



UN Communications Group at the country level: Basic Operating Model (Adopted by the UN Communications Group, 2 March 2006) *

1. Introduction

- i. Set up in 2002 at the initiative of the United Nations Secretary-General, the United Nations Communications Group (UNCG) has emerged as a strong unifying platform for dealing with common communications challenges facing the United Nations.
- ii. The Group, which includes communications offices of all United Nations system organizations, as well as the Department of Public Information and the office of the Secretary-General, holds regular meetings at UN Headquarters, where current communications issues are discussed. It also meets once a year at the principals level to discuss policy issues and agree on common responses and programmes of activity. In addition, several issue-based task forces work around the year to develop and carry out agreed communications strategies. Thus, by integrating communications resources of the UN system and devising practical measures to share their expertise, the United Nations Communications Group creates a close-knit information network, giving the UN communicators a practical tool to think and act together.
- iii. The Secretary-General, in his 2002 reform proposals, Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for change (A/57/387), called for enhancing public information. “The United Nations has a compelling story to tell,” he said. “That story must be told well, because public support is essential for strengthening the Organization.” These stories originate not only at UN Headquarters, but also in locations all over the world, often involving not one but several UN organizations. The creation of the UN Communications Group was inspired by the challenge of the Secretary-General to strategically communicate the collective UN story and achieve the greatest public impact.
- iv. The success of the UN Communications Group is largely determined by its ability to coordinate activities at the global as well as country levels. While policies are made at the headquarters of UN organizations, the implementation of those policies depends on the ability of the country teams to cooperate and coordinate locally and/or regionally. It was agreed at the Fourth Annual Meeting of the UN Communications Group (23 – 24 May 2005, Geneva) that a paper outlining principles guiding such cooperation would be developed. This paper, prepared in response to the above decision, presents some ideas that could serve as a basis for a comprehensive policy on strategic communications for UN field offices.

2. Establishment of UNCG

- i. Currently, a UN system mechanism for coordinating national communications outreach exists in several countries, often involving those agencies, funds and programmes, which are connected at the headquarters-level through the UN Communications Group. In order to further harmonize communications activities at global as well as country levels, United Nations organizations will create a UN Communications Group as part of each country team.

3. Terms of Reference

- i. The UN Communications Group (UNCG) at the country level – to be known as UNCG-name of the country (e.g. UNCG-Kenya) – will seek to strengthen inter-Agency cooperation in the field of

communications and to increase the media profile of United Nations activities at the national and/or regional level by:

- providing leadership in communications for the UN Country Team;
- identifying new and creative ways to show how UN programmes are delivering results (emphasizing inter-agency collaboration);
- promoting a coherent image of the United Nations;

ii. UNCG-Country will include communications focal points of all United Nations entities operating in the country, including those related to peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions and humanitarian emergencies. It will be chaired by the Director of the UN Information Centre (UNIC) or, in the absence of a UNIC, the senior most Information Officer of any UN agency represented in that country. Recognizing that communications specialists are present in only a few UN agencies, communications focal points will be appointed by UN agencies as they may find appropriate. An alternate will also be appointed whenever possible. UNIC will act as the national Secretariat for the UNCG.

4. Suggested activities

Depending on local needs, expertise and availability of resources, UNCG-Country will carry out various activities, such as:

i. **Regular meetings:** The Communications Group will meet regularly (bi-weekly or monthly) to discuss common communications issues and challenges, devise common responses and undertake collective action. Brief summaries or action points agreed will be prepared and circulated among all communications staff stationed in the country. The frequency of the meetings will be determined by each UNCG-Country.

ii. **Communications strategies:** UNCG-Country will develop an annual communications strategy to undertake national public information activities on UN priority issues, adapting and localizing public information mandates to take into account the national media environment and local needs.

iii. **Press releases:** While each member of UNCG-Country will continue to issue individual press releases pertaining to individual organization's activities, joint press releases will be produced on key UN priority issues and activities, such as the Millennium Development Goals and UN reform. These press releases issued through/by UNIC will help the public better understand the integrated nature of the work carried out by UN organizations at the country level.

iv. **Calendar of media and public events:** To avoid scheduling conflicts and with a view to better planning of Country Team events, the Communications Group will prepare and circulate every month a calendar of activities. This will include public events, such as seminars and other public gatherings and, to the extent possible, media-related activities, such as press conferences, visits by senior UN officials and launch of reports. The UNIC will be responsible for producing the calendar, with inputs from all UNCG members.

v. **Field Missions for Media** – The UNCG-Country will periodically organize joint field missions for members of the local media to showcase coordinated UN system activities in specific areas (e.g. visit to a refugee camp to underline the work of several agencies).

vii. Radio and TV Programmes – In countries where local UNICs are able to produce and air radio programmes through arrangements with national broadcasting authorities and/or private partners, UNCG-Country members will be invited to contribute stories and news items to such radio programmes. The UNIC will retain editorial control, but programme contents will be discussed in advance with UNCG-Country and its guidance will be sought on future programming. A similar approach will be taken with regard to producing TV programmes where such possibilities exist.

viii. Electronic newsletter: - In order to highlight the inter-related nature of UN work and the extent of its involvement at the national level, UNCG-Country will circulate a newsletter every month/fortnight/week (whichever is feasible), aimed at opinion leaders (Government officials, journalists, academics, NGO representatives etc). By providing highlights of current activities and informing readers about upcoming activities/events, the newsletter will serve as a clearing house of information and ideas. The UN Communications Group will coordinate regular submissions to the UN Information Centre, which will centralize contributions, package them and disseminate the final product electronically.

ix. UN System Information kit - The Communications Group will create a common press kit, which will include fact sheets dedicated to the work of each UNCT member covering the most important elements related to their activities. It will also include contact details of all communications focal points and will be offered to all visitors and media representatives.

x. Website – The UN Information Centre, in close collaboration with the Office of the Resident Coordinator, will maintain – wherever possible - a UNCT website, providing access to the sites of individual agencies and highlighting collaborative activities of the UN System in that country. The website will offer a gateway to UN activities in the country and provide a platform for interaction with partners.

xi. Common observances of important dates and special occasions – Observance of UN Day (24 October) and other special occasions provide excellent opportunities to showcase the work of the United Nations and rally greater support for the Organization at the national level. Some of the most successful UN days are those led by the Government and to which one or more UN agencies lend support. The Communications Group will encourage relevant Government bodies to take leadership in recognizing key days, e.g. Human Rights Day, AIDS Day, World Health Day, etc. A working group created by UNCG-Country will work directly with the concerned governmental agencies and ensure the involvement of as many local UN agencies as possible. In order to better coordinate inter-agency cooperation, an annual calendar of special days/events will be prepared and posted on UNCT website in consultation with all Agencies.

5. Reporting

i. UNCG-Country will report to the Resident Coordinator on UNCG activities at the country level. An annual review and evaluation of the Group's activities will be conducted, which will form the basis of an annual progress report. This report will be forwarded to the UNCG secretariat at UN Headquarters for sharing with all UNCG members and for posting on the UNCG website.

Adopted by the UN Communications Group
on 2 March 2006 in New York

* This paper has been updated to reflect agreements made at the UNCG annual meeting in June 2006.