



**“Assessing the Impact of Environmental Information
on Decision-Making Processes”
A Seminar with GRID-Arendal’s Advisory Panel
and Invited Experts**

**June 11, 2001
Arendal, Norway**

**Summary Notes
and
Advice to GRID-Arendal
and its Board of Directors**

**Executive summary
Advisory notes from the discussions
Practical recommendations**

Participants
Agenda

Executive Summary of Recommendations

*Be practical and move forward on media, policy, communication and education
- and adapt to new paradigms.*

GRID-Arendal needs to be proactive with information; it is neither an advocating NGO nor a “science black box”. UNEP sets policy agenda, GRID-Arendal should support UNEP’s agenda-setting.

Besides direct inputs to policy-setting and policy evaluation, aim for “the People” as your audience; all policy-makers are lay-readers, they react to issues in the media. Promoting solutions is as important as highlighting problems.

Representing neither research nor action groups, GRID-Arendal cannot compete with professional communicators, but rather should feed them with valued-added, timely, relevant and easily accessible information. Engage in partnerships (e.g. w/professional writers – interesting books vs boring reports). Work along different avenues: media, education and the arts are all effective and complimentary in their own ways.

An organisation that does not deal with the media appears invisible. Be active with the media. A G-A message should be simple, clear, understandable and relevant to lay people. Maps and good pictures are effective / memorable; use this also to motivate journalists. Make GRID-Arendal web site completely media-friendly. Network of journalists important, not only environmental and not only newspapers/TV. Remember “New Scientist”, “The Economist” and popular periodicals.

Think “timing”; when are policies to be formulated? –be there; when are policies to be adopted? –be there. Exploit “little news” periods: Monday-Tuesday, summer, Christmas. Use big events / conferences/science festivals – journalists already there and motivated for inputs. Do not consider a finalised project over – consider follow-up and “stories”. Consider what GA has to contribute to important debates. Remember GA information produced “3 years ago”; it may be relevant NOW.

Environmental issues must no longer be considered singular; think about integration of scientific, social, economic, cultural, spiritual sectors. Consider participatory approach, involve users in adding value to information.

Be practical and move forward on media, policy, communication and education - and adapt to new paradigms.

Advisory Notes from the Discussions

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS: DIRECTIONS

I. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF G-A?

G-A's mission opens up for G-A to be active with its information. Making information understandable means putting it into context. On some occasions, G-A may therefore be involved in taking a policy stand in support of UNEP and be under its guidance.

G-A can be proactive, but just modest about your pro-activity. And UNEP is not alone in defending environmental values, involve other partners too.

G-A cannot be an advocacy group like an NGO, we follow UNEP. But UNEP is not totally neutral either, it is involved in agenda setting. Therefore we are in the grey zone.

We may have all the answers, but we may have forgotten what the questions were. On the other hand we can't become totally demand-driven. We should partly be supply-driven too, follow our mandate. A balance is needed. We need to deliver what the policy-makers *want* to know, but also what *we think* the policy-makers *need* to know.

It is important to have an *independent* capacity to evaluate / benchmark performance, this is the success of the EEA. Information and policy should be separated. Ideally, information systems should be outside Ministries of the Environment.

Data and information do not improve unless exposed (a blank page on Germany in EEA's ozone report helped a lot).

II. HOW TO REACH DECISION-MAKERS, IN MINISTRIES AND IN THE STREETS?

There are two tracks of communication: I. direct into policy making and evaluation cycle (representative democracy), II. through raising awareness among the public (participatory democracy). If you do not do enough on track II, you are losing on track I too: if ministers see issues in the media, they are more likely to react. Kids can influence parents' opinions (e.g. whales, smoking).

One cannot discuss information in an empty room, we need to discuss it in relation to a policy agenda. In order to have an information agenda, one needs to push for a policy agenda that is well defined. If G-A serves UNEP, UNEP must have a policy agenda and that's what G-A needs to serve. We need to change the way policies are made, they should be responsive to information (Otherwise we cannot influence them.). UN organisations try to stay away from strong policy positions which often tend to be opposed by their general membership. This may slowly change.

GA should be pro-active in promoting the need for and producing information on environmental conventions'/protocols' follow-up reporting.

Environment can no longer come across as a single issue, environmental sustainability / sustainable development is a new paradigm.

There is always a simple answer to a complex question. But it will be wrong. But it may work...

Supermarkets as new cathedrals: IIED tries to influence consumers, from price as the only bottom-line to environmental values as well.

Participation is very important today, many countries far outside Europe (e.g. China) talk about the Aarhus Convention.

Grown-ups don't change opinions, opinions tend to die out. Grown-up journalists will come and ask for more information.

III. PRODUCE YOURSELF OR LET OTHERS?

We are neither research organisations nor action groups. Communication is a big market, and we cannot compete. It is very difficult to make a good book out of a technical report (3 attempts with the Dobris report failed). Action groups (NGOs) may be far more effective in producing reports based on our information. WWF has developed educational package based on EEA's information

'Slow murder': a successful case of how an unreadable World Bank's report was translated into a bestseller by an Indian NGO. <http://www.oneworld.org/cse/html/extra/smog.htm>

There is competition for attention. We need to use non-traditional tools, and non-traditional alliances (Attac, the church) to make things happen.

IV. HOW TO WORK WITH THE MASS MEDIA

An organisation that does not deal with the media appears *invisible* (NN). Norwegian journalists at large do not know that G-A exists, but they should according to G-A's mission, if G-A is to make information understandable to the public.

Don't stop when the project is finished. Remember there is interested audience out there, feed it with information, and make it easy for journalists.

Politicians like to see you in the papers if they give you money. It's like with one's own babies.

TV is still the main information channel in the world.

If people say: 'I didn't know this, this is interesting', than the job was well done.

A busy newsroom is a war stage. To get through, a message should be simple, clear, understandable and relevant to lay people (drivers, housewives, a man who keeps a pub). Newspapers are as much about entertaining as about information. If the story isn't amusing, it won't get in.

Timing is critical. Think timing, target events. Would media tours be feasible if they were not already in the area of high public interest?

V. HOW TO MAKE THE WEB MEDIA-FRIENDLY?

I use Internet quite a lot, but only go to known sites.

I would only go to sites specifically mentioned in press-releases. A free search is time-consuming and with unpredictable results. A phone call is often still more powerful.

Do we need to develop networks that are more attractive to journalists than the Internet?

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS: *ACTIONS*

COMMUNICATON STRATEGY

Do not hide potential good stories behind GA walls. Be more active in Norwegian debates. G-A can be much more offensive without risking the loss of funding.

Don't just go to decision-makers, go to people. If people ask for more, so will decision-makers.

A booklet strategy (all policy makers are lay readers): key thoughts on two pages, marketed as opinion, not as facts, raise much more interest. 3-pagers for Ministers, re-focus from past developments to future trends: from back-casting to now-casting and forecasting. It is good to have GEO-2000, but people want to know what is happening *now*.

People may feel that local problems are primarily solved, and that they cannot do much about global problems. Raise awareness about environmental solutions too, not just environmental problems.

Facilitate work by NGOs: a) make your information known, b) motivate donors to use some money spent on NGOs to support information and communication, but b) do not *push* public groups too much.

Education should be considered as the same track as communication. E.g. EEA is not able to produce educational materials, it tries to engage professionals to translate reports into educational packages. EEA needs partners (analysts, advocacy groups etc.), and combine information with a larger context to make it work.

Consider art, a theatre play on Arctic research? Antarctic Symphony commissioned by the British Antarctic Survey (<http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/>) helped send out many Antarctica-related messages.

GRID-Arendal's to-do list:

- **Re-think and develop an innovative approach to communicating GRID-Arendal's information through various channels (in-house brainstorm and facilitated process).**
- **Raise awareness about needs, possibilities and techniques internally (practically-oriented workshop in 2001).**
- **Actively build partnerships, both with professional communicators and with similar institutions who seek answers to the same questions (projects, networking, core funding).**
- **Do a case-study in Norway: why is information not able to influence environmental policies?**

MASS MEDIA

Be proactive

Follow the debate and step in with relevant information, and do so actively. Organisations must be much more proactive if they want journalists to go to them. Make your name remembered. Be present in the public room. Go out to the press, but be prepared and think beforehand when to go out, and what to talk about.

Be conscious to raise profile of an issue (e.g. climate graphics, wilderness), not of an organisation or an individual. Mention of a name is not so important after all.

Illustrations matter

Maps is what people really remember, they are very effective for papers and TV (wilderness animation). Chances of TV grabbing a story with a 15-min of motion is much higher than if its just paper.

A good picture will hold up a page. G-A's pictures are good, but still may not be simple and entertaining enough. A polar bear could appear on Arctic maps, etc.

Press-releases and contents

Do not send out too many press releases (this is massaging of egos). Better choose 3-4 cracking stories for the year. Two stories of 10 lines are better than 30 stories of 2 lines.

Don't repeat, try to find what is new (just one tiny piece of news makes a good story. Be inventive and original, make stories from different angles. A new fact can be everything (e.g. forecast of insurers' losses from climate change in 50 years)

Most journalists never read more than two paragraphs of a press-release, these should contain the whole story and be exciting. Don't welcome partners in first paragraphs, leave this for the end of a press-release.

Make your information relevant for non-specialists. Everyone loves polar bears, talk about them. Get experts to write 1 page so that a mother would tell it to her friends at a tea party. Make general popular overviews, e.g. G-A's map on environmental threats in the Russian Arctic is a very useful summary. Some readers are in fact quite mature, but catchy titles certainly help too. Don't use technical terms, use common language.

Policies are not interesting for most journalists, these are seen as internal. Turn it into a message: from streamlining environmental reporting, to millions of dollars to be saved and used for conservation.

Link a message to people's culture, link a message to something they know well and can relate to (e.g. draining of middle eastern wetlands - British literature on middle east). Regionalize information (e.g. IPCC), sub-regionalize if you can.

Don't be *too* clever. Your story may be 50% cut, and you point may never get through (toxicants in mushrooms – and apples).

Translations are necessary. You don't get into national newspapers in e.g. France, Germany, Greece without translation into national languages.

Contacts

Don't rely on web sites, many people still have no access to the web. Press releases can be rather long, with ready stories, pictures etc.

Put loads of contact information (mobile, home, e-mail) – and *be available*. Sometimes sorting out a question at 6:00 a.m. can be critical.

Put experts on TV/ radio, *media-train* the staff. (UK government spends big money to media-train scientists). But make sure *real* experts are given as main scientific contacts.

Where to publish

Build a network of journalists (TV, newspapers, magazines), interest groups
Several local papers, where people read everything, can be more effective than one big newspaper.

Don't only target environmental sections: financial, sports, children sections can be just as much interested.

Don't only target environmental media. New Scientist or The Economist can be just as effective, and the story will then be picked by environmental media.

Can G-A provide information relevant for general writing, not environmental news (e.g. country articles in monthly journals)?

The web

Popular issues like human health, Africa: very little at G-A, and no links to other sources. Try to indicate / link to complimentary information sources. Time = money, journalists are very busy and want 1-stop shopping sites (push one button and get it all). They do not care about mandates. Make it easy for them to find information, ideally link up every related organisation.

We must have a one-stop shop for what is under our mandate. If we don't have this information, we should make links.

Explain who you are, and what people can or cannot expect to find on your pages.

Surprise people (an old car image on G-A web site is a nice surprise).

Charts with text are hugely useful, especially in colour.

Make sure pages can be printed (G-A's climate pages cannot).

Make sure there is contact information on the pages, including phone numbers for more questions. (Normally not the case).

GRID-Arendal's to-do list:

- **Make media-oriented thinking part of GRID-Arendal's daily life (collective vision).**
- **Initiate and encourage networking with mass media (project set-up, targeted funding).**
- **Be consciously active towards the media (same + secure internal expertise).**
- **Make sure that all GRID-Arendal's products are media-friendly ('checklists' and feedback).**
- **Media-train the staff (internal workshop).**

Assessing the Impact of Environmental Information on Decision-Making Processes

Advisory Panel Meeting and Seminar
at GRID-Arendal, 10-11 June 2001

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Advisory Panel:

Nigel Cross

Managing Director
International Institute for Environment and
Development
3 Endsleigh Street
London, WC1H 0DD
UNITED KINGDOM
Phone: +44 171 388 2117
Fax: +44 171 388 2826
Email: Nigel.Cross@iied.org

Olav Høgetveit

Media Consultant
John Colletts Allé 86
0854 Oslo
Norway
Phone: +47 22 02 05 83
908 51830 / 909 39 701
Email: olav.hogetveit@oslo.online.no

Domingo Jiménez-Beltrán

Executive Director
European Environment Agency
Kongens Nytorv 6
DK-1050 Copenhagen K
Denmark
Phone: +45 33 36 71 00
Fax: +45 33 36 71 28
Email: domingo.jimenez.beltran@eea.eu.int

External Experts:

Nick Nuttall

Media Officer
Communications and Public Information,
UNEP Headquarters
P.O.Box 30 552
Nairobi, Kenya
Phone: +54 2 623084

Mobile 254 (0)733 632755
Fax 254 2 623692
Email: nick.nuttall@unep.org

Wendy Kristiansen

Editorial Director
Le Monde Diplomatique
English language edition
164 Deansgate
Manchester, M60 2RR
United Kingdom
Phone: + 44 207 722 2020
Email: mondip@wkris.demon.co.uk

Invitees:

Fritz Gilbert

Former Director of the FEWS project
(Famine Early Warning System)
3711 Whispering Lane
Falls Church, Va. 22041
USA
Phone: +1 703 642 2205
Email: 74242.2000@compuserve.com

Frank Rittner

UNEP/GEF Network Manager
United Nations Environment Programme,
Division of Technology, Industry and
Economics
39-43 Quai André Citroën
F-75739 Paris Cedex 15
France
Phone: +33 1 44 37 3008
Fax: +1 202 614 0816
Email: frittner@unep.fr /
frittner@worldbank.org

GRID-Arendal Board of Directors:

Leif E. Christoffersen

Chairman
2312 Kimbro Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22307
USA
Phone: +1 703 768 6369
Mobile: 911 23950
Fax: +1 703 768 3904
Email: leifec@attglobal.net

Øystein Dahle

Board Chairman, World Watch Institute
Norden,
c/o Den Norske Turistforening
Postboks 7, Sentrum
0101 Oslo, Norway
Phone: +47 22 82 28 00
Mobile: +47 957 55 941
Fax: +47 22 82 29 00

Kari Elisabeth Fagernæs

Head of Section, Norwegian Pollution Control
Authorities
P.O.Box 8100 Dep.,
N-0032 Oslo, Norway
Phone: +47 22 57 3572
Fax: +47 22 67 67 06
Email: kari-elisabeth.fagernas@sft.no

Odd Rogne

Executive Secretary of IASC
International Arctic Science Committee
P O Box 5156 Majorstua
N-0302 Oslo, Norway
Office address: Middelthunsgate 29
Tel: int. +47 2295 9900 (direct 9902).
Fax: int. +47 2295 9901
E-mail: iasc@iasc.no

Eva Thörnclöf

Head of Coastal and Freshwater
National Board of Fisheries
P.O.Box 423
SE-401 26 Gothenburg

Sweden

Phone: +46 31 743 03 00
Fax: +46 31 743 04 44
Email: eva.thornelof@fiskeriverket.se

GRID-Arendal Staff

Åke Bjørke

Information Officer
bjorke@grida.no

Nickolai Denisov

Manager CEE/NIS
denisov@grida.no

Karen Folgen

Seminar Co-ordinator
karen@grida.no

Lawrence Hislop

Manager Web & Info
hislop@grida.no

Kathrine Johnsen

Global Project Officer
kathrine@grida.no

Petter Neumann

Web Developer
neumann@grida.no

Philippe Rekacewicz

Cartographer
philippe@grida.no

Ieva Rucevska

Project Officer, CEE/NIS
ieva@grida.no

Ole-Gunnar Støen

Polar Programme Officer
stoen@grida.no

AGENDA

09.00 GRID-Arendal Conference Room, Longum Park Technology Centre

SESSION I Chair: Leif E. Christoffersen

Welcome and Introduction. Leif E. Christoffersen

What has been achieved since last year's Advisory Panel Meeting: presentation of Impact Paper. Objective of this meeting: guide the implementation of a more effective communication of GRID-Arendal's information products. The role of GA's Advisory Panel: advise the Board and raise strategic issues

09.30

"In which issues has environmental information made a difference?" (Examples, lessons learned) Nigel Cross
Discussion

10.30

Bridging the gap between environmental data and policy-relevant information" (identify the largest gaps between current and imminent issues and the need for available information) Domingo Jiménez-Beltrán
Discussion

11.30

"Is GRID-Arendal making a difference?" (addressing the right issues in the right way)
Olav Høgetveit
Discussion

Video Conference with UNEP, Geneva Office

Presentation of UNEP's Media Tour of the Balkans
Discussion

14.00

SESSION II Chair: Kari Elisabeth Fagernæs

"The art of communication"

Nick Nuttall
Discussion

14.45

Is GRID-Arendal producing useful information? – from a media perspective"
Wendy Kristiansen
Discussion

16.15

General discussion

17.00

Concluding comments

Nigel Cross. Domingo Jiménez-Beltrán. Olav Høgetveit.

17.30

Closing remarks: Leif E. Christoffersen