

UN Malawi Communications Strategy 2014 - 2017

‘Communicating as One’

Introduction

UN Agencies in Malawi jointly operate on the basis of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), a common strategy that provides a collective, coherent and integrated UN response to national priorities and needs within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The current 2012 -2016 UNDAF focuses on four priority areas:

1. Economic Growth and Food Security
2. Social and Protection Services
3. HIV and AIDS
4. Governance and Human Rights

These priority areas are bound together by key overarching issues including a focus on adolescent girls as a means to accelerate development; building resilience among communities and institutions; advancing human rights and gender equality, and advocating for changing attitudes and behaviours. A focus on results backed by solid monitoring and programme oversight are key principles for how the UN implements its programmes.

Each of these priority areas makes a strategic contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at country level and is closely aligned with the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDSII) and other relevant national policies and strategies.

This Communications Strategy aims at supporting the strategic programming objectives of the UN in Malawi and contributing, through joint communication and advocacy, to the successful implementation of UN development priorities spelled out in the UNDAF for 2012-2016. The strategy is also in line with the UN system-wide efforts to achieve greater coherence in communication activities among its different agencies and with a growing emphasis on the “One UN” approach at the country level.

UN’s Image in Malawi

A UN Perception Survey conducted in 2012 in Malawi ranks UN Agencies top on the list of international organisations best known for provision of development and humanitarian assistance to Malawi. This Communications Strategy builds on this positive image of the UN in the country, its achievements over 50 years of presence in Malawi, the knowledge and expertise and vast array of partners it brings together to help Malawi achieve its development goals. In addition to an overall positive image, the UN needs to be further associated with specific values, ideals and programmes.

In 2014, the UN marks the 50th anniversary of its presence in the Republic of Malawi. This can serve as an excellent opportunity to take stock of UN’s work over 50 years in Malawi and highlight major achievements.

Why Communicating as One

Communicating as One is critical for ensuring clear and consistent strategic positioning of the UN and its vision in Malawi; developing common messages and policy positions; strengthening the outreach of the UN system by pooling efforts; supporting communication about the UN comparative advantages in the country to both internal and external stakeholders; and avoiding message duplication, inconsistencies and fragmentation.

In essence, Communicating as One does not replace the communications efforts of individual agencies but would amplify their voices, preserving their distinct identities while presenting the UN as a coherent entity. Greater use of joint communication can improve the overall messaging of the UN system, support policy advocacy, catalyse change, and magnify UN's overall voice and impact in Malawi.

Communicating as One will therefore bring the following benefits to the UN in Malawi:

- Ensure more coherent and effective messaging from the UN
- Improve quality of dialogue with the government and other stakeholders
- Increase advocacy and UN's ability to drive change on key issues
- Help to highlight results achieved by the UN at the country level

What to Communicate?

This strategy seeks to promote issues-driven communications and a beneficiaries' perspective to achieve greater coherence and better positioning of the UN as a partner on key issues that resonate with Malawian citizens as spelt out in the UNDAF.

Some of the issues of common interest to all UN Agencies include poverty reduction, gender, human rights and resilience. This strategy gives a framework to guide joint communication and advocacy on these issues. Content of the messages will be tailored to the actual issues covered by the UN assistance in Malawi and will be supported with specific examples of UN's interventions.

Apart from regular communication activities, UN official days will be exploited to communicate key messages. Communication on an issue covered by the UN thematic days (human rights, AIDS, poverty, press freedom, etc.) will be used to profile the UN as a key player in that area.

Objectives

This joint Communications Strategy seeks to contribute towards driving change in UN's thematic areas through communication and advocacy; increase and maintain public awareness of UN mission, functions, programmes and services provided to Malawi; ensure a consistent projection of UN's image and a steady level of visibility among partners; and support media development as a way of advancing democratic consolidation.

External Communication

1. Ensuring clear and coherent advocacy messages are communicated by the UN to external audiences to drive change in strategic areas of focus;
2. Ensuring the UN system is clearly communicating to external partners results it is achieving from its development interventions in Malawi;
3. Ensuring the UN provides coordinated and coherent capacity building support to the media in Malawi to advance development and democratic consolidation;

Internal Communication

4. Ensuring that the UN is effectively communicating and sharing information internally across agencies to produce the desired results;
5. Ensuring that all UN staff are aware of the 'Delivering as One' approach.

Target Audience

This strategy aims to reach out to the following target audience:

External	Internal
1. Government (Executive, Parliament, Judiciary)	1. UN staff (Resident Agencies)
2. Development Partners (DPs)	2. UNCT Members
3. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)/NGOs	3. UN staff (Non-Resident Agencies)
4. General Public (Youth, vulnerable groups, etc)	4. Technical Working Groups (TWGs)
5. Media Practitioners/Media Houses	
6. Opinion leaders (Political, chiefs & religious leaders)	
7. Research and educational institutions	
8. Private Sector	

Key Messages

Key messages have been developed in reference to issues of focus in the UNDAF to reflect a common vision of the UN's role in Malawi. The messages are for use in system-wide promotion, for instance, during joint campaigns and events. In addition, specific messages tailored to each occasion/theme will be developed and driven by respective agencies. See drafted list of UN's key messages in Malawi for 2014.

Channels and Tools

Implementation of this strategy requires the use of different channels and tools, both traditional and new ones. Selection of the most suitable communication vehicles depends on what message or issue needs to be addressed and what audience is a target. A list of communication channels includes but not limited to:

- Traditional media: Radio, television, newspapers;
- Internet based media: News websites, social media - Facebook, twitter etc;
- UN Malawi website;
- Events: Press conferences, campaigns, launches, workshops, field trips, trainings, open-days, advocacy meetings;
- Publications: Newsletters, magazines, books, etc;
- Face-to-face communication: at various events, trainings, meetings, phone calls;
- Direct dissemination of publications, reports and other information materials: through email, launches, workshops, round tables, etc.

See the channels/audience matrix in Appendix A.

Media Development

There is increasing recognition of the vital role of effective and independent journalism, and the need to support the development of local news media with robust legal protections, relevant professional training, and open access to official information for all citizens. A free and vigilant press is essential to making government responsive and to exposing corruption and abuse of power. Media independence and professionalism is critical to the attainment of broader UN goals.

Many UN Agencies in Malawi have been implementing or supporting journalism training. However, trainings have too often tended to be fragmented and based on some individual agency initiatives or one-off exercises, with limited sustained follow-up. Therefore, the UN in Malawi should together get involved more to support media programmes aimed at improving professionalism of journalists and protection for media.

Crisis Communication

Globally, the UN faces two types of crises. The first involves natural disasters and manmade conflicts such as a government collapsing or people start fighting on the streets. The second kind of crisis occurs when the UN faces charges of malfeasance or incompetency including alleged wrongdoing by its officials. Effective internal and external communication is essential before, during and after a crisis.

Considering that a crisis can have a major impact on UN's work and image in Malawi, in a crisis situation, this strategy shall encourage effective internal and external communication to provide crisis responses to internally impact positively on staff morale and team building; and externally promote recovery, sustainability of Malawi's development gains and UN's reputation as a trusted organisation.

Roles and Responsibilities of UNCG and Agency Communications Focal Points

UNCG and Agency Communications Focal Points will be responsible for:

- a) developing and implementing a joint communication strategy for the UNCT for the period of the UNDAF or the One Programme, and in support of the UNDAF and national development priorities;
- b) establishing an annual work plan on the basis of the joint communication strategy;
- c) strengthening inter-Agency collaboration and coordination in joint communications;
- d) increasing the media profile of United Nations at the national level by:
 - i. supporting in communications for the UNCT;
 - ii. identifying new and creative ways to show how UN programmes are delivering as one (emphasizing inter-agency collaboration) and promoting a coherent image of the United Nations; advocating for the concept of 'One UN', collectively or individually, on behalf of UNCG;
 - iii. strategically positioning the United Nations as an effective and strategic development partner that speaks up when necessary to promote and protect human rights and other international instruments, norms and standards;
- e) bringing significant national events to the attention of the Resident Coordinator and Heads of Agencies;
- f) alerting the UNCT on sensitive issues that require close monitoring, including issues related to the media or safety of journalists;
- g) providing advice and recommendations to the Resident Coordinator and Heads of Agencies on strategic policy and major operational issues with regard to communicating as one;
- h) facilitating identification of key advocacy messages for the United Nations in Malawi, and developing and implementing relevant advocacy action plans for the key messages;
- i) supporting production of content for One UN communication products and platforms such as joint website, periodic newsletters or other information dissemination tools like joint press releases;
- j) capturing and sharing lessons learned from both joint and agency-specific communication work to support improved knowledge management at the country level; and
- k) in a crisis or emergency context, the UNCG shall play a critical role in coordinating management of information and messages with UNRCO and UNDSS, both internally and externally.

Responsibilities of UNCG Secretariat:

The secretariat will be responsible:

- a) for facilitating and maintaining communication channels between and among agencies;
- b) to collect possible future agenda items on an on-going basis;
- c) to organise UNCG meetings;
- d) to disseminate minutes of meetings with decisions and recommendations;
- e) to monitor the implementation of UNCG decisions

Implementation and Resources

UNCG is the owner and implementer of this Communications Strategy and its Annual Work Plan (AWP). The main prerequisite for effective implementation of this strategy is availability of financial and human resources.

In order to implement the strategy's work plan, the actual work should be distributed among the agencies taking into account their comparative advantages and in-house capacity in communications.

UNCG further suggests that UN agencies consider cost-sharing, either through funding a particular activity or contributing to the common budget to implement joint communication activities.

Ground Rules for Communicating as One

In Communicating as One, Agencies should:

- Emphasise on the shared values, norms and standards of the United Nations system;
- Agency-specific messages should be consistent with agreed common positions and should complement joint UNCT mission;
- Share responsibilities to ensure consistent and coherent messaging and communications;
- Coordinate and share timely information with all UNCG members, particularly on joint programmes and agency specific communication activities covering critical or sensitive issues or issues that may have system wide implications

Monitoring and Evaluation

UNCG will undertake a series of actions including conducting monthly meetings to assess the effectiveness of the strategy, in particular of the work plan which focuses on specific issues and activities.

Common Support Functions

The strategy also promotes coordination of a series of common support functions to synchronise media practices. Some of the common support functions include:

- Media Contacts List
- Media Reviews and Monitoring
- UN Perception Survey in Malawi
- Events Calendar/UN Priority Days
- Harmonisation of media practices and training (media awards and alliance with media)

Appendix A: Channels/Audience Matrix

Channels & Tools		External Audience							Internal Audience			
		Govt	DPs	CSOs/ NGOs	Public	Media players	Opinion Leaders	Research/ education institutions	Private sector	UN staff	UNCT members	TWGs
Traditional media	Radio	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•			
	Television	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•			
	Newspapers	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•			
Internet media	Social media				•		•					
	News websites				•		•					
	UN Malawi Website	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		
	Emails	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Events	Meetings/ launches/ trainings, etc.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Publications/ IEC materials	Newsletters, reports, info packs, posters	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Face-to-face	At events, phone calls etc	•	•	•		•	•			•		

Note: Choice of channel largely depends on type of audience and message.