



Fact Sheet

[The Challenge to Change: COP16 Survey on Climate and Communications]

A survey released by the government of Mexico and the Pew Center on Global Climate Change reveals COP16 attendees' attitudes on key issues when it comes to climate change, including the biggest barriers to action, the most trusted and effective sources for information on the issue, and the need for activating the general public. Nearly all those gathered for the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Cancun believe that real international action on climate change will not happen without strong public support, yet most also believe that the general public doesn't understand the meaning of "climate change."

Running out of time

When it comes to the human impact on climate change, COP16 attendees say that we are already suffering some irreversible impacts.

- The majority (56%) believe that irreversible harm has already been done to the planet.
- Over half (54%) say that we are currently at a standstill in our efforts to limit human influences on climate change.
- Eight in ten conference participants (83%) believe that countries will only undertake ambitious efforts to address climate change once they are actually suffering from the real consequences.
- Nearly nine in ten (88%) agree that if we do not address climate change now, it will eventually become a trigger for global conflict and possibly war.

Perceived economic impact viewed as top barrier to increased engagement

- Nine in ten conference participants (90%) agree that the global recession has made nations less willing to invest in addressing climate change, with over half (54%) saying that they strongly agree.
- COP16 attendees report that the biggest barriers to governments taking effective joint action on climate change are the unwillingness to jeopardize industrial growth (64%) and take political risks at home (63%).
 - This sentiment is more prominent in developed countries than in developing countries.

More involvement needed from all stakeholders

When asked what constituencies need to be more involved, respondents ranked the general public number one, ahead of heads of state, business, NGOs and UN organizations.

- The overwhelming majority of conference participants (94%) agree that climate change initiatives can only be effective with broad support from governments, business, NGOs, scientists and the public, with a full seven in ten (70%) strongly agreeing with this statement.
- Conference participants report that there needs to be considerably more involvement by all parties, particularly the general public (84%), local community leaders (83%), and country leaders (83%).
 - Participants from developing countries are significantly more likely than those from developed countries to believe environmental NGOs and global organizations (UN, World Bank, WHO) should be more involved in climate change initiatives.

Engaging the public viewed as essential to effective action on climate change

Although many COP16 attendees deem the activation of the general public as important to elevating the issue of climate change, attendees agree that the public currently has a limited understanding of climate change and needs more education on the issue.

- Nearly all conference participants (94%) agree that real action on climate change will never be made at the international governmental level without strong public support, with nearly two-thirds (64%) strongly agreeing with this statement.
- However, six in ten conference participants (58%) believe that the general public does not understand the meaning of "climate change." Only 5% said the public understands it "very well."



Media play a crucial role in activating the general public

The survey revealed mixed views on the role of the mainstream media.

- Over three-quarters of COP16 attendees (76%) report that the most effective means of reaching the general public to communicate about the need for global action to reduce the human impact on climate change is through mainstream media like television, newspapers, and magazines. Social media is also viewed as an effective means of reaching the public by nearly half of survey respondents (46%).
- Yet, when asked to identify “the most trusted voices on the scale and impact of climate change globally,” only 24% named the media. A strong majority (87%) blamed unskillful media and opinion leaders for a lack of public understanding of climate change science.
- Despite recent controversies over climate science, most respondents (66%) identified scientists as among the most trusted voices, well ahead of global organizations like the UN (42%), NGOs (41%), governments (24%) and business leaders (13%).

Key to effective change

- The majority of conference participants believe that the most compelling cases for the need to address climate change are stories of human suffering due to extreme weather such as drought or floods (65%) and evidence that climate change will negatively affect the economy (54%).

About the Survey

The government of Mexico and the Pew Center on Global Climate Change commissioned a survey that gathered insights from COP16 attendees from around the world on their attitudes toward climate change. The study of 503 COP16 participants who completed the survey was conducted via iPad and paper surveys between November 27-30, 2010. Survey respondents included NGO representatives, government delegates, business leaders, bloggers, climate change experts, and think tank representatives who attended the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Cancun, Mexico. Only credentialed COP16 participants were included in the survey.

About Pew Center on Global Climate Change

The US-based Pew Center on Global Climate Change brings together business leaders, policy makers, scientists, and other experts to bring a new approach to a complex and often controversial issue. Our approach is based on sound science, straight talk, and a belief that we can work together to protect the climate while sustaining economic growth. Over the past ten years, the Pew Center has issued over 100 reports from top-tier researchers on key climate topics such as economic and environmental impacts and practical domestic and international policy solutions. The Pew Center plays an active role in bringing people together to discuss policy frameworks and workable solutions to climate change.

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