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# IFPRI Communications Strategy

## **Objective**

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IFPRI's communications work seeks to increase the impact of the Institute's research and capacity strengthening activities by using appropriate means to engage key stakeholders in a continual dialogue that leads to sustainable solutions to the pressing problems of hunger and poverty.

Research can only affect policy in a significant way if it is appropriately communicated. Communications of research results can improve the quality of the debate on food policy issues and lead to better actions.

Research results can:

- confirm the appropriateness of policy actions taken;
- indicate that policy change is needed to reduce risks/costs or increase benefits/welfare;
- show in advance the probable outcomes of alternative policies and thus contribute to rational decisionmaking;
- offer synthesized information on how other policymakers have coped with an issue; and
- alert policymakers to major threats.

But research results only contribute their maximum value if policymakers understand them well and receive them at the right time. Research results that feed into the process when the policy agenda is being developed, when specific objectives and policy options are being identified and evaluated, and when recommendations are being advanced have the best chance of finding their way into the consensus-building, legislation, and policy implementation stages.

The degree of impact is a function of understandability, relevance, and timing: excellent research results that are well understood by key stakeholders and that reach them before decisions have been taken will have maximum impact.

IFPRI has impact when hungry and poor people in developing countries benefit from our research findings; when we engage in dialogue with all those who can use our research results and foster public awareness about food and nutrition security; and when key stakeholder groups in developing and developed countries turn to us as a prime contact for factual, timely, and competent information on all questions related to food and nutrition security, poverty eradication, and natural resource management as outlined in the 12 strategic themes of the Institute. The latter means of impact can take several forms: for example when policymakers and policy advisors in developing countries use our research findings as a basis for rational decisionmaking to fight hunger and poverty; when multilateral aid organizations turn to IFPRI to do research on vital food policy issues; and when NGOs, the mass media, and the private sector regard our Institute as the prime source for science-based input on food policy questions.

Impact on the decisionmaking process is not limited to the communications of results, but starts at the stage of agenda and priority setting of governments, NGOs, the media, and other key actors. Raising awareness before an issue becomes a crisis and helping stakeholders to identify their goals and priorities are also important objectives of IFPRI`s communications work.

A continual dialogue through a variety of communications vehicles ensures that policymakers can benefit from research and be more directly involved in identifying research goals and objectives. It leads to three positive outcomes for the institute:

- a constant reality check that IFPRI's research and programs focus on the needs of poor and hungry people in developing countries and contribute to sustainable solutions to poverty and hunger;
- a formal and informal role in influencing immediate decisionmaking; and
- long-lasting relationships that allow IFPRI to play a role in future agenda and priority setting.

Communications channels for reaching these and other audiences range from high-level personal dialogues with national policymakers (the direct approach) to engagement with the global mass media in order to influence policymaking via public opinion and its shapers (the indirect approach). The communications spectrum also includes printed material, the web page, conferences and workshops, and audio and audiovisual material. Communicating research results to each key stakeholder requires one or more communications channels.

Communications can only have impact if it is pursued as a continuous activity between key stakeholder groups and our researchers.

## **The Changing Face of Communications**

Science communications has often taken place within "closed expert systems": new knowledge is published in technical English and disseminated to a relatively small circle of (global) experts and insiders. The knowledge generated finds its mostly likely home in archives and libraries that members of an expert circle access. This model belongs to the past.

Today, many "closed expert systems" in science and research have developed into "open network systems" in which scientists have to communicate with lay persons for reasons of impact or simply for reasons of continued funding (partly a function of public understanding of science). In such systems, information flows both from the top down and bottom up, knowledge has to be accessible at all times and instantly, and lay people

want to know what is going on and have it explained to them in a language they can understand. An information environment such as this requires communications experts to work closely with scientists in order to cater to the needs of different audiences. The communications expert thus builds a bridge between the scientist and the need for accuracy and nuance on the one hand and the informed lay person and the need for clear, compelling, nonscientific information on the other.

For research to have an impact outside academic circles, which continue to comprise an important audience, research and communications competence have to go hand in hand.

State-of-the-art research needs state-of-the-art communications to achieve maximum impact.

IFPRI's communications work responds to the changing communications environment, continuously evolving to adapt to the needs of new or newly important stakeholders.

Over the past twenty years, new audiences in developing countries have not only been integrated into the Institute's outreach activities, but today policymakers and leading civil-society actors in developing countries are among IFPRI's major targets and partners. Younger audiences too (graduate and undergraduate students, for example)—the future scientists and policymakers/advisors—have also become part of our various communications strategies.

The years since the early 1990s have seen major changes in the application of computing. The increasing use of networks, particularly the Internet, has made it possible to share knowledge and information more easily, more quickly, and in greater quantities than ever before. Websites and Internet-accessible databases on specialized subjects are now available to a large community of potential users. Virtual workspaces allow an exchange of experience, information, and capacities between policy networks and those

working with information for policy formulation at an international, regional, or national level.

As the number of information and communications technology (ICT)-enabled knowledge and information services increases, the intended users risk being swamped with potentially useful sources of information. Emerging communications models should take into account the new opportunities that the Internet offers for knowledge and information sharing among research and policymaking communities. To meet these challenges will require building coherence among agricultural information and knowledge services and forums and using the Internet to:

- facilitate the exchange of information through virtual policy networks;
- disseminate research and promote communications through the web;
- build individual and institutional capacity via web-based approaches;
- review tools and approaches for dissemination and information exchange;
- strengthen communications and collaboration between and among the research, government, and educational communities;
- take a leadership role in the generation and dissemination of knowledge in IFPRI's areas of research; and
- work in collaboration with partner institutions on identifying and implementing shared ICT and knowledge-management standards.

Globalization and ICT uses are strongly linked. ICTs can be used to communicate views, raise funds, acquire information, monitor issues, and mobilize constituents. New ways of accessing and disseminating information have offered alternatives to hierarchies and led to more open decisionmaking. This implies a much greater emphasis on the interactive qualities of communications, rather than on one-directional use of communications channels.

## **Strategic Approach**

IFPRI regards communications as a key responsibility of every researcher. The Communications Division supports research staff in this vital activity.

Critical to any communications strategy are answers to these key questions:

1. What do we want to communicate?
2. With whom do we want to communicate?
3. How do we want to communicate?
4. When and where do we want to communicate?
5. How do we measure our impact ?

### **What do we want to communicate?**

The thematic content of our communications activities is outlined by the 12 strategic themes of the new IFPRI strategy. IFPRI is focusing its research activities and competence on these areas and it should focus its communications activities on these topics as well, at the institute, divisional, and project levels.

At the beginning of the year, the Communications Division develops a communications plan that outlines the communications activities the Institute wishes to emphasize. The plan is discussed by the Senior Management Team. This plan includes deadlines and responsibilities, key milestones, review dates, and costs.

Each research and outreach division then develops, with the support of the Communications Division, its yearly communications plan that outlines the communications activities it will prioritize in relation to the strategic themes it leads. These plans also include deadlines and responsibilities, key milestones, review dates, and costs.

Each new project proposal contains a communications platform that defines specific communications objectives and needs and earmarks the necessary resources to achieve and meet them.

The Communications Division supports researchers in the development of such project-specific communications platforms, helps them define audiences for their different research products, and assists them in disseminating their findings worldwide by creating appropriate communications tools.

### **With whom do we want to communicate?**

The Institute wants to communicate with key stakeholders. The composition of key stakeholder groups and the priority with which we address these groups will differ according to:

- type of communications activity (Institute-wide, divisional, or project-specific);
- area of research;
- phase of the project; and
- area of desired impact (national, regional, or global).

Key stakeholder groups may also differ in what they know about the issues and the Institute, its strategic themes, and specific projects. It is therefore important that research and communications staff differentiate these groups and continuously update their composition in in-house databases in line with the envisaged communications activities.

This stock taking is also important with regard to the “drivers” of new research agendas. These include the agencies of the United Nations and the World Trade Organization; donors with new national agendas; new intergovernmental networks such as the one on food safety; regional efforts such as the New Partnership for Africa’s Development; and new civil society and corporate organizations. The type of communications activity in response to these new agendas can range from presenting IFPRI as a good broker to promoting and evaluating new agendas in the context of the need to end hunger and poverty.

Strategic Goal: Undertake thorough stakeholder analyses to increase the impact of the work of the Institute and its divisions on strategic themes.
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IFPRI distinguishes in broad terms four stakeholder groups according to their prime interests:

- "*The Experts*," i.e. mainly an academic and expert audience that specializes in the research topic at hand. Experts have a keen interest in the research approach, the scientific methodology used, the results, and the detailed documentation on how they were obtained.
- "*The Insiders*," i.e. a group that has a professional interest in the research results and how they could best be translated into solutions for specific problems. This group includes, for example, national policy advisers who give their recommendations to policymakers, experts in the donor community, and other individuals who have a general academic interest in the research. For this group the methodology and reproducibility of the results are not of prime interest. Instead, they seek information that enables them to focus on the specifics of the results and the applicability of the findings to developing countries.
- "*The Interested*," i.e. a group of stakeholders that generally wants to form an opinion on key development issues based on sound research. Policymakers, students, and politically interested persons fall into this segment.
- The "*General Public*," i.e. lay people not familiar with the research subject and without professional or obvious interest in the subject matter. For this stakeholder segment the original research results have to be presented in highly condensed and simplified form, sometimes even at the level of sound bites. This group is reached primarily through the media.

Whereas the global language for the "experts" and "insiders" is English, communicating with the "interested" and the "general public" requires translations and local language skills. The Communications Division facilitates translation into other languages with regard to printed materials.

Strategic Goal: Receive top marks in surveys of all four customer segments at the Institute-wide, divisional, and project levels.
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### **How do we want to communicate?**

Depending on research content judged from a communications perspective, IFPRI makes an informed decision on the most appropriate channel for communicating with key stakeholders. The optimal communications channel will vary from project to project, from region to region, and from phase to phase of a given activity or project. The Institute's communications plan, the divisional communications plans, and the project-specific communications platforms will focus on the most suitable channels for achieving the highest impact. The suggested mix of channels—such as newsletters, conferences, workshops, formal receptions, list serve announcements, research reports, the website, regional seminars, and high-level discussions—will vary from project to project and is outlined in the respective communications plans.

To help researchers communicate directly with stakeholders, training, advice, and other relevant support are also provided on various presentational skills. This is part of an incentive system for researchers to communicate their results more effectively. It also enhances IFPRI's reputation and visibility.

Strategic Goal: IFPRI wants to be a leader in state-of-the-art science communications and will benchmark its activities with comparable institutions. We measure customer satisfaction at regular intervals.

### **When and where do we want to communicate?**

One of the major goals of IFPRI's communications work is to gain a thorough understanding of the various policy processes in major countries in order to better understand when and where (in which fora or at which national/international level) we want to communicate.

The establishment of links between policy and research communities, the undertaking of collaboration between IFPRI and other organizations, and the opening of offices in developing countries allow IFPRI to gain better insight into the political context of each country and to identify when and where

research findings are the most likely to be adopted or can change behaviors and thinking.

### **How do we measure our impact?**

IFPRI organizes a thorough audience survey every few years to gauge how effectively stakeholder groups are being served. In addition, on a regular basis, the Communications Division collates web statistics and other information, such as publication orders, related to stakeholder usage. Compilation of media coverage provides a picture of IFPRI's success in reaching the media and the broader public. Short surveys are part of every seminar, workshop, and conference.

It is one of the Communications Division's goals to improve two-way communications, especially via the web, and integrate feedback into communications activities.

### **Communications Structure**

IFPRI has adapted to the new communications environment, which requires messages adapted to more diverse and new audiences, greater speed and flexibility in disseminating information, and more interactive and high-tech approaches, by

- increasing the amount and type of communications support offered to research staff;
- making the Institute's knowledge easily accessible;
- creating an organizational structure (a Communications Division that collaborates closely with the research and outreach divisions) that enables communications with all stakeholder groups; and
- updating its line of communications products and channels to better serve the needs of a broader group of stakeholders.

The structure of the Communications Division reflects the aim to maximize the impact of research through communications:

### **Editorial Services**

IFPRI has earned its strong reputation through the excellence of its researchers and the publication of their research. Editorial Services publishes the peer-reviewed research of the Institute. It also adapts the intellectual output from the research and outreach divisions and markets it to the scientific and lay communities. This published outreach and marketing is done in various languages.

#### Strategic Goals:

- To help researchers find appropriate forms for communicating their research results.
- To establish effective publishing arrangements with other publishers and institutions.
- To identify and conceive communications tools in order to present IFPRI's research effectively to stakeholders worldwide.
- To contribute to IFPRI's visibility and reputation in the academic and policymaking communities.
- To make international public goods available nationally through translations.

### **Publication Services**

IFPRI's reputation is fostered by establishing and increasing visual recognition of its communications products through design that appropriately supports its mission and attracts and holds the attention of relevant stakeholder groups. Publication Services directs and administers the "corporate identity" of the Institute. It also collects and maintains contact information on target audiences (in English, Spanish, and French), disseminates IFPRI material, and promotes the Institute through exhibits.

**Strategic Goals:**

- To develop and prepare communications materials in a form that suits the needs of respective stakeholder groups, attracts their attention, and supports IFPRI's dialogue with them.
- To administer IFPRI's "corporate identity" in a way that sustains and expands IFPRI's reputation for excellence.
- To disseminate materials effectively and in a timely fashion.

**Media Relations**

State-of-the-art media relations ensure that IFPRI research reaches a broad audience. The Institute's media work focuses on reaching news outlets that influence policymakers and donors and bring research findings to the attention of decisionmakers who might not otherwise see them.

**Strategic Goals:**

- Create and strengthen relationships with high-profile journalists to assure continual coverage of IFPRI research in developing and developed countries.
- Establish IFPRI as a key source for journalists on a broad range of development issues.
- Ensure that IFPRI research projects receive positive media coverage to encourage policymakers to consider research results in their policies and donors to strengthen their support.
- Increase coverage in developing nations, especially those countries where it is most important to reach policymakers.
- Promote IFPRI research to media outlets with a focus on the Institute's enabling publics and a broad geographic reach.
- Support all research staff in articulating clear and compelling messages.

**Knowledge and Information Sharing (The Library)**

Information and knowledge management (The Library) supplies external information to research staff and contributes to preserving institutional memory through the development of and access to demand-based

information products and services, and to reducing unnecessary duplication of information around the institute. It seeks to improve the way that current and historical knowledge is supplied and used, extracting maximum value from knowledge developed within and outside the institute. The Knowledge and Information sharing unit provides leadership in scientific information management at institutional, regional, and international levels.

**Strategic Goals:**

- Provide leadership in institutional knowledge and information sharing by developing systems for information handling, access, conservation, and dissemination.
- Ensure efficient access to information through improved electronic systems and processes.
- Maximize access to published scientific information that meets the research needs of IFPRI staff and partners.
- Enhance global knowledge and information exchange through partnerships.

**Policy Seminars Program**

IFPRI also disseminates its research results and communicates with research partners through seminars, workshops, and conferences that have to be timed, marketed, and organized in a way that they attract the key audiences in an efficient and effective way.

Strategic Goal: Foster dialogue with key stakeholder groups through their participation in events on cutting-edge issues or methodologies.

**Collaboration**

***Director General's Office***

The Communications Division supports the Institute-wide communications activities of the Director General.

The Communications Division works closely with IFPRI's 2020 Vision Initiative. This initiative reaches high-level stakeholders of the Institute in all key sectors, including public, private, and civil society, primarily through targeted publications and organized forums for information and exchange. It also invests in identifying new stakeholders and building audiences for food policy research. The Initiative plays a vital role in detecting and shedding light on emerging issues—a critical element for proactive research and policymaking. However, understanding that it is not enough just to raise issues, it increasingly focuses on ways to facilitate action.

### ***Research and Outreach Divisions***

The Communications Division cooperates closely with the research and outreach divisions and supports their management and staff in all communications-related matters.

Research and outreach divisions, in cooperation with the Communications Division will nominate a person responsible for the communications activities related to the strategic themes, programs, and projects led by each division.

### ***Networking***

The Communications Division works closely with its sister centers, the Challenge Programs, the CGIAR secretariat (Marketing Group), and other international organizations to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of communications activities through joint efforts.

IFPRI looks out for external communications partners at the Institute, divisional, and project levels who can help to increase the impact of the Institute.

### ***Regional Aspects***

IFPRI offices in developing countries offer a great opportunity to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of communications activities in the host

countries. These offices can also serve as communications hubs for the surrounding region or continent.

IFPRI offices that are managed by a research and outreach division receive their communications support from the communications liaison person in the respective division and through close cooperation with the Communications Division.

Multi-divisional IFPRI offices will have to assess the best way to optimize their increasing communications activities with the resources available to perform these tasks. The spectrum could go from a researcher dedicating part of his/her time to communications activities, to hiring an external communications agency, to a full-time internal communications specialist, serving the country, region, or continent.

The increasing number of offices also makes internal communications more challenging. The Communications Division faces the task of building relationships and a sense of community amongst staff posted across continents.

### ***Internal Communications***

Currently the Communications Division works closely with the Senior Management Team, the research and outreach divisions, and Computer Services to ensure that IFPRI staff all over the world are informed on key issues and updated in a timely manner. A monthly e-letter from the director general to the staff keeps all employees not only informed about recent achievements and new strategic orientations, but fosters trust.

Efficient and effective internal communications goes beyond consistent information sharing: IFPRI's increasingly decentralized structure is prompting the Institute to think about improving its internal communications tools, such as the intranet.

There is also the challenge of sharing external information on best practices, possible collaboration, and opportunities for impact in ways that build on and

extend the work of the Library.

Strategic Goal: IFPRI will monitor the quality of its internal communications through regular staff surveys.

## **Resources**

Communications at IFPRI is financed from three sources:

- on institute-wide issues through unrestricted funds;
- on divisional and project-related issues through restricted funds; and
- through money raised for specific communications projects.

## **Outlook**

To have impact, communications, research, and capacity strengthening must work hand-in-hand to effectively reach and communicate with all key stakeholders. Armed with research results they find useful and understandable, stakeholders can improve the quality of the public debate and policymakers are more likely to make decisions that increase national and international wealth and improve the lives of poor people. Effective communications of state-of-the-art research to policymakers, the media, and other groups will help to ensure that decisions on food policy issues do not become prey to misguided populism or irrationality but lead to “sustainable solutions for ending hunger and poverty.”