

The overarching message can be used on everything from report covers to email signatures, whilst the specific messages are limited to particular audiences. The specific messages for the Convention don’t need to explain the work of the Convention in its entirety, just the key aspects of the work for the particular audience. It will also be necessary to pay attention to messages dealing with the Protocol, specifically simple key messages that make it easier to communicate about such a highly technical legal instrument.

The overarching message, also called a logo or motto should convey the essence of the Convention and its work. This can be the most difficult to create as it can be difficult to encapsulate the scope and importance of the Convention with a single sentence.

It is important when talking about the environment to ensure that people are included in the text of the materials and preferably put first. Placing the importance on the environment before people can be considered insensitive. A good example of this is the slogan for the Industrial Accidents Convention, which, although unofficial, illustrates the point well; ‘Safer communities and a cleaner, healthier environment’.

NOTE: There needs to be a discussion about the use of the word ‘democracy’ in the messages. A quick check of the Convention text showed only one reference to the word democracy in the preamble prior to article 1.

A list of key messages by target audience will go here. This needs to be consistent with the overarching message of the Convention.

5. Communication Products

This section joins the target audiences with the key messages and finds the most appropriate communication products.

Websites (Aarhus Convention website, Aarhus Clearinghouse and PRTR.net global portal) for the public, donors, National Focal Points, Government Authorities and Ministers, NGO's and International Organisations.

The main channels for public communication are the Aarhus Convention website, the Aarhus Clearinghouse and the Aarhus Centres. The websites should be regularly updated to keep them fresh and relevant, the information architecture (menu structure) of the websites also needs to be relatively simple and attractive, and the websites should be as small as possible to make it easier to find information.

The ECE website is currently being migrated to a new content management system that will see some changes to the information architecture of the Aarhus website. However, considering that the Aarhus website is the largest of the ECE environment websites, information about the Convention and its activities can be hard to find for the general public. The Convention should consider simplifying the information architecture for the website to enhance the ability of the public to find relevant information.

The Convention's website needs to be promoted in order to be more known, in particular by the public. Other environmental conventions could for example promote it on their own website.

In addition, the use of other, more modern electronic information tools to communicate with the different target audiences could be explored, if they are easy and cost-effective.

Welcome Pack for National Focal Points, Government Authorities and Ministers and possibly NGO's.

To ensure National Focal Points and others have easy access to key information about the Convention and the Protocol, a 'welcome pack' should be produced. It would contain the text of the Convention and the Protocol, a brief summary of the work of the Convention and Protocol to date, the contact details of the Secretariat, and some of the recent press releases. It could also contain some material and guidance on how to promote the Convention and the Protocol in their own countries.

Information Pack for legal educators and students

This is similar in some ways to the Welcome Packs discussed above. However, these information packs are specifically designed for university law courses and will contain the text of the Convention, a brief summation of the work of the Convention to date, and recent examples of the use of the Convention in legal proceedings (from the clearinghouse) and/or national laws and implementation.

Information Pack for the Media

More and more media (printed press, radio, TV, Internet) deal with environmental issues. In addition to an information pack, regular press releases could be sent to relevant journalists, so that they will be more likely to mention the Convention in articles on environmental issues.

Promotion Pack for all target groups

Should be designed as an attractive leaflet, written in a journalistic style and produced in six UN languages. It should contain the key information about the Convention and its Protocol and about the key achievements of the work to date. [Good practice examples?]

Publications for all target groups

The secretariat has already published a number of publications (printed and/or electronic) dealing with the Convention and the Protocol, and more such publications could be developed as appropriate.

Industry Publications for legal professionals

Industry publications are specialised forms of media that are strongly targeted to a particular group of people, in this case legal professionals, rather than the general public. They are often subscription magazines or emailed newsletters. Examples for the Convention could be the European Journal of International Law or the European Law Journal.

Industry publications can offer great opportunities for spreading information about the work of the Convention. The content needs to be focussed to the particular interest of the publication.

Presentation on the website

This can be uploaded on the Convention's website most likely in PowerPoint and be used by National Focal Points and stakeholders.

Event Box for participants at relevant events

An event box would contain all the information brochures, publications, posters and other materials that will regularly be used by Convention secretariat staff at event stalls and displays at large international events. The event box simply keeps all the information in one place to save time and effort in preparing for an event. It can also be useful to check the contents of the box after events to see which information was distributed the most. This can help inform the Convention of what materials people are finding the most useful and help guide the creation of additional materials.

Annex 1. Draft Survey for National Focal Points and Aarhus Centres

Overall, how satisfied are you with communications about the Convention?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

Which best describes your impression of communications about the Convention?

- Keeps me fully informed
- Keeps me fairly well informed
- Keeps me adequately informed
- Gives me only a limited amount of information
- Doesn't tell me much about what's going on

How well do you feel you know the Convention?

- I know the Convention very well.
- I know a fair amount about the Convention.
- I know just a little about the Convention.
- I know almost nothing about the Convention.
- Knowing about the Convention is not important to me

What is the best thing about communications from the Convention?

For which information items do you believe it is very important that you receive communications about?

- Task Forces (list)
- Working Groups (list)
- Expert Groups (list)
- Bureau
- MoP
- Aarhus Centres
- General News

What other topics do you feel are important for you to know more about and would like the Convention to include in future communications?

From which of the following sources do you now receive most of your information about what is going on in the Convention? Rank your top two information sources only.

- The Secretariat
 - Person
 - Group Emails
- The Bureau
- The MoP
- Other Convention Meetings

- Website
- Publications
- Other (please specify)

From which of the following sources would you prefer to receive most of your information about what is going on in the Convention?

- The Secretariat
 - Person
 - Group Emails
- The Bureau
- The MoP
- Other Convention Meetings
- Website
- Publications
- Other (please specify)

How often do you want to receive communication materials from the Convention?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Half yearly
- Yearly
- Other (please specify)

How do you want to receive information about the activities of the Convention?

- Personal communication from a member of the Secretariat
- E-newsletter
- Website
- Publications
- Other (please specify)

Annex 2: Current Communication Products and Activities (to be completed by the experts, focal points and the secretariat and updated regularly)

Communications Product and Activity	Date of Product (created) and Activity	Target Audience	Objective	Remarks
Aarhus Convention website	Ongoing	The public, donors, National Focal Points, Government authorities and Ministers, NGO's and international organisations	Channel for public communication, dissemination and sharing of information	
Aarhus Clearinghouse website	Ongoing	The public, donors, National Focal Points, Government authorities and Ministers, NGO's and international organisations	Channel for public communication, dissemination and sharing of information	
PRTR.net website	Ongoing	The public, donors, National Focal Points, Government authorities and Ministers, NGO's and international organisations	Channel for public communication, dissemination and sharing of information	
Aarhus Implementation Guide (print/online publication)	2000; updated version expected June 2011	National Focal Points, Government authorities and Ministers, NGO's	Inform target audiences about effective implementation	
PRTR Implementation Guide (print/online publication)	2008	National Focal Points, Government authorities and Ministers, NGO's	Inform target audiences about effective implementation	
Guidance on the Aarhus Compliance Mechanism (online publication)	2010	The public, donors, National Focal Points, Government authorities and Ministers, NGO's	Inform target audiences about effective use of the Convention's compliance mechanism	
Your Right to a Healthy Environment (print/online publication)	2006	The public, donors, National Focal Points, Government authorities and Ministers, NGO's and international organisations	Simplified guide on the Convention, providing information in everyday language for all audiences	
Your Right to a Healthy Community (print/online publication)	2011	The public, donors, National Focal Points, Government authorities and Ministers, NGO's and international organisations	Simplified guide on the PRTR Protocol, providing information in everyday language for all audiences	

Annex 3: Key Future Communication Products and Activities (to be completed by the experts, focal points and the secretariat and updated regularly)

Communications Product and Activity	Date of Product (created) and Activity	Target Audience	Objective	Remarks
Welcome pack		National Focal Points, Government Authorities and Ministers and possibly NGO's	Provide key information about the Convention and the Protocol	
Information pack		Legal educators and students, Media	Provide specialized information for specific target groups	
Promotion pack		All target groups	Provide key information about the Convention and the Protocol	
Publications		All target groups	Inform target audiences about the Convention and the Protocol	
Industry publications		Legal professionals	Provide specialized information for specific target groups	
Presentation on website		National Focal Points and stakeholders	Provide key information about the Convention and the Protocol	
Event box		Participants at relevant events	Inform target audiences about the Convention and the Protocol	