



futerra
sustainability communications

COMMUNICATING SUSTAINABILITY

***How to produce
effective public campaigns***

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME



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Communicating Sustainability

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The final selection of case studies was based on three main criteria:

- Variety of issues related to sustainable development
- Geographical balance
- Diversity of communication methods

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Forewords

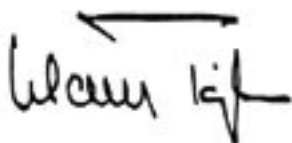
Public awareness and concern about environmental and social issues is growing. The fact that the world has become more and more transparent, due largely to the mass media and the rise of new information technologies, has undoubtedly contributed to that. The impacts of our consumption patterns are no longer vague and invisible. People are beginning to understand the effect they are having on this world – our only home – and that they have a responsibility to look after it.

Public communication has a key role to play to build on these emerging trends and to make sustainable development approachable and understandable. Informed, motivated and committed people can help us to achieve our sustainability goals. However, communicating effectively about sustainable lifestyles is a challenge. One needs to consider not only what to communicate, but how to communicate it.

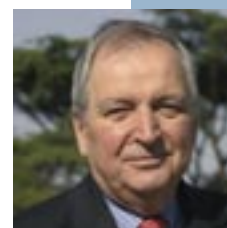
Important factors of success include content, messenger, choice of media and tone. Experts are coming to realise that traditional messages from governments and green groups urging the public to adopt the environment into their day-to-day decisions need to be overhauled. Many of these messages are simply too patronising, guilt-laden or disapproving. Instead of turning people on to the environment, they risk switching them off. The lesson to be learned is that communication styles have to be positive and tailored to different circumstances and cultural contexts.

Consumption is a global issue. Consumers are found everywhere, and are increasingly showing the same material consumption patterns. These patterns can only be positive if these consumers make sustainable choices. Of course, this cannot be achieved through communication alone. In order to bring about change, people have to want it, but they also need the tools to enable them to act differently. Sustainable products, services and infrastructure are all part of the hardware that governments and business have to supply.

This guide is about communication. Inspiring examples and visions from all regions can encourage national and local authorities to plan, develop and implement attractive and effective campaigns that make sustainable lifestyles fashionable and 'cool'. I commend this publication for helping to achieve this goal.



Klaus Töpfer
Executive Director
United Nations Environment Programme



Communications will make sustainable development a reality.

We need individuals, organisations and governments to change the way they think and the way they act. Those changes will not happen automatically, however clear and urgent the problems are or may become. Motivation, promotion and dialogue must become the familiar tools we use whenever we try and convince people to change.

At Futerra, we constantly seek out and test best practice in sustainable development communications. We draw on experience from around the world. We have seen, time after time, that national and local authority sustainability targets are reached more easily when the communications element is planned professionally, and at an early stage.

Although you do not need to be a professional communicator to plan and run inspiring and effective communications, you do need to approach communications in a professional way.

Since communications are often treated as an addendum to the “real business” of sustainable development, integrating just one communications element can have real effect. But it is up to you to decide whether the tips, ideas and case studies presented in this guide are right for your context.

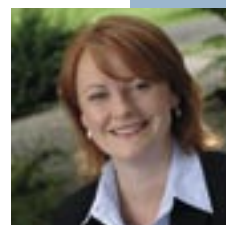
Working with UNEP on this guide, we were impressed at how many professionally-planned campaigns are already happening around the world. Some of them feature in this guide. We hope that this exchange of international experience will help everyone who reads this publication; it is an initiative that UNEP is continuing with its online database of advertising campaigns (see page 58).

At its best, communication has an extraordinary power, not simply to inform, but to challenge, and to inspire. It can achieve lasting and meaningful change. That is why it is vital for communications to be an integral part of the journey towards sustainable development.

Together we can take the first steps to forming an international community of sustainable development communicators – something that will surely help us all to achieve our sustainable development goals.



Lucy Shea & Solitaire Townsend
Director of Strategy & Managing Director
Futerra Sustainability Communications



Introduction

Quality of life. Sustainable consumption and production. Environmental sustainability.

Sustainable development is an issue of fundamental importance for all national and local authorities. Most experts agree that our current rate of development is not sustainable. In fact, some suggest that, unless significant action is taken, we will need two worlds' worth of resources to support us by 2050.

And so we face a turning point. To meet our goals for sustainable development, we can no longer delay in engaging, motivating and inspiring our citizens. This guide is intended to help you do just that.

A short history of sustainable development

Sustainable development (defined as "Meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"¹) is both a vision and a process.

It rests on the three pillars of environmental protection, economic development and social progress, and involves issues of international relevance such as poverty reduction, climate change and the conservation of biodiversity.

Pressure for sustainable development is increasing from all sectors of society. In 1992, governments, businesses and civil societies came together in an unprecedented way at the Rio Earth Summit, with the result that 178 governments signed up to the global action plan, Agenda 21². Ten years later, one of the outcomes of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) was the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and

In the business sector, over 1,400 companies world-wide have joined the UN Global Compact. Launched in January 1999 by Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the UN, the Global Compact seeks "to promote responsible corporate citizenship so that business can be part of the solution to the challenges of globalisation"³. Participants work to achieve this by adopting ten key principles in the areas of human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption.

These developments point to the will for a sustainable future. But we are not there yet; indeed, we have some way to go. For example, it looks unlikely that any of the Millennium Development Goals – such as reducing child mortality and achieving universal education – will be met within the planned timeframe. These goals are key to sustainable development (see Glossary section).

Furthermore, some countries face urgent issues, such as conflicts, which often take precedence over sustainable development issues.

"Individuals can choose to buy environmentally friendly products, or not. That changes consumption patterns and in the end production patterns. All individuals have that power".
Kofi Annan, Secretary General, UN

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