

# Communication



**An instrument of environmental policy**

## Communication can be an important policy instrument

Scientific research shows that communication has always played an important role when governments have been successful in implementing their environmental policies. Policy instruments work better if they are properly communicated to the respective target groups. Figure 1 shows the policy instruments on which governments have to draw to implement environmental policy. Depending on circumstances communication can be used alone or in a mix with other instruments.

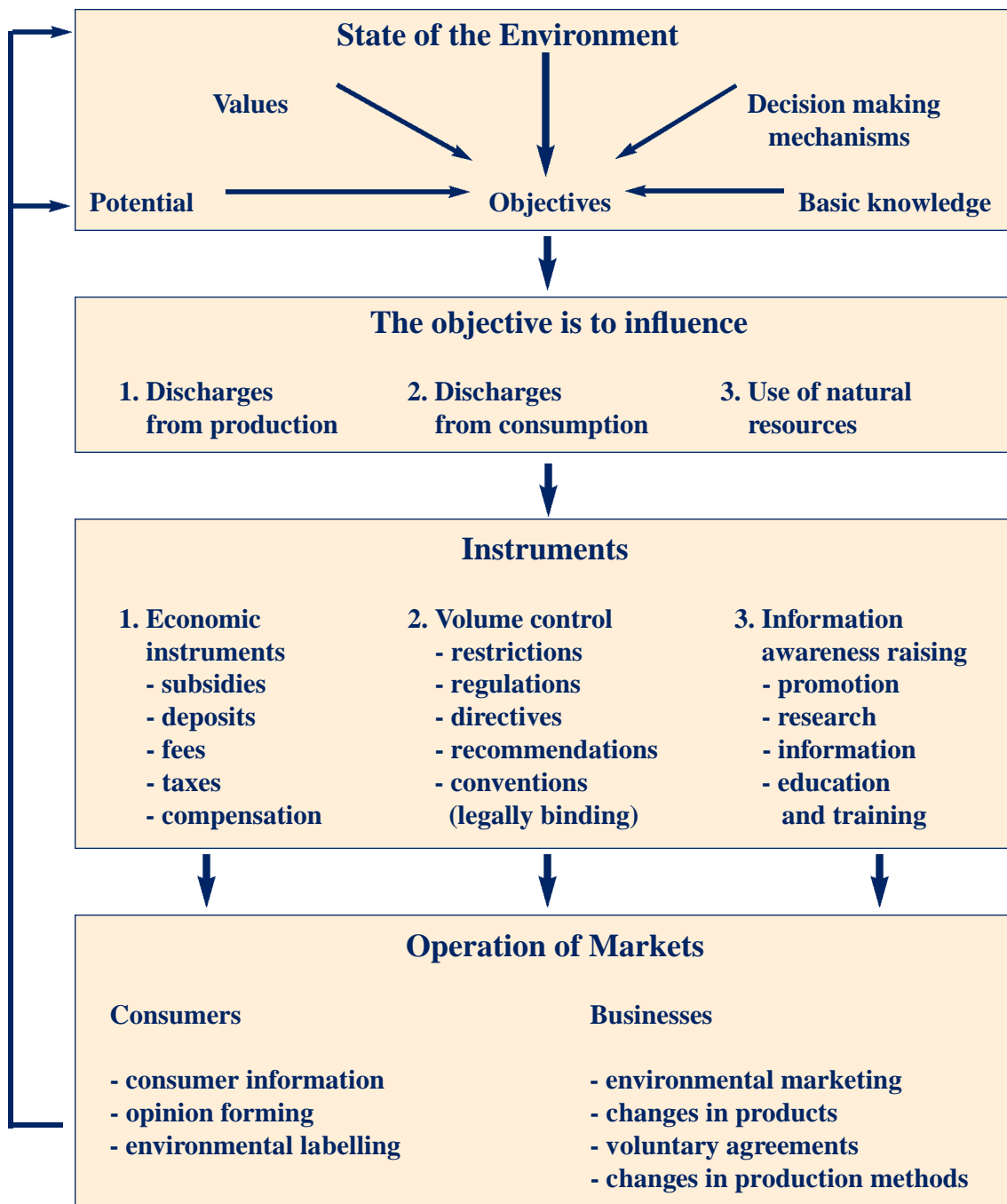


Figure 1 Hierarchy of instruments for sustainable development from “Finnish Action for Sustainable Development”, Ministry of the Environment of Finland (p. 132).

Communication can help increase knowledge, raise awareness and change attitudes and / or behaviour. An information campaign can make individuals aware of their responsibility for the environment and create a solid base for environment policy in the community. Education can stimulate the learning process and help children and people in general to make environmentally responsible behaviour part of their everyday lives.

Figure 2 shows what communication experts bring under the umbrella of the concept which we call communication.

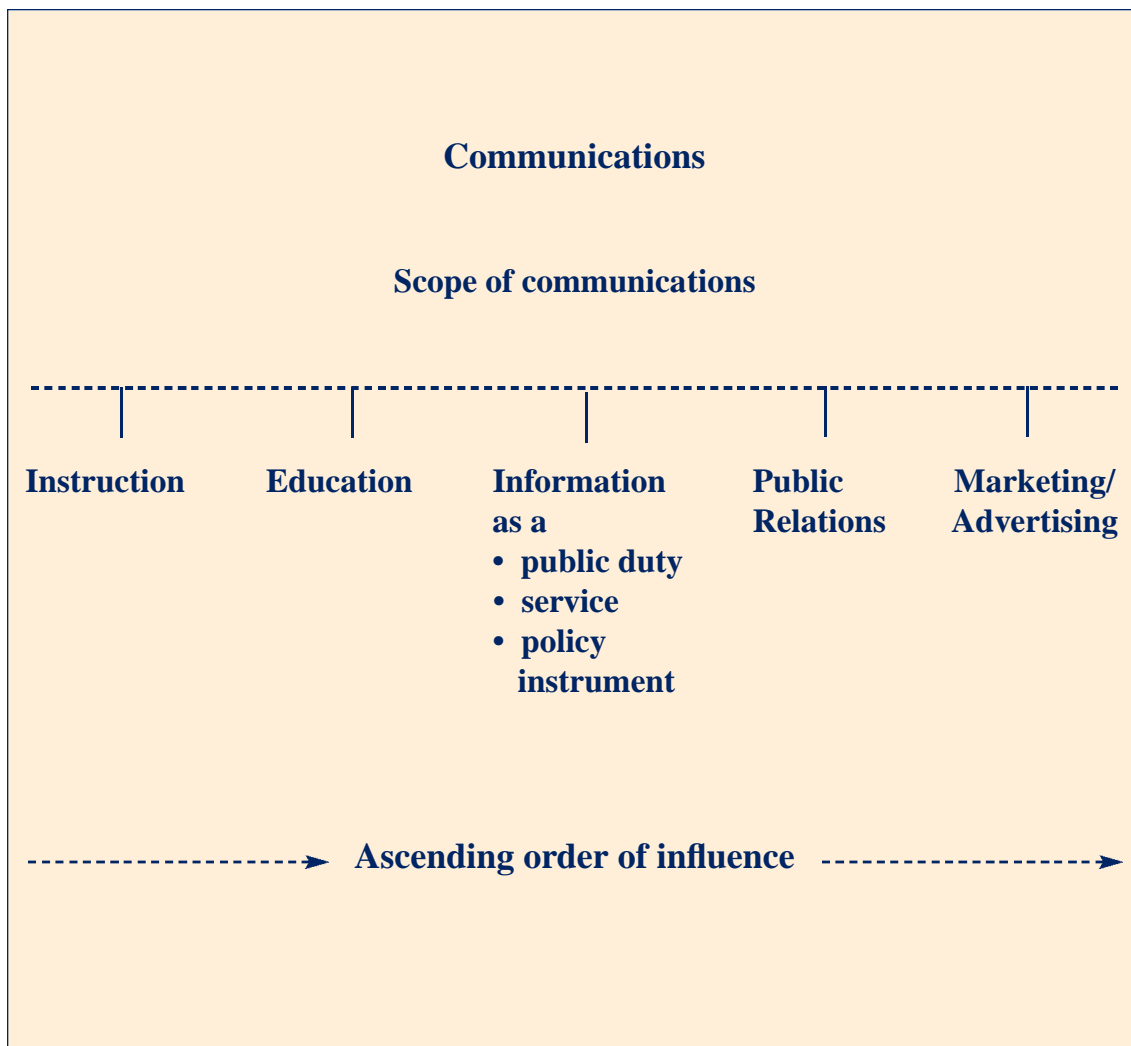


Figure 2 Areas of communications.

Communication as a separate instrument can be successful where not many obstacles exist to change behaviour towards more environmentally friendly practices. But research shows that communication has a better chance of success if it is combined with other instruments such as legislation or financial instruments. Especially when the aim is to change attitudes and behaviour.

## The policy process

Research and public affairs studies in different countries have revealed that policy making is a cyclic process of basically four main stages:

- identifying the issue: or agenda setting
- formulating the policy
- implementing the solutions
- management and control.

Communication has a different significance and plays different roles in each of these stages. Figure 3 shows the role of the government in the phases of the policy cycle. During the identification phase the government's role increases gradually, reaching a peak at the end of formulating the policy. Thereafter there is a slow decrease in the government's involvement as parties other than the government must take action, reflecting a higher degree of public self regulation. These include local authorities, the business community, industry, NGOs as well as consumers.

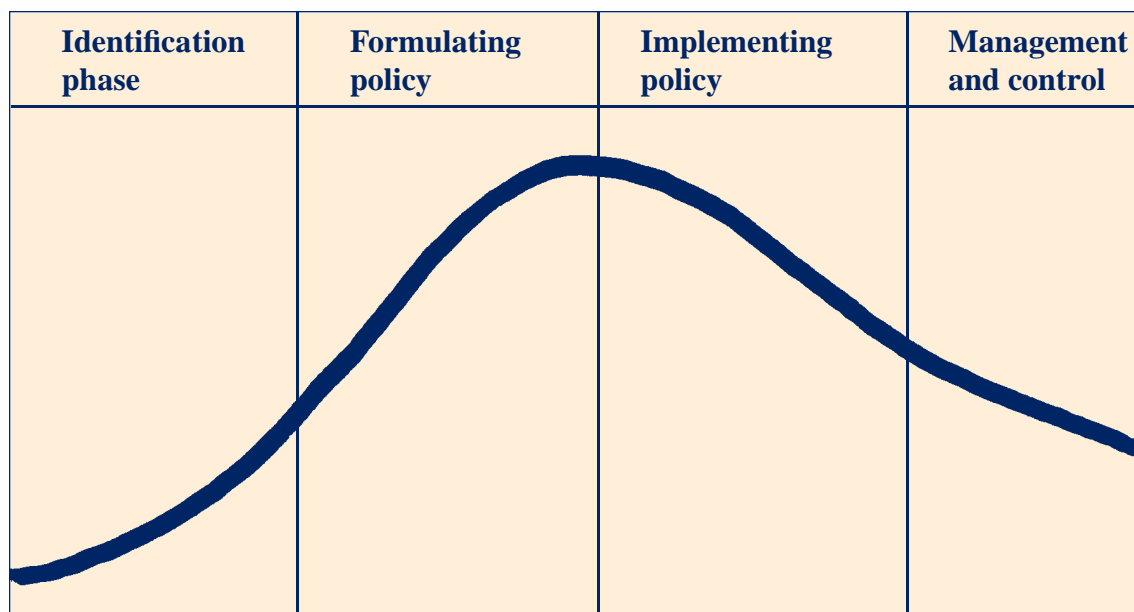


Figure 3 The role of government during different phases of the policy life cycle.

## Communication in the policy cycle

### Identification phase

At this stage the role of communications is to place environmental issues on the agenda. Various organisations in society play an important part here. The central government adopts a relatively low profile. Communication services need to listen to what people are saying so that they can identify problems promptly and pin point specific issues affecting the target groups of environmental policy. At this stage activities also involve communicating opinions, drawing attention to the issues, mobilising support and defining themes.

The methods of communication used in this phase are:

- regular opinion and attitude surveys
- mass media content analysis
- management by speech
- systematic and continuous network with NGO, interest groups and scientific institutions (public relations)
- regular briefings and interviews and meetings with interest groups and the press

### **Formulating environmental policy**

At this stage activities can raise public awareness of environmental problems, increase the public's understanding of the policy proposals and create broadly based support for the issues. The problems tackled are those which legislators have accepted but for which solutions have not yet been found. At this stage the target groups are opinion leaders, decision makers and the general public.

The methods of communication are:

- knowledge/ attitude/practice (KAP) surveys
- integrating communication in the mix of policy instruments
- design of a communication strategy
- communication to /consultation with those who will be involved (public relations)

### **Implementing environmental policy**

The aim at this stage is to communicate information about how to proceed. The idea is to communicate the substance of policy and the accompanying measures. At this stage communication will be mainly aimed at specific target groups.

Methods of communication:

- information campaigns
- specific information materials
- marketing and advertising
- instruction
- education
- consultation of target groups (public relations)

### **Management and control**

Here communication is provided as a service to sustain newly adopted attitudes and behaviour. The aim is to provide information about the policy that is being pursued as well as feedback reactions to that policy. Communication may be in the form of an active service explaining complex legislation and regulations. It may also be used to announce modifications to policy instruments, for example legislation.

Methods of communication:

- monitoring and communication of results
- regular opinion and attitude surveys
- informing on changes of policy design and implementation
- education

Figure 4 summarises the methods of communication in the different phases of the policy life cycle.

Policy Life-cycle Phase	Methods of communication
<b>Identification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- regular opinion /attitude surveys</li> <li>- mass media content analysis</li> <li>- analysis of communication materials of NGOs, consumer groups</li> <li>- systematic and continuous network with NGOs interest groups, scientific institutions</li> <li>- regular briefings/ interviews and meetings with interest groups</li> </ul>
<b>Formulating Policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- knowledge/ attitude/practice (KAP) surveys</li> <li>- integrating communication in the mix of policy instruments</li> <li>- design of communication strategy</li> <li>- informative extension/communication to disclose issues and policy options to those who will get involved</li> </ul>
<b>Implementing Policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- communication as an independent instrument</li> <li>- communication complementary to other instruments</li> <li>- informing groups on the use of other instruments (news, laws, subsidies etc)</li> <li>- ex-ante evaluation through qualitative research</li> </ul>
<b>Management and Control</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- public information</li> <li>- informing on changes of policy design and implementation</li> <li>- regular opinion/ attitude surveys (since age-linked target groups are replaced by younger generations)</li> </ul>

Figure 4 Summary of how methods of communication vary in different phases of the policy cycle (Winsemius 1985).

## Planning environmental communication

Most of the communication activities should be planned well ahead. A strategy should define the following elements (shown in figure 5): an analysis of the issues, the role of communication in solving the issues, determining who it is important to reach (target groups), the message, how this is most effectively delivered, (means/media), the budget, organisation and evaluation.

### Steps to prepare a communication strategy

1. Analysis of issues
2. Outline the role of communication
3. Determination of target groups
4. Determination of communication targets
5. Determination of strategy/ message
6. Determination of means
7. Budget
8. Organisation
9. Plan
10. Evaluation

*Figure 5 The elements of a communication strategy*

When education is part of the strategy you have to take into account the different modes of education and the specific educational systems you are dealing with. Integrating environmental education into the school system takes a rather long time and a special strategy to approach the different actors in the formal education system. Before all students in a country can benefit more than ten years of intensive effort and investment are needed.

## Internal communication

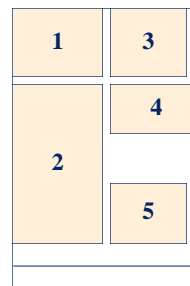
External communication: communication with the world outside your organisation has been described above. Internal communication, communication within your organisation, is as important, if not more so. This includes instruction, information, public relations, training, management by walking around and face to face communication. The most important aims of internal communication are to create support for the organisation's mission and policy and provide staff with knowledge and motivation. It is intended to make sure that everyone's energy is focused in the same direction. Your own people are your best ambassadors and sales force for your plans, policies and activities.

### Cover

The success of environmental policies depends on how well people are willing to take responsibility for their environment. Communication instruments provide a basis to stimulate the willingness of people to change practices and attitudes and enable them to participate in environmental management in the various aspects of life.

### Photos

1. WWF by Roger Le Guen
2. WHO photo by J. Mohr
3. WHO photo by P. Almasy
4. WHO photo by E. Schwab
5. G. Nizzola



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