



NAP
Global
Network

Key Recommendations for Communicating Climate Change in Tonga

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ABOUT THE NAP GLOBAL NETWORK

The NAP Global Network was created in 2014 to support developing countries in advancing their NAP processes and help accelerate adaptation efforts around the world. To achieve this, the Network facilitates sustained South–South peer learning and exchange, supports national-level action on NAP development and implementation, and enhances bilateral support for adaptation and climate-sensitive sectors through donor coordination. Financial support for the Network has been provided by Austria, Canada, Germany, and the United States. The Secretariat is hosted by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). For more information, visit www.napglobalnetwork.org.

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Introduction

On March 25 and 26, 2021, the Government of Tonga—with support from the International Institute for Sustainable Development—organized a media briefing and workshop on communicating climate change adaptation. The Department of Climate Change, Information and Communication Division and JNAP Secretariat under the Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications (MEIDECC) hosted the half-day media briefing, while two consultants conducted a full-day workshop for all relevant communications and media officers from the government, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. The two overall objectives for the events were to:

1. Gain a strong understanding of climate change adaptation and how the Tongan government's climate strategies support Tongans to adapt and build their climate resilience.
2. Build strong skills and knowledge on how to communicate key messages about adaptation and resilience in Tonga with different audiences through various communication channels.



Key Challenges Identified

During the two-day deliberations, a few key challenges were identified, some of which are listed below:

- There is insufficient data to define the public's awareness of climate change adaptation and the Government of Tonga's strategies.
- There has been only minimal engagement with the mainstream media in communicating key climate change messages.
- Social media is very much underestimated in its influence and public reach due to negative experiences with it.
- Communication officers of all levels have not been sufficiently trained on how to properly communicate climate change adaptation and resilience messages for different audiences.
- There is very little information on climate change available in the Tongan language.
- Climate change terms and messages may still be too technical to be understood by the average person.
- Time(s) must be allocated for media briefings and training.

Below are summaries of the workshop consultants' key recommendations based on the two-day deliberations under each objective of the workshop and the media briefing.



Summary of Key Recommendations

1. Understanding of Climate Change Adaptation and How the Tongan Government's Climate Strategies Support Tongans to Adapt and Build Climate Resilience

1.1 REGULAR ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND THE MEDIA THROUGH BRIEFINGS, TRAININGS, AND PRESS CONFERENCES ON CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE

The media briefing opened a great opportunity for dialogue and engagement between government and media representatives. Most of the media outlets discovered for the first time the structure, roles, and Tonga's strategies for building climate resilience. The briefing brought to light the need for government to engage more regularly with the media and the general public through training, press conferences, or regular briefings and updates. Media representatives did admit that they are not well aware of climate change, and only a few were aware of the government's strategies for climate change adaptation and resilience.

This is a golden opportunity for the government to continue engaging with the public through various media outlets and thereby increase the public's understanding of climate change. Continuous efforts to maintain these briefings, trainings, and press conferences regularly will be ideal so that the climate change messages, plans, and strategies become a topic of daily conversation amongst Tongans.

1.2 GOVERNMENT TO FORMALLY ESTABLISH AND FOLLOW UP ON ENGAGEMENT WITH THE MEDIA

It was acknowledged through the media briefing that this is the first time the government has engaged with the media only in terms of climate change. Although there is a communications division within the government, the mainstream media covers a lot more of the population and caters to diverse audiences throughout Tonga.

In previous years, the mainstream media mainly provided coverage on climate change projects and events, but there has been no formal agreement or understanding on how to partner and work together. Because climate change is a fundamental issue affecting the livelihood of all Tongans, it is important that the media be formally engaged in communicating messages to the general public. This workshop and briefing marked a significant milestone, as it was an initial step to acknowledgement and recognition of this role. The challenge will be for both parties to establish a formal agreement on how to best move forward and to follow up on this engagement.

1.3 DEVELOP A GUIDE OR HANDBOOK FOR MORE ACCURATE AND CONSISTENT COVERAGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND STRATEGIES

As there are different types, platforms, and audiences for communication within the media industry, a guide or handbook is recommended for more accurate reporting and consistency in communicating climate change messages.

It is recommended that government would take the initiative in defining, translating, and developing a basic handbook that would communicate key climate change terms and messages in Tongan. The handbook could formally outline how reporters can be more accurate in reporting and can avoid misleading the public.

1.4 CONDUCT A BASELINE SURVEY TO FIND OUT PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDING AND AWARENESS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

One challenge commonly shared in the workshop was the lack of data and research findings on people's level of awareness and understanding of climate change in Tonga. Although a lot of data is available in terms of climate change strategies and adaptation activities, there is none that would communicate people's level of understanding and awareness. A lot of assumptions are made with no solid evidence when it comes to discussing people's views and their level of understanding regarding climate change. A baseline survey is a crucial element in defining, designing, and communicating climate change messages throughout Tonga. Clearly, funding and resources will have to be mobilized for such a task, but it would make a tremendous difference in how we communicate climate change.

1.5 MORE PROGRAMS AND INCENTIVES FOR VARIOUS AUDIENCES

As a follow-up to engagement with the media, it is also recommended that government initiate more programs and incentives catering to various audiences and provide a variety of engaging content on climate change. These could then be easily distributed on social media or used in various awareness and outreach programs for climate change.

For instance, artwork, short videos, songs, and other creative outlets or healthy competitions may be used as incentives to encourage dialogue, publicize research, and raise more awareness on climate change. Having fun programs that would regularly raise awareness will help a lot more with distributing messages of climate change for diverse audiences.

2. Communicating Key Messages About Adaptation and Resilience in Tonga with Different Audiences Through Various Communication Channels

2.1 INCREASED, REGULAR, AND CONTINUOUS WORKSHOPS AND TRAININGS HOSTED BY THE MEDIA FOR COMMUNICATION OFFICERS

This workshop was a great initiative from the government to allow mainstream media and social media consultants to train communication officers from various government and non-government stakeholders. Similar trainings and workshops are recommended for ongoing dialogues, sharing of ideas, experiences, and best practices on how to communicate key messages to different audiences. Allowing media representatives from various backgrounds to lead the training will definitely assist communication officers on how to be more creative in their approach.

2.2 COMMUNICATION OFFICERS WHO ARE INNOVATIVE AND CREATIVE IN THEIR APPROACH

Having communication officers who are well versed in climate change helps a lot in tackling the issue. To move forward and progress better in communication calls for officers who are innovative and creative in their approaches. Partnering with the media for ongoing training will ensure communication officers are equipped with the skills, knowledge, and creativity to find solutions and capture captivating stories that will move the public to act in their various sectors of influence.

2.3 KEY MESSAGES ON CLIMATE CHANGE NEED TO BE CONTEXTUALIZED FOR MORE RELEVANT CONTENT AND INCREASED UNDERSTANDING

Similar to the mainstream media pleading for a handbook for guidance, public interest and awareness would greatly increase if climate change messages were contextualized to the local context and available in the local language. To do this would begin with a translation of all key messages into the Tongan language. Allowing room for traditional knowledge and narratives to be woven into the key messages of climate change will also be very helpful. This will ensure more engagement, understanding, and ongoing dialogue on climate change resilience and adaptation.

2.4 MORE TIME AND TRAINING TO DEVELOP COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND KEY MESSAGES TAILORED TO VARIOUS AUDIENCES

A follow-up to recommendation 2.3 would be allowing more time for dialogue and for the development of communication strategies and key messages. Although the workshop was quite successful in equipping participants with the knowledge and skills to develop their own, it would have more impact to develop them together for a more integrated and refined communication approach. This will also allow the participants to take home a blueprint for developing their own organization's communication strategies for any relevant issue in their line of work.

2.5 REGULAR AND UPDATED WEEKLY PROGRAMS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR TO BUILD MOMENTUM TO BE HIGHLIGHTED DURING CLIMATE CHANGE WEEK IN SEPTEMBER

Similar to what was recommended in 1.5, more programs should be designed and implemented throughout the year to build momentum and lead up to Climate Change Week. Programs may range from spot advertisements to photographs, real-life stories, radio call-in shows, television panels, or a collection of articles. Various stakeholders may also be encouraged to bring solutions to the various climate change challenges in different sectors such as fisheries, agriculture, education and so forth as outlined in the *Joint National Action Plan 2 on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (JNAP) 2* document. Websites, blogs, and other means of awareness raising and dissemination may also be explored to ensure everyone is reached when communicating messages of climate change resilience and adaptation.

2.6 GREATER UTILIZATION OF VARIOUS MEDIA OUTLETS (ESPECIALLY SOCIAL MEDIA) FOR COMMUNICATION

There is still misunderstanding and uncertainty amongst communication officers when it comes to social media. Questions regarding its credibility and the number of negative materials circulated there are significant. However, to dismiss social media—and its major influence on the Tongan people—would be a disservice to the media and those working in climate change. Although mainstream media caters to various audiences, the daily use of social media nationally cannot be underestimated. More training and awareness on how to engage this user-friendly and cost-effective tool will assist in reaching more audiences locally and internationally.



3. Technical Aspects of the Workshop

3.1 MORE TIME FOR TRAINING OVER AN EXTENDED PERIOD

Although this workshop was a great first step, we highly recommend that similar workshops take place regularly over an extended period in the future. The content covered in the one-day workshop was a bit tight and condensed given the timeframe. We would recommend having similar workshop content in the future but for the training to be split into half-days and spread out for at least a week. This will allow for a more in-depth discussion and give participants the opportunity to interact and practically apply the skills acquired.

3.2 Follow-up assignments and certificates

In the future, it is recommended that participants be certified with the specific skills they have been trained in throughout the duration of the workshop. Achieving this not only requires more time for the workshop but also time that would allow practical application of what was covered in the training. For instance, participants could be given time to write their own press releases, find interesting stories to highlight climate change adaptation and resilience, and so forth. This will also ensure that there is application and relevance to each participant's background and workplace.





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