

Lessons to be shared with:

- Chief Scientist
- Regional Offices
- All divisions, and
- Programmes and projects

Lesson 1: Stakeholders with policy interest need to be an integral part of the assessment process

Lesson 2: Communication must be seen as central to the scientific assessment process

Lesson 3: Assessing the policy impact of assessment initiatives should be done in a robust manner

Lesson 4: Boundary organizations in the science-policy interface should be identified and selected carefully

Lessons from the Evaluation of International Resource Panel

*The International Resource Panel (IRP)¹, which aims to provide authoritative scientific assessments of policy relevance on the usage of natural resources, was evaluated in 2016 by the Evaluation Office of UN Environment². The evaluation assessed the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the initiative focusing on aspects of science-policy impact. **In addition to the recommendations and lessons concerning the IRP directly, the evaluation drew valuable lessons that can be applied at UN Environment in general. This lessons brief aims to help UN Environment initiatives to further focus on the use of their scientific products in decision making (policy formulation) and to respond to the increasing importance of strengthening the science-policy interface³.***

Lesson 1: Stakeholders with policy interest need to be an integral part of the assessment process

According to contemporary knowledge regarding policy influence, a key approach is to identify the intended audiences for the assessment findings and involve them throughout the assessment process. **The evaluation highlighted that 'quality reports + communication efforts = policy use' is not a sufficient approach to have policy impact. Stakeholders with relevant policy interests need to have an opportunity to engage in key decision-making points of the assessment process** (such as defining the issues and assessment questions) and, contrary to common practice, giving them only a formal role on a steering committee is not necessarily a sufficient way ensure this. A participatory and thorough stakeholder analysis, needs assessment and identification of the targeted policy decisions is vital from the outset of an assessment process. Stakeholders should comprise not only those directly involved in policy processes, but also the diverse groups and industries that can influence policy processes indirectly (not only environmental authorities).

Lesson 2: Communication must be seen as central to the scientific assessment process

As mentioned (lesson 1) an efficient assessment process should closely involve the decision making interest from the outset. This approach should be supported by effective communications' efforts as well as outreach. This requires that **communications and outreach are seen as central to the assessment process, not as an add-on after the science product has been published**. The operationalization of communication strategies for assessment projects could be enhanced by the following suggestions⁴: 1) support the communication capacity of scientists/authors to reach policy makers, 2) share knowledge/findings frequently throughout the process – not only after the final product is produced, 3) ensure there is sufficient identification of user communities and opinion leaders from the beginning of the assessment process, and 4) beyond identifying different user groups, communications strategies of assessment projects need to also provide guidelines on how to address the needs of these different user groups effectively.

¹ The International Resource Panel (IRP) was established in 2007 and the secretariat is placed in the Economy Division of UN Environment. 2007-2015 the IRP produced 15 assessments reports as well as several other publications and policy briefs. More information at <http://www.resourcepanel.org/>

² The IRP evaluation report is available at: <https://wedocs.unep.org/rest/bitstreams/55754/retrieve>

³ Highlighted in United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) resolutions and Medium-Term strategies of UN Environment

⁴ Source: expert survey during of the IRP evaluation and National Research Council (2007)

[illegible]

The evaluation suggests that more targeted verification and assessment measures are necessary to better understand the policy impact of normative products produced by UN Environment. For example, this could be done by surveys among the target audience of assessment products, case studies or other qualitative approaches. UN Environment should allocate further resources to measure the actual policy impact of its normative initiatives instead of using solely anecdotal evidence or citation data. **Science-policy impact is a growing discipline and experts in that field can provide useful tools and guidance on how to enhance UN Environment's approaches.** This goes hand in hand with the need to ensure that sufficient organizational capacity exists to develop and apply efficient and effective tools to measure and assess the science to policy influence.

The IRP evaluation highlighted the importance of ‘boundary organizations’ that can help reaching the relevant policy arenas. One evident boundary organization is UN Environment itself. While the evaluation argues that decision makers should be brought into the core of the assessment process (lesson 1) to ensure the uptake and application of findings, the literature shows that **a boundary organization such as UN Environment can ensure the credibility and legitimacy of the scientific process while ensuring the close involvement of decision-making interest in the assessment process.** At the same time, UN Environment and its Environment Assembly (UNEA) are key channels for linking the assessment findings with the interest of environmental authorities.

However, the IRP evaluation underlines that the environmental domain is not the only policy interest to be reached by UN Environment's scientific products. The evaluation points out that the UN Environment assessment processes should identify boundary organizations that can provide useful bridges to the industry sectors and associated ministries covering other areas than environment. This is closely linked with the need for a thorough stakeholder analysis, needs assessment and identification of the targeted policy decisions (lesson 1) at early stages of the assessment process.

Evaluation of the International Resource Panel, Evaluation Office of UN Environment (2016)

Evaluation of Global Environmental Outlook (GEO). Evaluation Office of UN Environment (2014)

Guidelines for Conducting Integrated Environmental Assessments, UN Environment (2016)

UNEP Science Strategy 2010-2013

Analysis of Global Change Assessments Lessons Learned, Committee on Analysis of Global Change Assessments, National Research Council (2007)