

Workshop Meeting Minutes

“Communications Strategies for Renewable Energy: Experiences, perspectives and principles” (RE-COMMUNICATE)

Details

9:00 – 17:00

Thursday November 29

Fair Trade Room, Mundo-B, Rue d'Edimbourg 26, 1050 Brussels, www.mundo-b.org

Participants:

Attendee	Organization
Aaron Leopold	International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)
Anamaria Olaru	European Biomass Association (AEBIOM)
Benjamin Dannemann	German Renewable Energy Agency (Agentur für Erneuerbare Energien)
Christiane Egger	O.Ö. Energiesparverband
Craig Winneker	European Photovoltaic Industry Association (EPIA)
Damon Vis Dunbar	IISD
Eleanor Smith	European Renewable Energy Council (EREC)
Henriette Schweizerhof	Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU)
Henrik Karlstrøm	Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Jacqueline Cottrell	Forum Ökologisch-Soziale Marktwirtschaft (FÖS)
Jonathan Collings	Collings and Monney
Julian Scola	European Wind Energy Association (EWEA)
Lutz Weischer	World Resources Institute (WRI)
Kjersti Gjervan	Norway (ENOVA)
Kristian Petrick	IEA-RETD
Louise Hutchins	Greenpeace
Richard Bridle	IISD
Robert Flynn	European Renewable Energy Council (EREC)

Additional invitees:

Camilla Chalmers	Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership (REEEP)
Christine Lins	REN21
Colleen Brady	Natural Resources Canada
David de Jager	Ecofys / IEA RETD
Ewan Bennie	DECC
Faye Scott	Green Alliance

Jan Geiss	European Forum for Renewable Energy Sources (EUFORES)
Kristina Steenbock	Smart Energy for Europe Platform (SEFEP)
Neil MacDonald	International Renewable Energy Agency - IRENA
Pauline Morin	French Ministry of the Environment, Sustainable Development and Energy
Sophie Lenoir	EPIA
Taichi Ito	Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry
Tom Halpin	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
Ture Falbe-Hansen	Danish Energy Agency, Ministry of Climate, Energy and Building

The workshop agenda and presentations are publicly available under <http://iea-retd.org/archives/events/re-communicate-workshop>

Background

The increased deployment of renewable energy technologies has created debate around their impacts, costs and effectiveness. While debate around energy policies is to be welcomed, much of the public discourse is characterised by misunderstandings, outdated information and misinformation. How can governments use communications to provide authoritative information and change perceptions?

In November 2011 the IEA-RETD organized a workshop in Berlin that discussed the topics of ‘sending clear messages,’ and ‘getting the RE cost perception right.’ A subsequent meeting in March 2012 discussed “How to market Renewable Energies.” Following these workshops, the IEA-RETD commissioned the RE-COMMUNICATE project. As part of RE-COMMUNICATE, this workshop explored the current experience in IEA-RETD member countries of developing effective communication strategies for renewable energy and to identify and address barriers to increasing effectiveness in the future. See also <http://iea-retd.org/archives/ongoing/re-communicate>

The project is being carried out by a consortium consisting of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), Green Budget Germany / Forum Ökologisch-Soziale Marktwirtschaft (FÖS), and the global renewable energy communications agency Collings & Monney.

Introduction

The introductory remarks from Aaron Leopold (moderator), Jacqueline Cottrell and Kristian Petrick placed renewable energy and the event in the context of the challenges facing renewable energy, including:

- The structure and current activities of IEA-RETD;
- The need for renewable energy to be presented as a positive vision for energy. Targets for 100% renewable energy are ambitious but logical goal;
- The concept of energy autonomy as described by Hermann Scheer;
- Discrepancies between broad public support for renewable energy generally and negative sentiments towards specific projects due to the proximity of their development;
- Suggestions that the bulk of the population do feel strongly or place a high priority on renewable energy – raising the profile and convincing influential people who are currently neutral is key to building public support; and
- Debate in the media tends to be strongly polarised;

It was noted that factual information can help to create a realistic and positive picture. Communication should follow good practice examples to express ideas in ways that have the greatest impact.

Principles of communication

Jonathan Collings (Collings & Monney) presented a summary of communication principles and examples. Highlighting a number of guidelines for building successful campaigns, including:

- Campaigns start with research and understanding of the subject area, leaving aside perceived wisdoms and assumptions;
- Look for segments and subgroups. Identify coherent groups with similar motivations and concerns and tailor activities to groups;
- Be clear what you are trying to achieve. Campaigns can have objectives to raise awareness, change attitudes or prompt action;
- There is strength through union. Finding others who share your objectives allows sharing of resources to increase impact;
- Effective campaigns take time to become established and may not be effective in the short term.
- Addressing campaigns to neutral or undecided parties will be more effective than targeting those who already hold strong opinions in support or opposition to an issue;
- Campaigns should seek to attract people with fascinating, engaging, or creative materials that induce positive emotional responses. Feelings of guilt do not attract people to engage with your ideas;
- Engage with the press. Build personal relationships, based on trust, with journalists; and
- Ensure that communication channels match audience segments and messages.

Examples from municipal and regional government

The role of local and regional government in creating a supportive environment for renewable energy and energy efficiency was highlighted by Kjersti Gjervan (ENOVA), Benjamin Dannemann (Renewable Energy Agency, Germany), and Christiane Egger (O.Ö. Energiesparverband). The use of local plans to tackle climate change and energy issues provides a mechanism for local authorities to assess and remove barriers to renewable energy development. They highlighted, *inter alia*, that:

- Lack of experience and knowledge can be both a barrier to action and an opportunity. Newly elected and inexperienced local politicians were found to be receptive audiences;
- Peer learning and comparison between regions proved a powerful tool. Web-based platforms have provided a forum to compare progress and allow sharing of examples between municipalities. High-performing areas publicised their progress, plans and materials, which could be accessed by those lagging behind. The use of `traffic light` indicators provided comparisons at a glance;
- Healthy competition and recognition of achievement provided opportunities to demonstrate local success. Periodic awards for good performance were effective positive tools, and publicly highlighting of inaction in a good-natured way (“Why is municipality X so much more advanced than municipality Y?”) was used as a more negative, but also successful, tool;
- National guidance services have allowed resource sharing and the creation of guides and tools to support the concerns and needs of local authorities. Local authorities were able to

access examples from other areas close by or with similar demographics and similar questions about the way forward;

- Messages conveying the value of renewables to the community were found to be particularly resonant. Calculations of impacts on the local economy, including e.g. an online wealth creation calculator, were used to highlight tangible benefits of local action;
- Written information in the form of web-based resources and guidebooks helped to address information barriers and reduce the burden on local authority staff. Seminars, study tours and online comparisons helped to provide peer learning and address questions;
- The importance of a consistent mix of carrots (financial incentives), sticks (regulatory measures) and tambourines (information & training) in the creation of a supportive climate for renewable energy were highlighted;
- It was noted that face to face advice and support to consumers and businesses to present renewable energy investment options and promote informed decision making provide a valuable approach to directly present information and address concerns. Such approaches deliberately target investments being planned or close to implementation to focus resources on investment decisions that will be made in the short term; and
- It was also highlighted that business networks are a great tool to promote positive impacts of the green economy, such as in upper Austria, where a cluster of 160 companies with a collective turnover of 1.9 billion Euro and 8,880 employees demonstrate the economic viability and positive impacts of greening economies. Those numbers need to be constantly repeated. Positive messages should be regularly “re-packaged” to address various target groups in different ways.
- Particularly negative messages of journalists should be shrugged off and potentially be countered some days later with a better message. Journalists may also be contacted directly to understand their position.

Public perceptions

Dr Henrik Karlstrøm, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, presented research on public perceptions of renewable energy in Norway, which fed into a discussion on public perceptions more generally. It was noted that in many contexts, the public generally has positive perceptions of renewable energy. However, when confronted with proposals for new generating capacity locally, sentiments may be negative. The label of NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) is often used to describe those objecting to local developments, although this was called into question (see below). Karlstrøm noted that the factors influencing how people respond to renewable energy may be more complicated:

- A number of possible components of opposition were discussed including:
 - physical proximity makes negative consequences more clear
 - knowledge deficits
 - political affiliations
 - lack of participation, whereas increased participation seems to reduce objections

- Acceptance and approval of existing hydropower in Norway is very high, perhaps due to the particular history of that technology in Norway, and in particular its association with economic boom-times and that much of it was installed generations ago – in the case of Norway framing RE as part of industrial development can help to explain better “what is in for me”;
- Many concerns are legitimate. There are real negative effects from development in some cases, including land use change and construction of new infrastructure to support the development. Negative impacts must be confronted and addressed to gain acceptance from communities;
- Context is very important. In Norway, there is widespread support for offshore wind, but considerable opposition in areas in which the fishing industry is active and feels that wind energy may bring negative consequences to their livelihoods;
- The term NIMBY was shown to be very problematic. It over-simplifies individuals’ responses to renewable energy by assuming general support for renewables but local opposition– a presumably irrational and hypocritical position which doesn’t take into account potential legitimate concerns. Also the word “backyard” is not clearly defined. It was noted that the term NIMBYism reflects a static approach, whereas perceptions of renewable energy tend to be dynamic and change over time. Labelling people in this way prevents genuine concerns being addressed and may be counter-productive; and
- Inclusion and empowerment is important. Building trust in environmental planning and permitting processes (e.g. Environmental Impact Assessment) can help to address concerns. For example, where pro-conservation organisations support a project, this can help to improve perceptions of the conservation impacts of e.g. wind farms.
- Creating the sense of urgency is an empty threat as it makes people feel guilty without changing behaviour (it is apparently easier to live with guilt which can backfire on real action).

Showing support for renewable energy through “action days”

Julian Scola of the European Wind Energy Association presented Global Wind Day. The presentation and subsequent discussion covered the benefits of “action days”:

- Global Wind Day – 15 June – serves as an annual focal point for events around wind energy. Overall branding and concept provides greater impact than individual events and reduces some costs;
- Over 50 partners in 40 countries worldwide including companies, national associations, NGOs, others;
- The scope of events is very broad to allow the partners who organize the events the necessary flexibility to meet local needs.
- Elements: events (partners design it, e.g. exhibitions, concerts, open days at wind farms, workshops), branding (logo, website, merchandise, online presence), mass emailing, celebrity, photo competition; and

- Action day type campaigns provide a catalyst for groups to organise their own activities whilst benefiting from a coherent brand and shared resources.
- It was discussed if RE events like Global Wind Day, Solar Week (organized by EPIA) and the Sustainable Energy Week (organized by the EU) should be take place more or less in parallel to maximize media and public attention. No final conclusion was drawn

The role of digital and social media

Jonathan Collings of Collings & Monney, explained that digital and social media has a tremendous potential but suffers from a number of misconceptions. Following the rise of social media approximately one third of all news publication comes straight from blogs (i.e. articles published on websites, and not necessarily authored by traditional journalists), and ideas can travel round the world instantly. It was noted that social media is a two-way communication medium where users should be able to contribute, and that it can be a low cost way to reach out to the public. Fierce competition for attention drives the need for the most, engaging, useful or entertaining content to find an audience. Additional points on social media include that:

- A content management strategy will ensure content is always current and regularly updated. Content managers should moderate conversations to ensure the best content is displayed most prominently;
- The same content should be recycled to form the basis of different outputs (e.g. several Twitter posts can be combined into one blog entry, a video on YouTube can be made based on the blog, and then also posted on Twitter). Content needs to be constantly updated;
- People are far more likely to engage with entertaining content, that presents information in an amusing and innovative manner; and
- Advertising can help to build a following and establish a brand and momentum, especially in early days of a campaign. Despite the low cost of content distribution, it is generally professionally made content that receives attention.

Lessons from behavioural economics

Jacqueline Cottrell (FÖS) presented on behavioural economics, a discipline that provides insights into how humans approach choices in sometimes surprising and irrational ways. By building communication tools and campaigns that reflect our understanding of in-built responses and biases, information can be more effectively communicated. Behavioural economics offers a number of insights that can be particularly useful in developing campaigns for renewable energy, namely:

- People are naturally reluctant to embrace change if associated with risks (status quo bias and omission bias);
- Individuals attach a high value to objects they already own (endowment effect);
- People are more motivated to avoid a loss than to acquire a similar gain (loss aversion);
- Individuals underrate the intensity of future desires, meaning that they make far-sighted decisions if both costs and benefits are in the future, but short-sighted decisions if either costs or benefits occur today (hyperbolic discounting);

- Pro-social behaviour and a sense of fairness are strongest if free riding can be minimised; and
- Small amounts of monetary compensation for a particular action can be counterproductive, as this reduces the “warm glow” effect attained from activities such as volunteering.

Renewable energy often presents an example in which higher costs, through subsidies or higher electricity prices, are required today to improve energy security, lower costs or avoid the serious impacts of climate change in the future. Framing renewable energy decisions in this way potentially undermines support for the reasons listed above. Alternatively, campaigns frame decisions using the findings above, e.g. by highlighting how action today to manage a successful transition to sustainable energy will maintain the benefit of a supply of energy and prevent the loss of employment, social and economic benefits, will be more successful. Alternatively, policies and communication campaigns can set out to create a sense of psychological and economic ownership of renewable energy, taking advantage of the endowment effect and loss aversion.

The discussion covered the need to communicate the true costs of energy, including the depiction of electricity costs as an iceberg with the retail price being represented as above the water line and hidden costs being shown as below, also in comparison to alternative choices, including how the ‘do nothing’ option is actually an expensive choice.

Global perceptions of the German *Energiewende* (energy transition) and implications for communicating to international audiences

Lutz Weischer of the World Resources Institute presented recent work on how German energy policy is perceived in other national contexts, and the implications of this work for communicating internationally. While Germany is currently seen as a leader on renewable energy policy, respondents:

- Displayed limited knowledge about Germany’s targets and performance;
- Were broadly supportive of the transition but questioned the feasibility; and
- Saw that the experience was relevant for other countries but that goals and interests for pursuing renewables differed across countries (Europe: climate, sustainability; China: independence, technology; US: job creation, economy).

The work highlighted the need for tailored messages to targeted audiences. For example, German speakers and materials needed more than a mere language translation to be used effectively internationally, and communication of many concepts improved if materials were tailored to meet local needs. Study tours to enable foreign audiences and experts to experience the reality of the transition, were considered a powerful tool with advantages over German experts talking in another country.

Fossil fuel subsidy reform: from research to influence – the case of Indonesia

Damon Vis Dunbar (IISD) presented on a related field, fossil fuel subsidy reform. Fossil fuel subsidies act as a barrier to renewable energy as they artificially reduce costs of competing technologies. In Indonesia, government spending on fossil fuel subsidies amounts to more than spending on health, education and defence combined. However, reform is difficult due to entrenched interests and popular opposition to rising fuel prices. The key lessons learned from IISD's experience in Indonesia, many of which could be applied to the communication renewable of energy policies, were:

- Aim to understand the politics of reform and improve the quality of public debate;
- Although many may agree that subsidies are expensive and in need of reform, widespread suspicion existed that savings would be used wisely;
- Communicating the facts and the debates through a series of citizen's guides proved to be an effective way to create a more open debate and build consensus for reform;
- The need for a long term approach, as it takes time to build networks and trust; and
- While concrete impact assessment can be difficult, they can be gauged via on-going dialogue with influential networks and groups in addition to press coverage monitoring.

The impact of fossil fuel subsidies on the competitiveness of renewable energy was noted in discussion, as was the need to create a level playing field for energy sources so that renewables are not unfairly disadvantaged. It was highlighted that transparency in all forms of energy subsidies is essential to present the true costs of renewables and alternatives and allow for a fair debate.

Proposal for information gathering, next steps and structure of outputs

The structure of the project tasks and the progress to date was described. The project objective "to contribute to the creation of a realistic, positive, constructive image and environment for renewable energy among the key stakeholders and the general public, based on factual information" and the approach by which this will be achieved, including:

- Documenting examples of RE communications through case studies;
- Summarising experience and best practice; and
- Making recommendations on the role of IEA-RETD in supporting effective communications.

Following the successful completion of the workshop, a series of case studies will be produced from the presentations given by representatives of governments, NGOs and trade associations, supplemented by additional material gathered through interviews and desk-based research. To date the consortium has already held interviews with DECC (the Department of Energy and Climate Change in the UK), SEAI (the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland), the government of Denmark and Viden Om Vind (a communications campaign organized by two Danish wind associations). Further interviews are planned for the coming month.

The consortium will look for opportunities to disseminate the finding of the project through participation in third party events and a second workshop event in February 2013.

Concluding remarks

Kristian Petrick introduced the Action Star, six policy actions for renewable energy deployment that include the need for effective communication, which can be found at: <http://iea-retd.org/archives/publications/action-star-launched-six-policy-ingredients-for-accelerated-deployment-of-renewable-energy>.

Jacqueline Cottrell closed the meeting with a summary of the discussions, findings and questions from the day, which included:

- Reframing messages to have the greatest impact, thinking about perceptions and how they work. For example, how many jobs would be lost by a failure to support renewables?;
- Transparency is key to an informed debate;
- Renewable energy is visible in the media. This provides opportunities for engagement;
- There are two sides to every coin – for every negative argument, there is a more positive side;
- Approach of “carrots, sticks and tambourines”: provision of information and making noise;
- Seeking to understand people’s motivation and concerns through in-depth research. What is behind people’s opposition to renewables in a particular context and how does this change over time;
- Quality, entertaining content needs to be created to promote renewables;
- Broadening the debate: make prices and costs of energy transparent, learn lessons from subsidy reform; look to the future and the energy transition as a whole;
- What are the barriers to the successful communication of renewable energies (aside from the ones addressed today) and how can we best overcome them?
- Analysis of communications campaigns through the behavioural economics lens may be a way forward;
- How can we tackle information and knowledge deficits and share information most efficiently to enhance peer learning and benefit from one another’s experiences? Could an online platform / network on communications be helpful? and

There seems to be a need for more materials and guidance on RE communication, a handbook of lessons learned and good (and bad) practice may be helpful.

Next steps

The Implementing Body (the consortium) will conduct further interviews, document the findings, propose policy recommendations and deliver a draft report to the Project Steering Group by beginning of February 2013.

The 2nd workshop is planned to take place on **Tuesday, 12 February 2013 in Brussels**. The findings and recommendations will be presented and discussed.

Please contact Richard Bridle (rbridle@iisd.org) if you are interested to participate.

For further information please contact:

IEA-RETD

RETD stands for “Renewable Energy Technology Deployment”. IEA-RETD is a policy-focused, technology cross-cutting platform that brings together the experience and best practices of some of the world’s leading countries in renewable energy with the expertise of renowned consulting firms and academia.

The mission of IEA-RETD is to accelerate the large-scale deployment of renewable energies. It is currently comprised of nine countries: Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom. Hans Jørgen Koch, Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Climate and Energy, Danish Energy Agency, serves as Chair of the RETD.

The IEA-RETD Implementing Agreement is one of a number of Implementing Agreements on renewable energy under the framework of the International Energy Agency (IEA). The creation of the IEA-RETD Implementing Agreement was announced at the International Renewable Energy Conference in Bonn, 2004. For further information please visit: www.iea-retd.org

Contact: Kristian Petrick, acting for the Operating Agent of the IEA-RETD

(Kristian.petrick@allgreenenergies.org)

The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

IISD is a non-profit, non-partisan research institute with over 20 years of experience. It provides strong research capacity, with its Geneva office having recently led a number of projects focused on renewable energy policy, including cooperation with the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA); and its Global Subsidies Initiative (GSI) possessing a breadth of international experience with communications activities surrounding subsidy reform. IISD is also an experienced facilitator of policy dialogues. It is also well networked within the renewable energy community through its Reporting Services unit, which publishes the Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB), a summary of key international negotiations, including many major global events of relevance to renewable energy. For further information see: www.iisd.org

Richard Bridle (rbridle@iisd.org)

Aaron Leopold (aaron@iisd.org)

Forum Ökologisch-Soziale Marktwirtschaft (FÖS)

FÖS is dedicated to researching and promoting all elements of market-oriented eco-fiscal policy, with a prime concern since its inception having been how to improve communication and public awareness in this area of public policy. In addition to the promotion of renewable energies, its work has focused on environmental taxation, emission trading, removal of environmentally harmful subsidies and green growth. FÖS also has a great deal of experience in bringing together political decision-makers, policy-makers, industry representatives, international organisations and NGOs. For further information see: www.green-budget.eu / www.foes.de

Jacqueline Cottrell (Jacqueline.Cottrell@green-budget.eu)

Collings and Monney

Collings&Monney is a specialist renewable energy communications agency. It is an experienced manager of communications activities within renewable energy companies, media and trade associations. It will provide support to the project through high-level guidance on how communications are approached from a professional marketing perspective, and its solid understanding of the specific communications challenges and opportunities in the renewable energy sector. For further information see: www.collings-monney.com

Jonathan Collings (Jonathan@collings-monney.com)