

IUFRO ENLARGED BOARD
VIRTUAL MEETING
9 -11 September 2020



Draft IUFRO Strategic Communications Plan 2020-2024 - Background Information

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The draft IUFRO Strategic Communications Plan 2020-2024 aims to provide strategic guidance for strengthening IUFRO communications and identifies measures to be taken in the next four years and beyond. **This plan is an internal IUFRO document and shall be part of the broader IUFRO Strategy Action Plan 2019-2024 serving for internal guidance.**

The document is the outcome of a meeting on IUFRO communications held at IUFRO Headquarters on 22 January 2020. The meeting brought together Senior IUFRO officeholders, members of IUFRO Headquarters and external communication experts¹. For the meeting, two background documents had been prepared: an overview of current IUFRO communications activities (see annex), and a discussion paper based on previous communication plans.

¹ Meeting participants:

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DRAFT IUFRO Strategic Communications Plan 2020-2024

Vision, Mission and Main Messages

The vision of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) has so far been to “interconnect forests, science and people” as the leading global network of forest-related research that serves the needs of all forest scientists, research organizations and decision-makers, and will be changed into the vision of IUFRO as “the global voice of forest science promoting a sustainable future of forests and society” IUFRO’s mission is to advance research excellence and knowledge sharing globally and to foster science-based solutions to challenges related to forests to the benefit of forests and people worldwide.

Communication is considered an essential element in pursuing the vision and achieving the mission of IUFRO. Therefore, the need to increase communication is recognized in the IUFRO Strategy, which defines the following goals:

GOAL 1 – RESEARCH EXCELLENCE: STRIVE FOR QUALITY, RELEVANCE AND SYNERGIES

- Improve capacities for quality science cooperation
- Identify emerging areas of research
- Increase interdisciplinary cooperation

GOAL 2 – NETWORKING: INCREASE EQUITY, INCLUSIVENESS AND COMMUNICATION

- Improve communication within the network
- Further diversify participation in IUFRO structure
- Expand and strengthen member base

GOAL 3 – IMPACT: VISIBILITY, OUTREACH AND SCIENCE-BASED OPTIONS

- Further enhance IUFRO’s impact on policy processes
- Strengthen science-society interaction
- Enhance global forestry education

In addition to being a goal in its own right, communication contributes to the achievement of all other aforementioned goals especially by aiming to:

- raise the organization’s visibility
- consolidate its reputation as trustworthy source for information related to forest science
- provide a knowledge base for more informed decision making
- attract new member organizations
- recruit new voluntary officeholders
- expand strategic partnerships
- increase the organization’s financial base by attracting new donors

Following the vision, mission and strategy, three main messages can be formulated for IUFRO:

- IUFRO offers solutions and scientific knowledge that contributes to solving forest-related problems globally
- IUFRO fosters collaboration between all who have an interest in and focus on forests, trees and forest products
- IUFRO promotes research excellence to provide the best available knowledge for decision making on all levels

Strengths and Weaknesses

IUFRO is the only world-wide international organization devoted to forest and tree related sciences. More than 600 Member Organizations, more than 700 officeholders and an estimated total of 15,000 scientists in more than 120 countries of the world form the basis of the organization.

IUFRO is a large and relatively loose network organization, in which involvement is voluntary. Because of this, IUFRO depends on the initiative and willingness of its members and officeholders to share information and speak on behalf of IUFRO. Many members and officeholders do not identify themselves sufficiently with the organization, which limits IUFRO communications impact.

IUFRO is open to all individuals and organizations dedicated to forest and forest products research and related disciplines. It offers opportunities to collaborate in a wide range of research fields related to forests, trees and forest products.

The variety of members and stakeholders makes it difficult to find a one-size-fits-all approach in communication. IUFRO offers a good mix of communication tools and products, but these are usually distributed to the widest possible group of recipients. Due to the diversity of target audiences and the lack of resources at IUFRO HQ it is currently difficult to target recipients for particular communications and to produce more customized communications products.

IUFRO is a non-profit, non-governmental and non-discriminatory organization with a long tradition dating back to 1892. Over the past 20 years, it has managed to establish itself as a strong partner in global policy processes, especially with the United Nations, and as a reliable source of sound scientific knowledge.

Yet, IUFRO is relatively unknown outside the world of forest science and global forest-related policy making. Non-forest scientists and the general public as well as policy makers on regional and local levels are hardly aware of IUFRO. Nor has IUFRO managed to establish itself as a strong partner with media and journalists. Also, IUFRO does not have a sufficiently strong and long-term financial basis to step up communication activities on a grand scale.

Opportunities and Threats

Due to the climate crisis and related challenges for forests and trees, forest topics have moved up on the media agenda and receive much more public attention than only a few years ago. Also, the expectations on science to find feasible solutions are rising.

At the same time a lot of deliberately misleading or poorly informed messages are being spread and influence public opinion. Also, as more scientific information becomes publicly available through the internet, the public interpretation of such information deserves increasing attention by the scientific community.

New information and communication technologies have significantly enhanced the provision and sharing of forest-related information worldwide.

However, the infrastructure (technical facilities, Internet access and speed etc.) needed for good communication may not be available in all regions in which IUFRO members are located. In addition, some member organizations may have stricter communication and publishing policies and target audiences than others. IUFRO member organizations also work under very diverse political, cultural and financial situations.

Forest-related scientific knowledge and its application create benefits for society. At the same time, through active participation in decision-making on funding and other science related policies, society itself can influence forest science and the forest research agenda. Effective communication is therefore indispensable for the science community to be heard and provided with adequate resources to fulfill its role.

IUFRO finds itself in a busy and highly competitive international environment, especially with respect to funding. In the forest sector, several international forest research organizations and networks have emerged over the past years and offer possibilities of forest science cooperation with a regional or thematic focus. While this may provide opportunities for cooperation, IUFRO has to face up to the competition in order not to lose relevance.

In addition, as a result of the more fragmented forest agenda, an increasing amount of forest research is being carried out by research institutions and scientists outside the traditional forest sector that may not have heard

of IUFRO. This can be both a threat and an opportunity. However, IUFRO should definitely see it as an opportunity to broaden its member base and increase the involvement of these forest-related scientists.

Internal Communication –Target Audiences, Challenges and Improvement Measures

Good internal communication is a prerequisite for successful external communication. As IUFRO is a network organization, it strongly relies on the input and engagement of the network members, i.e. Member Organizations and officeholders. IUFRO, in turn, offers more publicity and networking opportunities for its Members, among other things. In addition, IUFRO seeks to broaden its membership base and recruit new officeholders also from scientific fields outside traditional forest science.

Target audiences:

- Member Organizations
- IUFRO officeholders and members of IUFRO Units
- Non-IUFRO scientists who have been or could get involved in IUFRO activities

Challenges:

Communication distributed by IUFRO Headquarters to Member Organizations is often not shared with scientists of the organization. This means that the intended cascade communication does not work sufficiently well.

- Member Organizations often do not use the opportunity to spread information through IUFRO. On the one hand, they do not see the benefit of it. On the other hand, they do not want to use IUFRO as a channel or mention IUFRO in their own communication, because they understand IUFRO as a competitor that draws attention away from them.
- Although officeholders have made a commitment to set aside time for their position in IUFRO, they often do not find enough time and support for their IUFRO tasks. Many of them do not have a strong enough sense of belonging to IUFRO, i.e. they often do not mention IUFRO or include IUFRO in the communication about their achievements. Furthermore, Member Organizations often do not give enough support to officeholders who are employed with them.
- Reaching out to scientists outside IUFRO is difficult. It is hard to identify them and get their contact details. Potential new IUFRO scientists hardly get in contact with the established network. Officeholders/organizers of activities/meetings have more direct and personal contact with such scientists and should therefore be encouraged to take on this task.

Improvement Measures:

Established communication activities include regular website announcements, IUFRO News, IUFRO Spotlights, Annual Reports, social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, blog, to a lesser extent LinkedIn), occasional media releases, as well as thank you letters for officeholders involved in organizing IUFRO meetings.

In addition to these, a number of measures shall be taken in the course of the next four years:

- The IUFRO President and HQ to **intensify regular communication with Member Organizations and the International Council**; provide them with updates on IUFRO activities and with PR material (logo, poster, membership certificates, anniversary certificates) for display.

IUFRO HQ, with the help of officeholders, to **systematically identify communication experts** at the Member Organizations. Communications officers can become focal points of mutual information sharing. If there are no communication experts at an organization, the persons registered as contact points should be reminded regularly of their tasks(e.g., forwarding IUFRO News and emails to the

members/scientists of his/her organization; sharing member organization's events, news, job posting, etc. to IUFRO HQ). Also, regular checking with the contact persons for their continuation in the role or for learning about any changes is needed to ensure that the communication channels still function.

- IUFRO HQ, with the help of officeholders, to **identify officeholders in IUFRO Units** who have a strong interest in communication and could serve as “**spokespersons**”, multipliers and media contacts for a specific topic or region.
- **International Council representatives** to communicate more frequently with the Member Organizations in their countries. This task has been included in their Terms of Reference.
- **Directors' Forum** to become active in preparing the ground at Member Organizations for more support to and visibility of IUFRO activities and better information exchange. This would include regular contact with the head of each member organization (e.g., annually) to 1) thank them for being a member, 2) provide a list of IUFRO officeholders participating from their organizations, 3) recognize their activities in IUFRO, and perhaps 4) positive impacts that IUFRO and their employees make.
- IUFRO HQ, together with the IUFRO Board, to do **systematic research to identify potential member organizations** and non-forest scientists who may want to become engaged in IUFRO activities and contact them, providing a good “sales pitch” at the same time.
- IUFRO HQ to establish a **procedure that ensures that non-IUFRO scientists** who have been involved in IUFRO activities – e.g. authors of GFEP assessment reports, Task Force members, early/midcareer scientists who have received support under the SAP to attend meetings or do an internship with IUFRO, others – **stay informed and ideally get involved as officeholders**.
- IUFRO HQ together with officeholders and strategic partners (students, member organizations, international organizations) to **develop and strengthen mentoring activities** with a view to recruiting young scientists as officeholders.
- IUFRO HQ to provide an IUFRO **communication toolkit** including key messages, logos, information on membership benefits, videos, infographics with facts and figures, etc. These tools, many of which are already available, should be used primarily by IUFRO members and officeholders.
- Look into the possibility of increasing additional social networking services (such as WeChat or Weibo)
- **Redevelopment of the IUFRO website** in consultation with the Board to identify their needs, also with a view to improving internal communication.
- Preparation of short **tutorials** (Powerpoint or video) to guide through the website and explain website features.
- IUFRO HQ to make an **addition to the IUFRO website to facilitate the first contact** with the organization. This shall be a visually attractive webpage with basic information on “who we are”, “what we do” and “how to get involved”. The core piece of this page would be information about the IUFRO Research Themes that will be summarized in an easy-to-read style and offer information on how IUFRO is actively contributing to finding solutions to forest-related problems.
- Examine the possibility and cost-benefit ratio of purchasing a large-scale webinar/digital conferencing tool to enable broader participation in meetings.

External Communication – Target Audiences, Challenges and Improvement Measures

As mentioned above, good internal communication paves the way for successful external communication. Therefore, many of the measures identified above will also help to achieve external communication goals such

as raising the organization’s visibility, and providing a knowledge base for more informed decision making in policy and practice.

Target audiences

- Global policy and decision makers
- **Regional and national policy and decision makers in particular donor countries**
- Strategic partners who can act as multipliers (e.g. students, member organizations, international organizations, private sector, **national academies of science and international forest-related societies**)
- Special and general media in selected countries, depending on the specific content of communication

The general public is not considered as a main target audience, because it is too broad a group and the financial and staff equipment of IUFRO is not sufficient to reach out in a purposeful and efficient way. It would imply building strong relationships with media and journalists in different countries, tough competition for attention, quick response capacities and tailored messages in different languages.

To a certain extent the general public or rather an “interested public” can be reached by social media as they are more “permeable” in terms of recipients and make it possible to reach out to wider audiences with less effort.

Challenges

- The communication to and with policy makers at a global level is being rated as a success, but **resource implications** are relatively high as they include, among other things, the frequent participation at international conferences.
- Communication to and with **policy makers at national and regional levels** was less intensive because of insufficient dedicated networking projects and funding as well as the occasional lack of local relevance of some of the global forest-related topics.
- The identification and collaboration with strategic partners has also been quite successful. It is, however, difficult to **ensure that these partners will really take on the role of multipliers**, and also to identify partners outside the realm of forest science.
- As regards the outreach to technical and general media in selected countries, a systematic approach including the **establishment of relationships with journalists is still lacking**. In addition, **resource implications** of continuous media outreach and the timely reaction to media representatives who contact IUFRO on short notice remains a challenge.

Improvement Measures

- IUFRO HQ to develop **more targeted communication tools** (e.g. for NGOs, stakeholders), such as booklets, background information, policy briefs or issue briefs and have them translated into other languages (mainly French, German and Spanish), if needed.
- IUFRO HQ to **consult with communication experts** from IUFRO Units (e.g. 9.01.02 - Communication and public relations and 9.01.07 - Forests and the media) and benefit from their expertise.
- IUFRO HQ and senior officeholders to **motivate successful cooperation partners to share good experience** about collaborating with IUFRO and **formalize communication partnerships** with strategic partners/member organizations who can act as multipliers.
- IUFRO to **continue with building up good social media presence** (has been done with great success so far) to reach out to wider audiences on their preferred channels (especially youth) and to be “social”

by sharing information from strategic partners. Invite officeholders to actively follow and share the IUFRO social media accounts and mention @iufro in their posts related to IUFRO.

- IUFRO HQ to **identify scientists who are willing to act as “spokespersons”** for the media on specific topics (also see above under internal communication), especially also in their own countries and languages. Some guidance and/or training from IUFRO communication experts could be provided also with a view to preparing media briefs and policy briefs.
- IUFRO HQ to work towards **building a good network of journalists** mainly in German speaking countries (especially Austria as the IUFRO host country and Germany as a major donor country).
- IUFRO HQ to **develop a media toolkit for journalists**, follow-up the communication with journalists who have already picked up news about IUFRO activities, and offer journalists background information (e.g. develop GFIS further as a resource and one-stop shop for the media on forest science issues).
- **Policy makers at the regional level** shall be targeted more specifically, especially through regional activities of GFEP as part of the new partnership agreement with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, as well as through thematic networking and the development of the new science/practice program in the framework of SPDC.
- IUFRO HQ and senior officeholders to look into the idea of **creating an IUFRO presidential award** for bringing forest-related science into policy making.

Action Plan and Resource Implications

Current division of communication tasks at IUFRO HQ:

The IUFRO Communication Strategy takes a holistic approach to communication activities as there are many ways of sharing information and interacting with target audiences. Communication-related tasks are therefore part of the terms of reference of almost all IUFRO HQ members.

Consequently, the following overview of tasks encompasses not only the typical communicator’s work (news sharing through various channels, public and media relations, strengthening the brand, etc.) but also important tasks that support these core activities (translation services, design/layout/editing of printed and digital materials, etc.) as well as activities specifically aimed at developing stronger or new relationships with members and relevant institutions and individuals.

1 HQ staff, 36 hours/week:	<i>Gerda Wolfrum</i> , Coordinator PR & Communication, IUFRO Publications and Translation, Global Forest Expert Panels (GFEP) Communication (newsletter, branding, media relations, event-based communication)
1 HQ staff, 32 hours/week:	<i>Brigitte Burger</i> , IUFRO Web Manager, Communication and Social Media (website, social media, officeholder communication)
1 HQ staff, 20 hours/week:	<i>Janice Burns</i> , Thematic Networking Manager, Special Programme for Development of Capacities (IUFRO-SPDC) internal communications with partners, IUFRO Units, and individual scientists/meeting organisers
1 HQ staff, 20 hours/week:	<i>Lena Lackner</i> , Global Forest Expert Panels (GFEP) Project Manager (communication with partners and individual scientists, branding)
1 HQ staff, 6 hours/week:	<i>Eva Schimpf</i> , Project Management and Translation Services, Special Programme for Development of Capacities (IUFRO-SPDC) (SPDC website, publications)

1 contracted science writer: *Bob Burt*
 IUFRO Spotlight

Event-based or project-based contracts for layout/editing/media services/printing

Note: Communication with Board members, International Council members, other officeholders, stakeholders, partners, translation/editing/layout services, and representation of IUFRO at events shared between several HQ members.

A comprehensive **list of current communication activities** can be provided for reference.

Actions for additional or improved internal and external communication

In the following table seven main clusters of actions have been identified and described. A detailed list of these actions can be provided for reference in a **comprehensive table of communication actions**. (The actions grouped below are reflected by colors and numbering in the detailed table.)

Note: Expenses are based on estimates (1 consultant day @ 500€ / 1 hr/wk/yr staff time @ 1,500€ / 1 training unit @ 500€).

Internal Communication

	ACTION	ACTOR	METHOD	ONE-TIME EXPENSES	RECURRING EXPENSES/YEAR
1	Redevelop website	HQ in consultation with Board	Develop roadmap; discuss with Board; prepare content; contract web company	100,000€ min.	25,000€ web maintenance
2	Motivate officeholders to share more news and identify more with IUFRO	Board, HQ	Regular communication; develop toolkit, messages; provide useful website features, website tutorials; create communication award	25,000€ (50 consultant days)	18,000€ equivalent to 12 hrs/wk staff time
3	Increase identification of Member Organizations with IUFRO	President, IC, Directors Forum, HQ	Intensify communication, provide PR products, website features, identify communicators at MOs	-	13,500€ equivalent to 9 hrs/wk staff time; 5,000€ (printing, mailing)
4	Training of HQ staff	IUFRO HQ	Improve comms and technical skills		5,000€

External Communication

	ACTION	ACTOR	METHOD	ONE-TIME EXPENSES	RECURRING EXPENSES/YEAR
5	Attract external audiences online	HQ	Design homepage as “shopping window”; tailor social media activity to target audiences	2,500€ (5 consultant days)	12,000€ equivalent to 8 hrs/wk staff time
6	Recruit new members	Board, HQ, officeholders	Systematic search to find potential members; mentoring for students, young scientists; engaging scientists who work with IUFRO but are not members; targeted products; office holders at events	10,000€ (20 consultant days)	77,000€: 50,000€ of which are partner-financed 27,000€ of which are equivalent to 18 hrs/wk staff time

7	Intensify media outreach	HQ, Board, officeholders	Prepare event-related media toolkits; build relationships with journalists; build communication partnerships e.g. with MOs; identify officeholders as spokespeople for media	15,000€ (30 consultant days)	30,000€ equivalent to 20 hrs/wk staff time 20,000€ (travel, consultant)
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Consequently, additional requirements of staff and finances (rounded) are:

Staff time requirements:

20-25 hrs/wk: seconded by Member Organization (for communication with Member Organization, support to Directors’ Forum)

40-45 hrs/wk: one additional full-time position *or* one additional part-time position plus working hours distributed among HQ staff members

Total Staff: ca. 60-70 hours/week

Other expenses:

One-time expenses: ca. 150,000€

Recurring/annual: ca. 50,000€

Total other: ca. 200,000€ (including 1-time and recurring annual expenses)

Over the next four years the aforementioned activities shall be initiated and/or completed, and evaluated at the end of the Board term. In order to be successful, IUFRO HQ strongly relies on the support of IUFRO officeholders, especially the Board members and International Council members, to help mobilize the network and secure the necessary funds. IUFRO HQ also needs further resources to expand its capacities.

Measures that should be taken to mobilize funds:

- Systematically include communications costs in efforts to mobilize donor funds
- Consult with the MC and Board on how the necessary funds or staff time could be mobilized