NDC Messenger - Localizing NDC Messages and Actions

Concept idea by the NDC Support Cluster
Core challenge addressed

To successfully implement the Paris Agreement and limit global warming to well below 2 degrees, it is imperative for sub-national stakeholders at the regional, communal and individual levels to be fully engaged in the formulation and realisation of ambitious climate actions. Alongside the commitment of state and private sector actors, it is particularly the involvement of the broad civil society that is indispensable. However, to date, public awareness of the implications of climate change on one’s own life and of ways to personally mitigate greenhouse gases and adapt to the local impacts of global warming is by no means sufficient. As a consequence of the rather abstract nature of climate change, the uncertainty about one’s own engagement opportunities and the technical jargon of international treaties, civil society is far too often excluded from the NDC process.

Approach of the NDC Messenger

As an innovative approach developed at the 2018 NDC Support Cluster Workshop in Washington D.C., the NDC Messenger aims at translating high-level abstract language into actionable messages at personal levels. By localising NDC messages and actions through an integrative, "non-exclusive" stakeholder dialogue, this approach addresses the question of how climate change mitigation and adaptation become real for the individual and works towards making the Paris Agreement everyone’s business. The NDC Messenger can be regarded as an iterative multi-level stakeholder process, which serves as a platform of dialogue between national policy makers, sub-national and local governments, communities such as religious groups, labour unions or NGOs, and the individual. With concrete messages adapted to the recipient, abstract climate change policies, research data and trends become comprehensible for everyone and communities can be mobilised to take actions themselves. In addition, a training module offers the possibility for an in-depth study of the subject. For this purpose, it is essential to make use of community groups as non-traditional "climate advocates" and to adapt messages to the local context. At the same time and in addition to this top-down approach of information campaigning, the NDC Messenger can give citizens a voice in the NDC implementation process and communicate regional specificities and local necessities back to the political level (bottom-up approach). At national levels, this approach can furthermore be linked with the SDG framework and thus also integrate other sustainability issues into the discourse.

Success factors and replicability

A number of prerequisites and requirements need to be met to allow the NDC Messenger to produce the desired outcomes. First, it is indispensable that national and international funding is granted to support sustained engagement and advocacy by the coordinating body and key individuals/"climate advocates" (1). Without financial support from different actors, this approach could be neither functional nor independent in its nature. Thus, a strong and reliable institutional framework (2) is needed to guarantee the existence of an independent technical or administrative body on the national level (3) in charge of the NDC Messenger that works autonomously and free from particular political or economic interests. There is need to establish a coordinating agency at national level with the responsibility of:

- facilitating/ coordinating stakeholder participation in the formulation of national mitigation and adaptation programmes;
- mobilizing resources within the national budget and from external funding opportunities;
• coordinating the formation of local networks at sub-national level and vertical cooperation between those networks and the national level structures as well as
• monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the programmes under implementation.

To guarantee the approach is integrative and "non-exclusive" (4), a prior and very detailed stakeholder mapping process (5) is needed to ensure that all actors involved can participate in the discourse. To ensure inclusivity and reach all sectors of society, the membership of the coordinating agency should include the civil society, religious institutions, trade unions, private sector associations, national NGO coordinating bodies, Government ministries and agencies. It is through these institutions represented in the national coordinating agency that the mitigation and adaptation programmes and messages get translated into the ‘call to action’ to be elevated into policy (by government ministries) or are broken down into specific local actions through other channels.

With the help of this sociological method, it is possible to get an overview of all relevant actors involved and to be sure no-one is left out. The mapping process can help to identify community leaders, natural advocates, “connectors” and local entry points that may not be readily apparent until one maps at the local level and makes the political personal. Moreover, the content of the respective nationally determined contribution (NDC) must be broken down (6) to make it more understandable and applicable to local circumstances. For the latter and prior to starting the discourse, it is further necessary to carry out a mapping process for the purpose of becoming aware of the local context and adapting the content communicated accordingly (7). Furthermore, the NDC Messenger makes use of positive social change / nudging (8), which can be understood as efforts to influence social behaviour at large scale for the purpose of producing desirable characteristics in the target population, which in this case means to enhance public awareness and foster ambitious climate actions on communal and individual levels.

Lastly, for the NDC Messenger to be successful, it is crucial that communities, such as religious, cultural, female and other interest groups, focus on their mandates and embed climate change issues into their existing agendas (9), thus making it a deeply integrated communication process rather than an additional one that first needs to find new channels of expression and audience. Most of these factors and prerequisites are fully measurable, with either qualitative (3-7) or quantitative (1) methods or a combination of both (9). In contrast, other factors (2,8) can only be measured indirectly and require prior indicator development to determine their magnitude.

The sub-national level of government shall be involved in this process by providing the following:

• Context analysis and mapping of the economic, social, cultural and environmental realities which are communicated horizontally to sub-national level stakeholder structures, similar to that at the national level;
• Identification of key drivers of climate action and the nature of climate issues;
• Identification of institutions that need to form the sub-national coordinating agency which (i) reports and coordinates with the national one; (ii) supports and coordinates the individual institutions at sub national level.

Existing Good Practices

A successful approach to raising awareness and promoting behavioural change amongst citizens that could serve as a methodological and strategical example for the NDC Messenger is the communication and programme delivery strategy of Kenya’s National AIDS Control Council (NACC). The National AIDS
and STI’s Control Programme (NASCOP) was the programme delivery unit of this Council and aimed at reducing new HIV/STI infections rates through a two-pronged approach, comprising both prevention and management of HIV cases. In the prevention programme, a range of behaviour change communication programmes, being developed with participation of vulnerable groups and reflecting geographical variations in vulnerability and risk exposure, disseminated messages on several channels (mass media, communal and individual levels) designed at reducing risk of being infected (use of condoms, monogamous relationships etc.), increasing acceptability and demand for biomedical interventions, promoting danger-conscious behaviour of medical personnel (e.g. injection safety), reducing stigma of infected people and mobilising local communities to do campaigning and take action themselves. Thus, over the last 25 years, this programme contributed to reducing the absolute number of new HIV infections per year by almost 75 percent despite high population growth. Just as well, NASCOP is linked to the SDG framework and contributes to goal number three, “Good Health and Well Being”.

Unique and innovative characteristics

With this approach, mainstreaming climate change and promoting personal actions is no longer a one-way street but opens up channels of communication in both directions. By making use of this approach, local knowledge can be used to improve public policies on the community level and citizens are encouraged to get actively involved in the common endeavour to limit climate change. With the help of non-traditional "climate advocates" like trade unions, industry or religious groups, it is possible to reach out to citizens who normally have little or no contact with such issues. Hence, the impact of this approach is far greater than that of conventional information campaigns. By addressing recipients with personal and locally adapted messages with concrete information on how to take action themselves, a complex and abstract topic becomes comprehensible and relevant to local groups and individuals. Particularly the adaptation of NDC actions and measures to the local context opens up a potential for profound impact, as it establishes a specific relation to people's livelihoods and provides information on local engagement opportunities. Finally, it is envisaged to link the NDC Messenger with the SDG framework, capitalizing on economies of scale and making the approach even more valuable for the promotion of sustainable development issues.

Authors: Benjamin Schäfer (GIZ), Elizabeth Ouma (Government of Kenya), Allison Towle (UNDP)

This concept idea has been developed in the framework of the Thematic Working Group on Governance of the NDC Support Cluster.

10 / 2018

1 More information on this topic can be found in Kenya’s HIV/AIDS Strategic Framework as well as on the websites of NASCOP and UNAIDS.