

Workshop Meeting Minutes

IEA-RETD Country Experiences with Renewable Energy Communications Barriers, best practice, knowledge gaps and ways forward (RE-COMMUNICATE)

Details

10:00 – 16:00

Tuesday February 12th

Meeting Room: Trône 1+2 Venue: Eurocities, Square de Meeûs 1, B-1000 Brussels

http://www.eurocities.eu/Eurocities/about_us/contact_us

Participants:

Attendee	Organization
Aaron Leopold	International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)
Alice Stollmeyer	Stollmeyer Consultancy
Alison Abrahams	European Environmental Bureau
Anamaria Olaru	European Biomass Association (AEBIOM)
Andrea Monge Rodriguez	Havas Media
Angelika Pullen	Windmade
Aylin Dirioz	Turkish Industry and Business Association
Bénédicte de Badereau	France Nature Environnement
Charlotte JuhlKoch	Koch Architekten 4greenarchitecture
Christopher Beaton	IISD
Claire Willers	The Gold Standard Foundation
Claudia Delmirani	Gestore dei Servizi Energetici - GSE S.p.A Divisione Operativa Unità
Constanze Adolf	Green Budget Europe
Craig Winneker	European Photovoltaic Industry Association (EPIA)
Elodie Cantaloube	Birdlife
Eleanor Smith	EREC
Erika Cannata	Gestore dei Servizi Energetici - GSE S.p.A Divisione Operativa Unità
Francesca Gater	Friends of the Earth (FoE) Europe
Florian Peter Iwinjak	United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO)
Greg Tracz	International Hydropower Association
Henrik Karlstrøm	Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Jacqueline Cottrell	Forum Ökologisch-Soziale Marktwirtschaft - FÖS
Joanna Ciesielska	Bellona Europa
Jonathan Silver	Partners for Euro-African Green Energy (PANGEA)
Jonathan Collings	Collings and Monney
Joseph Smitz	University of Liege

Attendee	Organization
Judit Szegő	Clean Air Action Group
Kristian Petrick	IEA-RETD
Lucy Chen	Upsolar France
Nathan Brettscheider	PRACISIS
Matthew Keys	Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe
Petra Sieber	Green Budget Europe
Rob Flynn	European Renewable Energy Council (EREC)
Sirin Engen	Bellona Europa aisbl
Sören Bauer	strategic communication & knowledge networking
Susann Scherbarth	FoE Europe
Vanessa Bulkacz	CAN Europe
Viviana Siclari	European Investment Bank

The workshop agenda and presentations are publicly available under <http://iea-retd.org/archives/events/re-communicate-workshop-2-2>

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. The first workshop of RE-COMMUNICATE, held on the 29th November 2012, explored the experiences of governments in developing and implementing communications strategies. Details of the first workshop, including meeting minutes and presentations, can be found on the project webpage.¹

This meeting presented the results of a scoping study commissioned by IEA-RETD to explore the current experience in IEA-RETD member countries of developing effective communication strategies for renewable energy and identify and address barriers to increasing effectiveness in the future and consider ways to overcome them within the framework of the IEA-RETD. 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 (IISD, moderator), Jacqueline Cottrell (FÖS) and Kristian Petrick (IEA-RETD Operating Agent) placed renewable energy and the event in the context of the challenges facing renewable energy, including:

- The structure and current activities of IEA-RETD;
- New publications available from the RETD website

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.

¹ <http://iea-retd.org/archives/events/re-communicate-workshop>

Introduction to the scoping study: Good practice examples of renewables communications in IEA-RET D countries

Richard Bridle (IISD) outlined the objectives and approach for the IEA-RET D RE-COMMUNICATE scoping study.

- The objective of the project was summarised as follows: “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”;
- This objective was met through documenting examples of communication campaigns, summarising examples of best practice and making recommendations on the role of RET D in supporting effective communications;
- The case studies collected for the study were introduced and participating organisations were thanked for their support and involvement;
- A summary of the main types of campaigns reviewed was presented, including: information campaigns for public awareness, transparency and comparison between communities, campaigns to counter misinformation, to promote government support and advice, and to increase the information base for debate about different policies and scenarios.

Working with human nature:

Compelling communication messages from behavioural economics

Jacqueline Cottrell (FÖS/GBG) presented lessons for communication strategy development from behavioural economics (BE).

- It was noted that the levels of renewable energy deployment and awareness vary widely across RET D countries, leading to the creation of different conditions in each country;
- Five theories from behavioural economics were introduced and examples given of their relevance for renewable energy communication campaigns:
 - **The omission bias:** People prefer harmful inaction over harmful action. To address this, communications campaigns could focus on the cost of inaction;
 - **The endowment effect:** Individuals perceive the value of an object higher if they possess it than if they do not. Creation of a sense of ownership (e.g. a stake in RE plants), or engagement in decision-making processes, could promote consent;
 - **Loss aversion:** motivation to avoid a loss is higher than to acquire a similar gain. Messages could be reframed to present the losses incurred by *not* investing in RE.
 - **Hyperbolic discounting:** people are only far-sighted, if both costs and benefits occur in the future. Communications can place emphasis on the immediate benefits of RE.
 - **Pro-social behaviour:** individuals place value in the consumption behaviour of others and dislike free-riders. Emphasise what others are doing to deploy RE.
- It was noted that people don’t necessarily make rational decisions and that lessons from BE can be applied to ensure campaigns work with human nature.

- Communication cannot be considered in isolation. Ownership and allocation of benefits must be considered.

Discussion / comments:

We should approach lessons from behavioural economics in a holistic way: talking about losses is not a solution

→ create feeling of ownership, engage people emotionally, don't make them feel powerless by solely negative messages – cf. reduced impact of climate debate

Conventional communication of RE industry is based on creating a better future and other abstract messages → can mainly address people who are already convinced

To address those who are opposed to RE or have no strong opinion about it, we should try to engage people individually by also addressing their concerns (security of supply, costs, social/ negative impacts, etc.)

Lessons learned, provisional conclusions

Aaron Leopold (IISD) outlined the provisional conclusions from the RE-COMMUNICATE scoping study, including that:

- Many campaigns are undertaken unilaterally and are underfinanced, increasing partnering would allow pooling of resources and create a greater impacts;
- Pre-campaign research was often not seen as a priority, although it is essential for understanding the framework conditions of a campaign;
- Objectives were not always clearly defined, often a lack of specific and detailed goals hindered audience definition and evaluation;
- Appropriate timing and sustained duration are crucial for effectiveness of a campaign;
- Audience segmentation tended not to be a focus of many campaigns, or was not specific enough to target messages accurately;
- Concentrating on audience segments that have the potential to be convinced, i.e. the “swing vote”, is key;
- Creativity in design and messaging is essential in creating a memorable campaign. Innovative messages and material provoking emotional responses are powerful. Be funny, shocking, thought provoking;
- There was a lack of in-depth post-campaign evaluation;
- Findings from the post-campaign evaluations should be built into the pre-campaign research of future campaigns.

The study's take-home message was summarised: Consistently holistic and rigorous approaches to pre- and post-campaign development would result in more targeted, effective RE communications campaigns.

Discussion / comments:

Link between post-evaluation and budget? Often very low budget allocated to post-research → not conducted; would be better to adjust and define better objective and the target audience of the campaign to the budget available, because pre- and post-research can lower costs significantly

Recommendation is to spread the right message in the right context and at the right time, i.e. audience, context and timing are all important!

Responses from the project steering group, IEA-RETD and discussion of the results

Kristian Petrick (IEA-RETD) responded to the findings of the scoping study and echoed a number of points of particular interest:

- Investing more time and resources in campaign planning and research might lead to increase impact of campaigns;
- The importance of clarity and consistency of messages;
- The need to identify and target audiences that are possible to convince and that have influence; and,
- That RE communicators should be aware of resistance from competing sectors and to actively counter negative messages.

Henrik Karlstrom (Norwegian University of Science and Technology) noted that levels of general support for renewable energy were high but that opposition was strong, particularly where people were negatively affected by developments. He noted that:

- Giving people a stake in the process helps to promote engagement and reduce opposition;
- It should be taken into account that costs and benefits of construction projects are not evenly distributed and that steps to redress the balance should be undertaken;
- A balance must be struck where clear and forceful messages do not alienate people with different points of view.

Dealing with negative media coverage

Jonathan Collings (Collings & Monney) raised the issue of negative media coverage and how it can be combated:

- The process of news-making often favours negative messages. While this is the same for all issue areas, other sectors have been better at avoiding negative press by using proactive communications;
- There are clear misperceptions concerning RE. RE is regarded as expensive even though fossil fuels receive 6 times more subsidies than RE;
- There is a lack of focus in the sector on overall perceptions of RE, organisations are typically focused on their own specific areas and targets. All organisations have a duty to counter negative press;
- Influencing the media requires resources. Other industries with much less compelling value propositions have invested significant resources and achieved results;
- The solution has to include a greater allocation of resources for communication activities. Efforts should capitalise on good stories, tackle grey/uncertain zones, engage with journalists, occupy the social media space and become a trusted source of information; and,

- Withdrawing or not participating in the debate is a dangerous strategy and will leave the debate to opponents.

Discussion / comments:

Communicators should focus on getting in touch with journalists and opening a communications channel with them; organisations and campaigners have to understand how journalists operate and how media function in order to design their media work effectively

Social media are strongly occupied by sceptics: One possible strategy is not to react → but this risks losing the debate in social media, as it leaves the open space to opponents – once a public opinion has been formed, it becomes more difficult to change it again

→ communications campaigns should be proactive on media work.

Campaigning for Transformational Change in Climate and Energy across Europe

Francesca Gater and Susann Scherbarth (Friends of the Earth Europe) presented FoE Europe's experience of campaigning for transformational change in the energy sector across Europe:

- The Big Ask campaign was a Europe-wide campaign for change in climate and energy policy launched with the celebrity backing (Thom Yorke, of the rock band Radiohead), helping to raise the campaign's profile;
- The campaign had a clear set of objectives including increased renewable energy, increased ownership, and participation from citizens and political change;
- Common demands, messages, material and identity helped to create a feeling for campaigners of being part of a big process, even when local efforts faced setbacks;
- Successful ideas could be replicated across countries and campaigners shared experiences which helped to create momentum;
- The key challenges were: How to communicate across a pan-European project? How to link local and community issues to national and EU policy? How to communicate the benefits to communities and individuals?

Creating widespread support for renewables: A successful communications campaign from the renewables industry

Eleanor Smith (EREC) presented the experience of the European Renewable Energy Council (EREC) in attempting to maintain pressure on countries to meet their 2020 targets in the RES directive.

- EREC's Media Communication Group set up to create a united voice for RE sector to strengthen collaboration between industry associations representing different technologies;
- The remit of the group includes planned press events and activities based around current policy priorities, press releases and responses to media coverage;
- A key objective is to request that governments "Keep on track!" to achieve the targets of the RE directive and to create an "early warning system" in case countries begin to fall behind, or backtrack on commitments and miss targets.

Meaningful Brands: Understanding the impact energy brands have on well-being

Andrea Monge Rodríguez (Havas Media) introduced the role of brands in the public consciousness and what brands need to do to be valued by the public:

- Results were based on a survey of more than 60,000 people covering 300 brands;
- Brands that were viewed positively were those that focussed on positive human outcomes. (example: Nike makes shoes which make you a better runner);
- The quality of the products is not enough. People need to feel that brands have positive personal (social) and collective (sustainability) outcomes;
- The customer experiences brands through three channels:
 - Say - What the brands say
 - Think - What the customer personally experiences
 - Trust - What others say about the brand. Opinions of peer groups are the most important in forming an opinion;
- To improve brand awareness and perception you must engage with these channels by engaging with traditional media and having a clear identity stating positions, creating direct connections with social media and through engaging in dialogue.

Discussion / comments:

Marketing/ brands should never replace education and knowledge, but they often have higher influence in mass communication addressed to the broad public; people tend to follow brands and simple messages if they can't take fully informed decisions in every day life

Is RE as such a brand with different sources as sub-brands?

→ Depends on interpretation and potential to make use of it

→ e.g. new label "wind made" to certify companies/ organisation using 100% wind energy

Discussion session

The session included the discussion of the following questions:

- How can communication campaigns be better prepared and evaluated?
- How can audience identification and segmentation be improved?
- What goals are most feasible for government communications campaigns?
- What are the most significant barriers to effective communications in the renewable energy sector?

The key points raised and discussed were:

- There is a tendency to rely on factual information rather than expressing messages in terms of emotionally resonant stories.

- The extent to which messages can and should be targeted was discussed: It was suggested that messages that are too specific could reduce the impact of campaigns by restricting the audience;
- Audience segmentation was noted to be a method for excluding groups you don't want to speak to as much as identifying groups that you do. Excluding particular groups reduces costs and helps to focus resources;
- The example of a district heating company in the Netherlands was given which had completely changed the perception of the company by shifting the marketing to focus on the fact that it was the most sustainable district heating company in the Netherlands;
- Campaign objectives must be ambitious but also achievable. Finding a balance between these two characteristics is a key challenge. Setting objectives can be improved by evaluation of previous campaigns and paying attention to previous commitments; and,
- It was noted that the scoping study and the RE-COMMUNICATE project have focussed on countries that have been relatively proactive in promoting RE, the picture may be very different in other countries, specifically in developing countries.

Possible ways forward

Jacqueline Cottrell (FÖS) outlined two possible areas for developing IEA-RETD RE-COMMUNICATE work beyond the current scoping study:

1. A survey-based study that would assess the attitudes to renewable energy across social and demographic groups in RETD countries;
2. A global network or knowledge platform that would enable the sharing of information on the experiences of communications (host events, webinars workshops, etc.).

In response to the proposals, a number of participants made comments and expressed support for the ideas. The following specific points were raised:

- Demographic information from the proposed survey would be publicly available and could form part of pre-campaign research internationally;
- To date, competition between technologies has led to a lack of coordination amongst RE actors and inability or unwillingness to “speak with one voice” on many issues. Perhaps a forum for communications experts across the sector could help to address this;
- Similar platforms were raised as positive examples of the impact of networks and sector groups. Groups included the Renewable Grid Initiative and a multi-stakeholder group on energy efficiency; and,
- It was pointed out that the needs and wishes of stakeholders should be considered and reviewed, so that additional communication work will meet the needs of stakeholders.

Concluding remarks

Jacqueline Cottrell (FÖS) and Kristian Petrick (IEA-RETD) thanked the speakers and audience for their attendance and commented on the high quality of debate and participation.



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

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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

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Forum Ökologisch-Soziale Marktwirtschaft / Green Budget Germany (FÖS/GBG)

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

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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

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