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A GUIDE TO DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS PLANS

This document presents for information purposes, a step-by-step guide to support national-level project implementation and communications planning efforts. The document is presented to the committee its consideration and review.

Developing National Communications Plans¹

In project implementation, the importance of a project's inception phase is commonly known. Although the role of communication is often not well considered in the inception stage, usually communication is considered only after plans, policies or projects are prepared. Practice has indicated that this strongly reduces the potential for successful project implementation. Importantly, communication is part of the entire policy and strategy implementation process.

What is strategic communication?

- *Strategic communication* is planned and accomplishes a purpose.
- *Strategic communication* is targeted to a particular audience or audiences.
- *Strategic communication* is designed and delivered to produce the desired outcomes which may be changes in policy, practices of an organisation or individual behaviour.
- *Strategic communication* aims to achieve results with the best possible use of time and resources.

Ten Steps for Planning

The 10 steps for planning:

1. Analysis of the issue and the role of communication.
2. Selecting target groups/audiences and stakeholders.
3. Determining the communication targets.
4. Developing the strategy and selecting partners.
5. Determining the messages.
6. Selecting the communication means.
7. Organising communication and briefing partners.
8. Planning (in terms of mile-stones and activities).
9. Budgeting of activities.
10. Monitoring and evaluation.

Step 1: Analyse the problem

Understanding the real issues underpins designing a communications strategy. Insights of the causes and effects is crucial to convince target groups of specific issues that need to be addressed. Some guiding questions, include:

- What is the extent of the issue in qualitative and quantitative terms?
- Is the issue urgent?
- What is the context and causes of the issue?
- Which activities cause the biodiversity?
- Who is responsible for the causes and activities?

¹ This guide is adapted, and in parts extracted from: Frits Hesselink, Wendy Goldstein, Peter Paul van Kempen, Tommy Garnett and Jinie Dela, (2007). *Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA): A Toolkit for National Focal Points and NBSAP Coordinators*. Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, IUCN Commission on Education and Communication, Montreal, Canada.

- Who is interested in the activities?
- What is the role of communications?

Step 2: Selecting target groups

For an effective communications strategy, it is crucial to know who your relevant target groups are. Reaching the wrong people with the right message will have no effect; reaching the right people with the wrong message will not realize your aim. The questions below may guide your target group selection:

- Which target groups are involved?
- Who is directly affected by the plan or activity?
- What is the composition of these groups in terms of demographic character (age, income, religion, gender, education and lifestyle)?
- What roles or positions can be distinguished in the target group?
- What interests do the target groups have regarding the problem and solutions?
- Who will benefit? Who will suffer damage or loss?
- What level of knowledge do target groups have of the problem and solutions?
- What is the attitude of the target group towards the problem and towards proposed solutions?
- Can you expect resistance for change?
- Who is not directly involved, but can influence opinions?
- What relationship does your organisation have with the target groups? How do they perceive you?
- What communication means do they use?
- Is it possible to use intermediary organisations to reach the target groups?

Step 3: Determining communications targets

To achieve the changes in people that are required to reach your biodiversity conservation objectives communication in most cases will need to be used in combination with other instruments. In any project there are communication targets which are different from the biodiversity conservation targets, though each is related.

Communication targets should be:

- Clear about the results to be achieved, be specific and measurable;
- Realistic, feasible and acceptable;
- About motivating a change in knowledge, attitudes or behaviour by being neither too ambitious nor too 'weak';
- Indicating when the results should be achieved.

Targets can range from involving people in problem solving, to seeking attention for an issue, increasing knowledge or awareness, motivating behaviour or developing skills to take action.

Example: Communication objectives

Target	Change in:
80% of car drivers should be aware that public transport is better for the environment than driving.	Knowledge
A local community living around a protected area should appreciate the need to protect a specific species which is threatened with extinction.	Attitude
Hotels on the island should welcome the introduction of a system of eco-labels and a system of training, control and regulation.	Attitude

75% of government officials working in departments which have an impact on the environment should take the specific measures into account when formulating plans.	Behaviour
50% of directors of large extractive industries and 25% of medium size companies should integrate biodiversity issues in their business plans and mission.	Behaviour

Step 4: Strategy development and partnerships

Advantages of working with intermediaries:

- It can be more economical.
- Intermediaries can have data bases on the target group to help reach them effectively.
- Intermediaries can have support from a large audience or have grass root support.
- Intermediaries can have a reliable, solid image for the target group and authority based on expertise.

Disadvantage of working with intermediaries:

- There can be lack control of the message.
- There can be a lack of control on the way the target group is approached.
- There can be lack of control on communication planning and the entire communication process.

Overcoming disadvantages:

- Weighing the pros and cons of using intermediaries for each specific situation and selecting the most effective strategy.
- Developing good relationships with organisations with similar missions, or with organisations with missions and activities that can strengthen your own.

Step 5: Messaging

How to formulate a communication message:

1. The message must connect to the image and identity of the sender. If this is not the case, the communication will lack credibility.
2. The target group must understand and accept the message in order for it to be effective. So the message must connect to the characteristics of the target group: the existing knowledge, attitude, level of education, lifestyle, interests and their involvement in the problem and solutions, etc.
3. The message must connect to the communication strategy. Furthermore, the message should reflect the strategic approach: be informative, emotional or action oriented.
4. *'The medium is the message'* is critical. It is a fact that the combination of media and messages can either strengthen the effects of communication or weaken it. For instance, when a government distributes a brochure with the message that it values the opinions of local communities concerning wildlife conservation and these communities have never been listened to by the government, the message will lack credibility. However if that message is told by a group of government representatives when visiting a village meeting where the locals are invited to tell what's on their mind and share their ideas, it will be much more convincing.

Step 6: Selecting communications means

The choice of means to communicate the message depends on the communication targets, the characteristics of the target group, the message, the budget and your experience with the means.

Interpersonal means make direct contact between the communicating parties and take many forms.

Interpersonal

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogues, face to face conversation • Group discussions • Conferences • Symposia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tours • Home visits • Round tables • Exhibitions • Meetings • Workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone calls • e-mail information service (question and answer) • Internet debate
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Advantages

- Every situation is unique because there is interaction;
- There is flexibility because during a dialogue or a meeting one can change the tone of voice, the strategy and the content of the communication and tailor it to the specific situation.

Mass media

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newspapers • Press releases • Magazines • Newsletters • Manuals • Brochures, booklets, flyers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters • Radio • Tapes • Television • Video • Posters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stickers • Banners • Billboards • CD Rom • Website
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Disadvantages

- The message is 'fixed';
- There is little flexibility for change once launched.

Advantages

- Can reach large audiences;
- Uses the credibility of the mass media.

Step 7: Organising communication and briefing partners

For your communication to be effective, a great deal depends on organisation. A clear division of tasks and responsibilities for your communication team is essential for success. If these prerequisites are not met, you will risk missing vital steps and deadlines. It will not be clear how the team will operate and how their activities are coordinated.

Frequently made mistakes in communication planning:

Experts often do most of the communication activities by themselves to keep control over all the communication to make sure that the information is valid and facts and figures are correct.

This may not be effective when experts:

- Are viewed by the audience as being 'on the other side' to them. Those audiences will then not listen.
- Lack skills to translate the message to the specific audiences.

- Do not have the knowledge or skills to organize interactive meetings, etc.
- It may be better to manage the process and delegate communication interventions to specialists and organisations that can multiply the message through their constituencies and networks.

Step 8: Planning

Motto: “Communicate *internally*, before communicating externally.”

A clear schematic overview works best, specifying who does what, when. Sometimes it can be useful to make two plans: one for the preparation of the communication activities, one for the execution phase of the communication.

In some cases the planning needs to be in great detail, in other cases a rough outline is sufficient. During the planning phases various milestones are set.

Some Do’s for planning:

- Be realistic in the amount of time needed by taking into account the time to reach the project outputs AND also the time and inputs needed for the organisational process. This is especially important when working with partners and intermediaries.
- Allocate adequate time for planning your communication.
- Allocate time for internal communication.
- Take into account the skills of the manager responsible for implementation.

Checklist: Failure factors in communication planning

- Insufficient use of status/progress reports.
- Inadequate project manager skills, influence or authority.
- Insufficient influence from partners.
- Poor coordination with partners.
- Lack of rapport with partners.
- Lack of project team participation in decision making.
- Lack of project team participation in major problem solving.
- Excessive structuring within the project team.
- Poor coordination with the Ministry on implementation.
- Project is more complex than focal agency of Ministry has ever handled.
- Insufficient funding provided for the communication to be initiated or budget under calculated.
- Unrealistic project schedules.
- Inadequate procedures in case of changes in the plan or partnerships.

Step 9: Budget

Frequently made mistake in communications planning: Not enough budget

What elements should be considered in calculating the budget?

- **Personnel:** how many employees need to be involved and how much time do they have to work on the project?
- **Personnel:** do you need to hire external consultants and experts? If so, how much will this cost?
- **Material costs:** What are the costs to design and produce the communication means?
- **Distribution costs:** What are the costs to distribute the communication means?
- **Media costs:** What are the costs to publish in newspapers, radio and TV?
- **Organisational costs:** What are the costs of office supplies to be used, mailing, telephone calls, copying, etc.?
- **‘Safety budget’:** How much should be left for unexpected costs?

Step 10: Monitoring and Evaluation

Frequently made mistakes in communications planning:

No performance indicators and no time or budget for evaluation

Evaluation of the communication implementation is a very important step and should be aimed at assessing *the outcomes or effects* of your communication efforts during processes of implementation.

Evaluation serves several purposes:

- To justify communication efforts for the leaders of your organisation and its stakeholders.
- To learn which methods are most effective and most efficient for future application
- To learn how to organise and manage the communication process more effectively in the future.
- To define future steps after considering the results achieved.