



POLICY BRIEF

CRITERIA AND INDICATORS FOR FOREST-RELATED COMMUNICATION



SUMMARY: THE PURPOSE OF COMMUNICATING ABOUT FORESTS

Public communication plays a vital role in our daily lives. It is an integral part of development in society, industry and politics. It is a key element in present-day forestry. There is growing interest in forestry matters at every stage of the forester's work, starting with operational practice, through local and national planning and development, to international policy initiatives. Nowadays, everyone, whether citizen, nature lover, businessperson, tourist, government official or politician, wants to know what is happening in local, regional, national and global forests.

INTRODUCTION

Public communication serves many purposes. The overriding purpose is to allow information transfer to aid better understanding. In the case of forests, it means much more than simply talking about trees.

For a significant part of society, forests are nice to look at, to visit for recreation, a morning jog or walking a dog. Others recognize the environmental and economic value of forests, in addition to their social and cultural benefits. Forests provide employment, the timber for everyday products, supporting livelihoods, often in fragile rural communities.

As understanding of the myriad benefits offered by forests increases, the challenge for communicators intensifies, requiring reliable, scientifically-sound information and powerful tools to present the evidence that demonstrates assigned values. C&I for SFM are such a tool.

Communication models and processes are simple and refer to certain key components e.g. a sender transmits a message through a channel to the receiver or receivers [1]. However, the final effect depends on understanding the conveyed message and the variety of different values assigned to forests in recent decades. Within this context, Criteria & Indicators help communicating through showing the complexity of forests and forestry and considering the range of uses and potential values that society assigns to forest resources.

Adler and Towne (1978) state that everything accomplished by humans or that will be accomplished involves communication with others [2]. This is ever more relevant today, with references to forests in almost all major international commitments and reporting obligations, including SDGs reporting [3], Forest Resource Assessment - FRA, and UNFCCC [4].

THE MOST IMPORTANT TARGET AUDIENCE FOR COMMUNICATION ABOUT FORESTS AND FORESTRY

As with any area of life and business, communication about forests and forestry may target individuals, involve dialogue between specific groups, or be directed at the general public. Communication may be undertaken by

international organizations; State institutions, including ministries and government agencies; forest administration at every level; specialist communications units, but also stakeholder organizations, and even individual foresters.

Successful communication will cover all three dimensions of sustainable forest management, the economic, environmental and social aspects and relies on identification of target audiences. These audiences may be individuals, groups and communities that have influence and decision-making power over the forest sector and its visibility. Forestry is under scrutiny, with often strongly held, and sometimes contradictory opinions, emerging in public discussion. It is necessary to consider those people who might react positively to the sent messages about forests but also to respect those whose views may differ. Also, not all target audiences will have the same level of understanding about forestry. Some audiences may be new to the topic, or from outside the forestry/environmental sector and its overall business. For communication with these audiences to be effective, there must be a careful assessment of their current understanding, the factors driving their interest, and their connections with the forestry sector. Remember too that target audiences may have links with people who have influence over their decisions: this may include family members, friends, leaders and the media.

QUESTIONS THAT HELP TO IDENTIFY TARGET AUDIENCES

- Who needs to hear our message?
- Who are the people that would be interested in hearing and learning about what you have to offer them?
- Who are the influencers?
- Whose attitudes and behaviours are we trying to influence?
- Who must be moved to action?
- Who has the greatest impact on the outcome?
- Who are the people who will affect whether you fail or succeed?

QUESTIONS THAT HELP TO CLARIFY THE INVOLVEMENT OF TARGET AUDIENCES

- Does the target audience need to be more aware of something?
- Does the target audience need to change its attitude?
- Does the target audience need to change its behaviour?
- Should our communications be more informative or engaging?
- What kinds of reputational risks are there?

THE MOST RELEVANT TARGET GROUPS FOR FOREST-RELATED COMMUNICATION [5]

<u>Who are they?</u>	<u>Why may they be important?</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant civil organizations: NGO's from various sectors relevant to forestry. • Policy makers: national, regional and local politicians, ministers and policy leaders. • Institutional and market decision makers within related sectors and industries: climate change and renewable energy sector, agriculture; construction. • Key media people: journalists and other commentators at national and regional or local level. • Education system – teachers and children. • General public. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in many legislative processes, including consultations and lobby activities, some of them view their role as a watchdog organization and critically monitoring the activities of governments, industry. • Play a central role when it comes to creating forest policy, legislative regulations, governance and supervision of the forest sector development. • Influence cross-sectoral aspects decisions that may results in long term direction for developments and trades-off between different sectors. • Hold views and form other people's views, serving as channels for transmitting information and influence the image of an organization. • Partners in forest education. • Very important for gathering support for the forest sector activities and maintaining a social license to operate.

In analyzing potential target groups, it is important to understand how they perceive problems and what sparked their interest in forestry. Some people may be interested in emerging issues like climate change, others in protecting biodiversity, and still others in timber production. Just as the concept of SFM integrates different aspects of forestry, forest-related communication needs to recognize the different standpoints and interests within society and stakeholder groups. It is worth trying to engage with those people or organizations that may be able to influence change, and in that way to multiply and extend the reach of “our” message.

THE BEST COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

There is no single approach to developing a successful communication strategy. Certain steps can ensure that the design of a strategy helps the forest organization or unit to communicate effectively and to meet its objectives. It is not surprising that, throughout the world, forestry issues are seen and understood differently between the forestry community and those outside it. A striking example of the gap between reality and public perception is a common belief that forest cover in Europe is declining when, in fact, the forest area has expanded since 2000 (cf. the State of Europe's Forests 2020 report, Köhl et al. 2020). Despite the ready availability of factual information, there is a tendency for people to interpret, modify, or respond to

information they receive, according to how it fits their perceived interests and current beliefs. Developing a communication strategy should begin with identifying the present state of public perception of forests and forestry, the main areas of interest and any gaps, including misperceptions of forest management. These efforts are even more important when considering the broader context of how forests and their potential have emerged on the global political agenda in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement, for example. These open opportunities for communication but also a need for information and actions to rebalance communication gaps and to secure understanding of why forests and forestry are so relevant to modern life.

A six-step process for every communication strategy [6]

<u>Step</u>	<u>Action</u>	<u>Activities</u>
Step 1	Situation analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping communications and information • Identifying challenges and priorities • Finding out what works now
Step 2	Investigate audiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding out who your audiences are. • Finding out what your audiences know and think
Step 3	Message Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying messages. • Creating clear, timely, accurate and appropriate messages
Step 4	Choosing options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matching communication methods with audiences and messages
Step 5	Planning Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocating responsibilities • Budgeting • Using events
Step 6	Monitoring and Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting targets • Responding to results and reporting

Useful tools for developing a communication strategy [7] when analysing the current situation are:

- a) SWOT Analysis - listing the forest sector's **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats**.
- b) PEST Analysis - listing the **Political, Economic, Social and Technological factors** that could affect the forest sector or a forest organization's work.

Whatever approach is used, a strategy will need to include information about target audience, communication goals and tailored messages, as well as a team of inspired people to implement the plan.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN COMMUNICATING FOREST-RELATED ISSUES?

The successful implementation of a forest-related communication strategy depends heavily on the people involved. Whether they are forestry people in media units or from an outside organization, such as a PR agency, they must be professional with the required competencies. The communication strategy must supply

everyone involved with information to communicate, maintaining a consistent approach to planned activities, and avoiding ambiguity. Communication responsibilities within a forestry organization may follow a range of models. A standard model is assigning most communication tasks to a nominated spokesperson, or a specialized media unit. Many forestry organizations have operational units with personnel who specialize in communicating and explaining specific issues. In some, there are staff specialized in forest education or leading tours and lessons in the forest.

Best Practice Example from Poland

The State Forests (SF) in Poland established a separate department for national outreach, known as the State Forests Information Centre (SFIC) about 20 years ago. It publishes magazines and books, runs the SF website, operates social media profiles, engages in promotion, and organizes promotional events. It has run many successful campaigns including, “*Welcome – the forests: a good neighborhood*” in 2017. Its aim was to show that forests looked after by SF met the highest standards of management, taking full account of the social, ecological and economic expectations of society. Coordinated activity increases the strength and impact of communication messages. The Centre publishes and distributes periodicals on forest and forestry: an internal monthly magazine, a quarterly magazine aimed at people who are interested in forests, mainly tourists and forest enthusiasts, teachers and pupils. Their social portal, at Facebook, is now the most popular tool for communication, with half a million followers, the official profile of the State Forests at Instagram receives considerable attention, as well as the Twitter profile. Another popular move was the establishment of the forest educational portal, for example the [Las Rysia eRysia](#), which explains about biodiversity of forests and how they influence the environment and climate. This forest education platform is dedicated to the public at large, but the main target is the young generation. The platform includes three services: for primary schoolchildren (4-6 grade), for intermediate schoolchildren and for teachers. The portal receives an average of 20,000 visits monthly, presenting the thematic blogs “*Forester’s blog*” and “*Forest Educator’s Blog*”. It offers a foundation for raising awareness among the young generation about our shared responsibility for the condition of the environment (Kulisz, 2016).

TOOLS TO COMMUNICATE FORESTRY ISSUES

There are many communication tools and methods available. Choosing which to use will depend on what is known to work best for the chosen audience and budget. Social media are used more and more, but do not overlook more traditional methods, such as press briefings, factsheets, calendars, advertising, exhibitions (indoor and outdoor), posters, podcasts, or photography. Consider engaging directly with members of Parliament and research communities as a way of advocating on specific topics with legislators.

OUTREACH ON FORESTRY TOPICS

Outreach activities create a link between the forest sector and stakeholder groups, helping to promote sustainable forest management. Special events, including outdoor activities enhance public appreciation of the importance of forests and their role in supplying multiple economic, social and environmental benefits. Outreach activities include press and news releases, thematic media campaigns and organizing events, such as outdoor education for school groups. Websites and social media are of increasing importance and they have become a significant means of communication. The challenge is how to keep websites, Facebook pages, and Twitter looking fresh, up-to-date and attractive. There are international opportunities to boost forest

communication across the wider community inside and outside the forest sector and it is recommended to take advantage of these. The United Nations' International Day of Forests (IDF), held annually on 21 March, promotes the importance of forests and trees for people and the planet.

The UN works with governments, community organizations, forest administrations, and the public, to promote local and global activities dedicated each year to a chosen theme. This highlights specific topics, such as forests and biodiversity in 2020, and to seek synergies with other sectors. When the forestry community acts collectively, it strengthens the power of the message at different levels, giving it greater attention, visibility and impact.

Networking and collaboration are essential. The UNECE/FAO Forest Communicators' Network (FCN) [6] provides a forum for international interaction and cooperation in forest-related communication. The FCN has undertaken many activities, which have improved the ability of the forest sector to communicate within and outside the sector.

The International Day of Forests encourages countries to organize activities involving forests and trees locally, nationally and internationally, such as:

- Tree planting campaigns.
- Photo exhibits portraying the IDF theme.
- Sharing infographics, videos, news and messages via social and other media.
- Wearing shirts with slogans that may draw the attention of people.
- Arranging seminars in schools, field trip, family picnics.
- Visiting beautiful wooded places.
- Addressing the IFD at political summits and conferences.



THE ROLE OF CRITERIA AND INDICATORS IN COMMUNICATING FOREST-RELATED TOPICS

Criteria and indicators (C&I) of sustainable forest management may offer a framework for developing a communication strategy, focusing on clear messages that allow the public and policy makers to connect with issues and challenges, including information about the state of forests, forest management and the forest sector. By presenting consolidated information on the economic, social and environmental benefits of forests, C&I have emerged as a powerful tool to promote SFM. They also satisfy growing public expectations on forest managers to show how their activities support SFM. C&I can help to spark dialogue with other sectors and society at large, in developing a national forest programme, for instance. Moreover, C&I provide a means of presenting achievements in promoting sustainable forest management globally, regionally, and nationally, as well as locally. Forests play a key role in supporting most of the United

Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), even though forest receives explicit mention in only two SDGs. Where national sets of C&I exist, they can support communication on how forests of national and regional-scale contribute to sustainable livelihoods through income generation and employment, food production, resilient and sustainable production/consumption, and mitigating and adapting to climate change.

National C&I sets provide the basis for evidence-based communication UNECE, 2019), assisting:

- Tree planting campaigns.
- Photo exhibits portraying the IDF theme.
- Sharing infographics, videos, news and messages via social and other media.
- Wearing shirts with slogans that may draw the attention of people.
- Arranging seminars in schools, field trip, family picnics.
- Visiting beautiful wooded places.
- Addressing the IFD at political summits and conferences.

National C&I sets support different dimensions of forest-related communication:

- Indicating the relevance of the forest sector to policy makers and society at large.
- Highlighting the significance of cross-sectoral relations.
- Demonstrating the forest sector's contributions to meeting global responsibilities and obligation, such as the SDGs.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The forest sector must use widespread, continuous communication to respond to society on a broad range of social and environmental issues.

Devising national forest policy requires systematic planning, and the use of forest-related communication strategies to convey succinct messages to well-targeted audiences.

National sets of C&I for SFM can present robust evidence on forests and their environmental and socio-economic values nationally, regionally, and internationally.

Given that the future of forests may depend as much, if not more, on public perception and expectations about forests than the efforts of foresters, communication will be a fundamental force to shape public opinion and to inform politicians.

CONCLUSIONS

Public perception and expectations of forests have evolved in the last decades and now play an influential role in determining how forests are managed, affecting forest policy makers, forest owners and forest managers.

The challenges for forest communicators are to listen to society, and to explain what and why is and is not possible in forest management. This will lead to a better understanding of forestry and an appreciation of what shapes public opinion and the different values that forests provide.

The growing need for forest communication and improved public relations require a fresh approach, new understanding and the skills to respond to the opportunities and challenges of reconciling competing views about how forests should be managed.

The criteria and indicators (C&I) used for measuring sustainable forest management (SFM) derive from environmental, social and economic forest functions and should help communication with the wider community too, about the broad range of essential goods and services that forests provide.

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Project manager: Roman Michalak

Project coordinator: Roksolana Shelest

Author of the policy brief: Marta Gaworska

ANNEX 1: INTERNATIONAL SOURCES/ORGANIZATION THAT CAN HELP IN FUNDING/IMPROVING OUTREACH OF FOREST-RELATED ISSUES

The UNECE-FAO Forest Communicators Network: <https://unece.org/forests/team-specialists-forest-communication>

Forest communication toolkits: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/communication-toolkit/76361/en/>

Best Practices in Forest Communication UNECE-FAO Forest Communicators Network
<http://www.fao.org/forestry/communication-toolkit/76358/en/>

Global Coordination Group of the Regional Forest Communicators Network: More information available here: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/communication-toolkit/87164/en/>

UN International Day of Forests: <https://www.un.org/en/observances/forests-and-trees-day>;
<http://www.fao.org/international-day-of-forests/en/>

ANNEX 2: SOURCES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT COMMUNICATION

Referenced sources:

[1] The 3 Essential Elements of an Effective Communication Strategy:
<https://communicationgmt.usc.edu/blog/the-3-essential-elements-of-an-effective-communication-strategy/>

- [2] Basic communication model: <https://docplayer.net/1652142-Basic-communication-model.html>
- [3] SDG Monitoring and Reporting Toolkit: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/unct-toolkit/>
- [4] Land use, land-use change and forestry under the Convention: <https://unfccc.int/land-use-land-use-change-and-forestry-under-the-convention>
- [5] How to determine your target audience <https://publicrelationssydney.com.au/how-to-determine-your-target-audience/>
- [6] Guidelines and tools for developing communication strategies for joint UN teams on AIDS https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/jc1582_guidelines_tools_en_3.pdf
- [7] Developing a communication strategy <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/campaigns/communications/communications-strategy>
- [8] UNECE-FAO Forest Communicators Network: <https://unece.org/forests/team-specialists-forest-communication>

Other recommended reading:

Communication cycle: Definition, process, models and examples:

<https://studylib.net/doc/8076219/communication-cycle--definition--process--models-and>

Communication- A Systematic Process <https://www.bartleby.com/essay/Communication-A-Systematic-Process-F3QSS94CDM6S>

The Role of Communication in Social Forestry:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/43090918_The_Role_of_Communication_in_Social_Forestry_The_Case_of_Mwenezi

Best Practices in Slovak Forestry Communication – case study, Marusakova, L. (2009): Forestry Journal 55(4), DOI: 10.2478/v110114-009-0009-0

ANNEX 3: REFERENCED LITERATURE

Adler, R and Towne, N. (1978): Looking out/looking in (2nd ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Köhl, M.; Linser, S.; Prins, K. (2020): State of Europe’s Forests 2020. Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe. FOREST EUROPE Liaison Unit Bratislava, Slovakia.

Kulisz, M.Z. (2016): Ecological culture of poles as a determinant of a secure development of the society in the 21st century. Scientific Journal WSFiP Nr 2/2016.

UNECE (2019): Guidelines for the Development of a Criteria and Indicator Set for Sustainable Forest Management. (Linser, S. and O’Hara, P., Eds) ECE/TIM/DP/73, United Nations, New York and Geneva, 89 p. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.32430.36168/1.

