Interdisciplinary collaboration in the development of IPCC report glossaries

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The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) produces assessment reports on climate change, spanning physical climate science, climate impacts and adaptation, and mitigation. These reports draw upon scientific, technical and socio-economic information and are produced by interdisciplinary and international author teams. The reports, including their glossaries, are used by diverse audiences across the natural and social sciences, policy and practice, and education. IPCC report glossaries are an invaluable resource in their own right, covering the domains of each report and providing rigorous definitions for terms that are oft-used in public discourse.

The IPCC is currently in its Sixth Assessment Cycle (AR6), for which it has already released three Special Reports, and is currently preparing three Working Group (WG) Reports and a Synthesis Report to be released in 2021/22. Since each report and report chapter is written by a different author team, ensuring consistency in approach and conclusions across and within each report represents a key challenge. An important contribution towards achieving consistency is the development of single definitions for terms to be used across several reports. To facilitate the development of such definitions, the IPCC Secretariat and Technical Support Units have created custom software for internal author use, termed the Collaborative Online Glossary System (COGS). In addition, a public portal for IPCC glossaries (https://apps.ipcc.ch/glossary/) has been developed, where AR5 and approved AR6 report glossaries are hosted and can be readily searched. Here we discuss these tools within the context of interdisciplinary collaboration in climate change assessment. We also highlight the benefits of having consistent definitions when working more broadly at the water-energy-land nexus.