Environmental Science and Policy xxx (xxxx) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Environmental Science and Policy

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/envsci

Lessons from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on inclusiveness across geographies and stakeholders

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Science-policy interface
Science advisory bodies
Climate change
IPCC
Global environmental governance
Stakeholder participation

ABSTRACT

There have been many calls in policy and academia for more inclusiveness in science-policy interfaces, but there is as yet insufficient clarity as to what such inclusiveness means and how to achieve it in the context of international organisations. This paper analyses how inclusive the IPCC is across geographies and stakeholders. Building on the distinction between access and active participation, it examines the involvement of developing countries and NGOs in the Panel's assessment process.

The analysis shows that more inclusive institutional set-ups in international science-policy organisations do not automatically lead to greater credibility, salience and legitimacy of knowledge production processes (Mitchell et al., 2006). For instance, inclusive access does not per se guarantee active participation as the latter depends on a variety of factors including resources and the capacity of actors to engage. Furthermore, in institutional contexts the idea of inclusiveness is necessarily subject to operational interpretations. How these interpretations relate to the representativeness of those who participate in the process affects the relevance of knowledge to its users' needs. Finally, there are political elements to inclusiveness as more powerful actors may be unwilling to renegotiate the balance of power to expand access to stakeholders.

The paper concludes that these nuances should be taken into account in the IPCC and other international science-policy institutions. It also urges the Panel to address the developing country participation gap and explore institutional avenues for expanding access to non-state stakeholders in order to increase the credibility, salience and legitimacy of its processes and shift to solutions-oriented assessments.

1. Introduction

Inclusiveness, or openness, seems to be a commonly accepted expectation – and in some cases an explicit requirement – for the science-policy interface.[1] Academic literature argues that the production of science in a more inclusive way achieves greater legitimacy and influence (Gupta et al., 2012). The call for inclusivity is furthermore signified by a new – implementation – phase following the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement in 2015. To respond to this shift, there is a need to improve the evaluation of solutions such as policies, regulations, instruments and technologies in the provision of scientific advice, including through global environmental assessments (Kowarsch et al., 2017). This will require related processes to better incorporate diverse views and perspectives as well as multiple stakeholders.

Although recent literature has already begun to expand our understanding of what inclusiveness in science production and science-policy interface means and how it can be achieved (Esguerra et al., 2016; Klenk et al., 2015; Kohler, 2006; van der Hel, 2016), there is still insufficient evidence of how it works. For instance, the questions of how inclusiveness can be operationalised in the institutional context of the UN and what consequences a particular participation setup has for institutional effectiveness remain largely unanswered. It is this gap in the literature that the paper addresses through analysis of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), arguably the most well-known international science-policy organisation.

Inclusiveness is a generic category which allows for multiple interpretations. Inclusiveness in science-policy interfaces can be understood as the involvement of actors across multiple axes: scientific schools; scientific disciplines (interdisciplinarity); types of stakeholders (governments, non- governmental organisations (NGOs), the private sector, local communities and others); countries/regions; gender; and age; to name just a few dimensions. Without discounting the value of other angles, this paper limits its analysis to just two aspects:

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[1] For instance, the 2016 Science-Policy Forum held under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) Environment Programme concluded that the science-policy interface should strive for 'a geographical and expert balance and an inclusive co-design process', explicitly address 'traditional and indigenous knowledge, and citizen science' and strengthen 'interdisciplinarity in the natural and social and environmental sciences' (UN Environment Programme, 2016, p. 2).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2017.04.005
Received 26 July 2016; Received in revised form 10 April 2017; Accepted 12 April 2017

geographies and stakeholders, which in the IPCC context primarily refer to the role of developing countries and NGOs, respectively.

In analysing how inclusive the IPCC is across geographies and stakeholders, this paper makes a distinction between access and participation: while access refers to institutional arrangements through which actors may take part in the work of an international organisation, participation means 'making use of these institutional venues' (Tallberg et al., 2013, p. 8).

The ultimate aim here is not only to understand whether access to the Panel is inclusive across geographies and stakeholders but also to illuminate how specific institutional arrangements for inclusiveness relate to the Panel's effectiveness in successfully influencing policy – or in other words its credibility, salience and legitimacy (Mitchell et al., 2006).

The empirical evidence consists of documentary material, participant observations and interview data. The documentary material comprises official documentation by the IPCC related to the governance of the Panel and meeting documents, and proceedings of IPCC meetings published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development Reporting Services. Participant observations cover the meetings of the Panel in its Fourth and Fifth Assessments from 2007 to 2013[2] and inform the conclusions on participation by developing countries and NGOs. The conclusions set out in the paper relating to NGO involvement and the obstacles to developing country engagement are also informed by interview data collected during 2006 to 2009. Although the Panel has undergone important institutional reforms in response to the review by the Inter-Academy Council since then, these did not touch on the issues of geographical representation or stakeholder inclusion, and therefore the interview data remains relevant. The paper also utilises existing empirical research, in particular on developing country representation in respect of authorship in the IPCC.

I will begin by outlining the analytical framework. This involves explaining the difference between access to and participation in international organisations, discussing the current debates on inclusive international science-policy institutions and summarising the research on the credibility, salience and legitimacy of global environmental assessments, as well as providing a brief introduction to the IPCC. The paper then moves on to a discussion of developing countries' access and participation, followed by discussion of non-state actors' access to and participation in the assessment process. The paper continues by discussing the complex dynamics between institutional arrangements for inclusiveness and the credibility, salience and legitimacy of the IPCC's assessments. In light of these, the concluding section contains suggestions as to how the IPCC's assessment process can be opened up.

2. Analytical framework

2.1. Access to and participation in international organisations

Academic scholarship indicates that international cooperation has undergone transformation from interstate to more open governance over the past few decades and hence international organisations have increasingly become more inclusive, for instance through the involvement of transnational actors – NGOs, social movements and the private sector (Bäckstrand, 2015; Tallberg et al., 2013, p. 1).

Consequently, this paper utilises a distinction between access to and participation in international organisations. Access is an important dimension because it serves as a pre- condition for contributing and influencing global governance (Tallberg et al., 2013 p. 8). Access is formally defined in treaties, rules of procedure and decisions and informally developed through institutional practices (Tallberg et al., 2013, p. 8). For analytical purposes, it is useful to examine access in terms of depth of access (level of involvement) and the range of actors engaged (are all actors entitled to participate or only a subset according to some criteria?) (Tallberg et al., 2013, p. 8). High access implies deep involvement, extends to a broad range of actors on a permanent basis, and is difficult to revoke; while low access means shallow involvement, extends only to a narrow subset of actors, is temporary in nature, and can be easily revoked (adapted from Tallberg et al., 2013, p. 28).

2.2. Inclusiveness in international science-policy organisations

Geographical inclusiveness in the IPCC primarily refers to the involvement of developing countries. The analysis focuses on both governments and authors, and therefore stands in contrast to most research, which tends to address geographical representation across IPCC authorship only (e.g., Biermann, 2006; Corbera et al., 2016; Ho-Lem et al., 2011). It may be regarded as important to include governments in the analysis because they are engaged in the co-production of assessment reports by contributing to scoping, review, and 'political negotiation of its key scientific messages' (Gupta et al., 2012, p. 86). Extending the focus to developing country governments can also help one to understand why the Panel adopts Northern framings[3] and fails to address the pressing needs of developing countries, as some scholars have argued (Biermann, 2006; Lahsen, 2004).

As for stakeholder inclusiveness, due to the global nature of climate change and the important role of the IPCC in synthesising the science behind it, potentially everyone can be viewed as a stakeholder with regard to its assessments. Scientists and governments are embedded in the IPCC's institutional design and their role has been subject to extensive discussion in the literature (Haas and Stevens, 2011; Hulme and Mahony, 2010; Lidskog and Sundqvist, 2014; Siebenhüner, 2003). However, whether and how stakeholders of a non-governmental nature are involved in the IPCC's work remains an open question.

Bodies and agencies of both a governmental and non-governmental nature can become IPCC observers. The Panel's current list of observers distinguishes between intergovernmental organisations, NGOs, observer entities and UN bodies and agencies (IPCC, 2016a). Accordingly, the paper focuses on NGOs.

Stakeholder inclusion has been discussed extensively in relation to the production of scientific knowledge for policy use. This can be placed within the context of a wider debate on the changing role of science in response to a new type of policy issue – 'wicked' problems characterised by a high level of complexity and uncertainty, high stakes involved in decision-making and normative conflicts (Rittel and Webber, 1973). Some authors have, therefore, proposed that a new means of production of knowledge is needed, one which explicitly acknowledges deep uncertainties and the plurality of relevant perspectives, and engages diverse stakeholders including non- scientific actors (Bäckstrand, 2003; Funtowicz and Ravetz, 1996).

Inclusive participation also refers to the framework of co-production originating in science and technology studies. In this framework, knowledge and social order are produced together, and hence 'knowledge and its material embodiments are at once products of social work and constitutive of forms of social life' (Jasanoff, 2004, p. 2). Research also refers to the concept of co-production in a practical way as the involvement of non-scientific actors in knowledge production (Klenk et al., 2015; van der Hel, 2016).

Finally, it is worth noting that the call for more inclusiveness in the science-policy interface comes with different normative underpinnings (Lövbrand, 2014, p. 173). For some, a more transparent and participatory form of knowledge production will help bridge the widening gap between science and society; while others view inclusive participation through the lens of democracy (Lövbrand, 2014, p. 173; Miller, 2007, p.

[2] A full list of the meetings attended is included in the Supplementary material.

[3] Referring to issues being framed and conceptualised from the perspective of developed countries.