

AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Colophon

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Research sponsored jointly by NCDO and the OECD Development Centre.

The author would like to thank everyone who took the time from very busy schedules to meet in New York and Washington DC and to colleagues in OECD Member countries for having written responses to the questionnaire. A special thanks go to Annelies Kanis, Henny Helmich and their colleagues at NCDO for valuable feedback and input.

Design: Lanphen Ontwerpt

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Foreword

As early as 1994, discussions at the OECD stressed the usefulness of development targets – similar to today’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – for engaging public opinion about development co-operation and how to improve its effectiveness. There was a conscious effort by development and communications experts to adopt a ‘results-based’ approach, assessing progress towards poverty reduction rather than talking about the means that went into it. This new approach would also improve communication towards a sceptical public opinion.

In 1996, the OECD Development Centre’s publication *Public Support for International Development* reported on a meeting which took place at the OECD on Public Knowledge and Attitudes towards International Development in October 1994. The emergent ‘Paris Declaration’ from this 1994 meeting called for the establishment of clear goals for development policy, so that the people will know the standard against which performance should be measured, and will understand the stakes involved. These clear goals emerged from the DAC in 1996 with the publication of *Shaping the 21st Century: the contribution of Development Co-operation*. The seven International Development Goals (IDGs), as they were initially referred to, were more clearly outlined with a time-line in *A Better World for All: Progress towards the International Development Targets* (2000). The IDGs focused on what should be done in developing countries to reduce poverty – the first seven of the eight MDGs – and it was only at the Millennium Summit that the eighth goal emerged.

The MDGs could serve as the communication tool outlined in the 1994 declaration on Public Opinion. Indeed the conclusions of the most recent OECD Development Centre’s joint publication with the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe (March 2003) on *Public Opinion and the Fight against Poverty*, complement the policy recommendations made in 1994. The later report found that “citizens in OECD countries unambiguously support more solidarity and justice at the international level. If they were better educated and more

informed regarding global development issues, they could provide informed, critical support to reformers in their countries, so as to foster more vigorous, more efficient and coherent development co-operation policies. Engaging critical public support in the fight against global poverty requires: I) increased public awareness about development and poverty; II) improved transparency of development co-operation policies; and III) improved efficiency of development co-operation.”

The MDGs are the bench-mark for most DAC member countries in their development co-operation policies. They should be the major vector in communications about these policies.

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Abbreviations

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DATA	Debt Aid Trade in Africa (an NGO)
DfID	The Department for International Development
GNI	Gross National Income
HDR	Human Development Report
IDGs	International Development Goals
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NCDO	Nationale Commissie voor Internationale Samenwerking en Duurzame Ontwikkeling
NGLS	United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programmes
SIDA	Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFUNA	The World Federation of United Nations Associations

The Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals as on the UNDP website www.undp.org/mdg

The Global Challenge: Goals and Targets

For each goal one or more targets have been set, most for 2015, using 1990 as a benchmark.

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Target for 2015: Halve the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and those who suffer from hunger.

2. Achieve universal primary education

Target for 2015: Ensure that all boys and girls complete primary school.

3. Promote gender equality and empower women

Targets for 2005 and 2015: Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.

4. Reduce child mortality

Target for 2015: Reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five

5. Improve maternal health

Target for 2015: Reduce by three-quarters the ratio of women dying in childbirth.

6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Target for 2015: Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

7. Ensure environmental sustainability

Targets:

- Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.
- By 2015, reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water.
- By 2020 achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

8. Develop a global partnership for development

Targets:

- Develop further an open trading and financial system that includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction – nationally and internationally.
- Address the least developed countries' special needs, and the special needs of landlocked and small island developing States.
- Deal comprehensively with developing countries' debt problems.
- Develop decent and productive work for youth.
- In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries.
- In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies – especially information and communications technologies.

There are eight Millennium Development Goals. Goals one to seven are primarily results sought in developing countries, assisted by the partnership with the developed countries addressed in Goal eight. One hundred and eighty nine member states of the United Nations committed to achieving these Goals when they signed the Millennium Declaration in September 2000.

Nevertheless, the achievement of the first seven goals is intricately bound to the efforts in the industrialised countries in that they can support the developing countries by meeting their commitments on Goal eight. The rich countries must provide increased aid and debt relief, and access to their markets and technology (UNDP, 2003). The MDGs represent a Global Partnership for Development (UN Millennium Campaign).

This paper is premised on the notion that awareness-raising and communications about the MDGs in the industrialised countries are crucial in order to remind and hold national governments accountable to their aid, trade and debt commitments, which are found in the MDGs. These commitments have been supplemented with additional promises at UN global meetings in Monterrey (Financing for Development) and Johannesburg (World Summit on Sustainable Development) and the EU Summit in Barcelona (committing an EU average 0.39 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI) to Official Development Assistance (ODA) by 2006). Despite these high level discussions, debate and awareness about the MDGs has not trickled down to public opinion. Without the pressure which comes from public accountability these commitments are less likely to be achieved. At present, no more than 10 per cent, and an optimistic average of five per cent of the general public, in any Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member country (where this question has been asked) is aware of the MDGs or the commitments that have been made on their behalf to global poverty reduction by their head of state¹.

1. See Part II of this publication: The UN Millennium Development Goals Awareness in the Netherlands and Comparisons from other DAC Member Surveys.

The Millennium Declaration celebrated its birthday in September 2003. While some progress has been made in terms of awareness about the MDGs in development circles since, it could be argued that this is not sufficient given the close time-limit of 2015. The Millennium Project Task Forces have produced background papers on all the Goals; 40 developing countries have produced MDG country reports with UNDP and a handful of countries in Europe have started to communicate about the MDGs. The UN Millennium Campaign under the leadership of Eveline Herfkens who was appointed by the UN Secretary-General as the Campaign's Executive Co-ordinator in October 2002, has been operational for over one year.

Given these developments this research which took place in the autumn of 2003, sought to learn from the forerunners in the MDG campaign. The objective was to identify first lessons and best practices, so as to help nascent MDG national campaigns and communications programmes with their work. The focus, therefore, is on communications strategies and activities at the international level UN circles including NGO's and in a number of DAC member states. The results of our investigation are interesting in so far as they demonstrate that no-one is miles ahead of anyone else when it comes to getting information out about the MDGs – with the exception of a couple of examples.

In relation to the research process itself, there was a lack of availability of documents (past draft stage) outlining communication strategies because some organisations do not produce such written documents, others are in the process of finalising their strategies and others are waiting on these strategies in order to develop complementary ones. While most organisations had clear ideas and some plans about what they were doing and hoping to do, it is clear that the global campaign for the MDGs is "...still at a conceptual stage" (Foster, 2003) and the adoption of the MDGs so far largely remains an untapped opportunity to peg more vigorous efforts to inform and engage the public (Mc Donnell et al, 2003).

The same point applies to measuring the effectiveness of communications. Interviewees were all conscious of its importance (and difficulty) as well as having indicators of effectiveness, yet, very few had clearly set performance targets and indicators. Nevertheless, some general indicators which are used as signs of having had some impact were suggested.

The paper is divided into the following parts: section two provides an overview of the communication strategies of UNDP and the UN Millennium Campaign, an overview of a selection of DAC member states is provided in section three. Section four takes a brief look at activities by a number of civil society organisations and the paper concludes in section five with various ideas for MDG Campaigns focused at public opinion in the industrialised countries.

The United Nations: Taking the lead in MDGs' communication strategy

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is a key player in the implementation of the Millennium Declaration and the achievement of the MDGs and has been designated by the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, as the overall responsible UN body for the MDGs. By consequence, UNDP manages the trust fund that supports the Millennium Campaign, the Millennium Project and Country Reporting. UNDP also chairs the UN Development Group (see: <http://www.undp.org/>) which has a specific focus on achieving the MDGs.

Communication about the MDGs is multi-faceted in UNDP. This section will summarise what is happening in the Communications Unit, the MDG Unit and the Civil Society Unit at UNDP. Each unit has a central mandate to use the MDGs as the operating framework for its activities but the goals of this work and envisaged outcomes are different for each unit.

The more general UNDP **Communications Unit** is responsible for publishing the annual Human Development Report (HDR) which focused on the MDGs in 2003. It produces television documentaries, visual and written media advertisements, organises conferences, etc. Its messages therefore have the potential to reach non-specialist members of society. However, the main target group is that which has an existing pre-disposition towards development issues. UNDP is not directly aiming to reach out to mass public opinion. Its target groups are policy-makers, civil society in developing countries and industrialised countries (to a lesser extent), opinion leaders, the private sector, development studies students and the development community. The general public and youth do enter the picture by way of, for example, soccer TV commercials and UNDP documentaries with BBC. There is also a pan-African TV initiative using African stars.

UNDP IN GENEVA

Activities: TV documentaries and other publicity. Strong focus on the MDGs as a whole package. It published “For a fast changing world... bringing the MDGs into people’s homes” from the perspective off the power of television to communicate and using it to contribute towards the mobilization of energies towards the goals.

Resources: HDR (2003) dedicated to the MDGs. Goldmine of information.

Partnerships: with broadcasters and production companies to offer a Range of TV products designed for all audiences worldwide.

1. The *Azimuths* series – 300 documentaries. Target the donor countries as well as developing countries which are also used in educational circles.
2. Up and coming are new TV products that are anchored to major broadcasters.

There is an active educational outreach programme and efforts to make them available to the public at large.

TV Partnerships in the rich countries

Scandinavia: TV2 Norway, YLA Finland; France: France 2, France 5, Escales, Cuisine TV, TV8 Mont-Blanc, Air France, CITEL VIDEO, Belgium, RTB 1; Spain:TVE 2, TV3 Catalunya; Switzerland: TSI, TSR, Lemans Bleu; UK: BBC World, Developing World; Ireland: RTE; Germany: SFDRS; USA: CNN

Satellite broadcasters: France & Europe –Euro news, KTO, AB Group, TV 5.

Italy – RAINNEWS 24, K-World in Scandinavia.

The current communications strategy at this unit is to emphasise the MDGs in all of UNDP’s external communications and to spread the message that “it can be done”. A number of famous individuals (such as the soccer star Ronaldo) have been invited to join in this communication effort by being ‘Ambassadors for the Goals’. However, in relation to UNDP products such as TV spots and documentaries, and contrary to what has been perceived by some national development educators and communicators, the resources that UNDP produces, often in partnership with specific actors, are not necessarily produced with a view to them being used or adapted for other non-UNDP campaigns. They are first considered for UNDP communications and if the idea, the documentary, the message, the story, etc. is found to be interesting, UNDP will not object to it being used elsewhere and would like to assist where possible, thereby producing a positive externality. This explains why non-UNDP communicators find the communications resources difficult to adapt to their own

contexts and why UNDP is cited as top-down in the way it creates its development resources. There is a clear misperception about this aspect of UNDP work. Perhaps, however, this tacit demand by these actors for more adaptable resources from UNDP is something that it could consider in future communications strategies.

The **MDG Unit** at UNDP is responsible for internal communications and awareness-raising in the UNDP country offices located around the world (mostly in developing countries) and head office. This latter unit is currently developing an advocacy and communications tool-kit for all UNDP staff. The objective is that communications become part of every staff member's job. Considerable effort is being invested in the process, especially, as experience at UNDP shows that it should deal with the challenge of getting staff on board before trying to move into the public domain. The goal of this unit's campaign is to create awareness about the goals, convince UNDP representatives that the goals can be achieved with a later result of the staff spreading the word to people they work with outside UNDP.

One of the questions the MDG Unit is confronted with is: What is the message in the MDGs? How do you make the message meaningful? Up to the present, thinking about the MDGs at UNDP suggests that the message should resonate at the national context in a day-to-day language that people understand. It is also thought to be unnecessary to refer to the MDGs as a whole and more efficient to be thematic where one can view the rest of the goals through one specific lens of interest.

UNDP finds it difficult to target the MDG message at various different audiences. While part of its mandate is to be an advocate for the MDGs, which should aim to hold governments accountable to their commitments, UNDP and any other governmental organs for that matter must be prudent in how it challenges governments, especially if that government is not performing up to standard. One of the ways in which UNDP deals with this complexity is through its role as dialogue facilitator between the public sector and civil society in developing countries, or between civil society and local government. Building awareness about the MDGs in civil society and empowering it to enter into dialogue with government results in strengthened accountability to the MDGs.

The **Civil Society Unit** at UNDP mostly focuses on Southern NGOs. However, over the past year it has been dialoguing with Northern NGOs on trade and debt issues in particular, that is, Goal eight issues. Communications with civil society on the MDGs shows a division between “Northern NGOs” and their potential to convince supporters in the rich countries to demand policy change on Goal eight issues and the “Southern NGOs” whose role is to lobby and hold their national governments accountable to reducing poverty – that is, achieving Goals one to seven. In contrast to the agenda of some Northern public educators this dialogue is less about the aid effectiveness agenda and using the goals as a tool to communicate about results oriented development co-operation than it is about raising aid, eliminating subsidies, etc. This type of focus on Goal eight could be taking public opinion away from the aid effectiveness agenda.

This unit also finds that some NGOs are still sceptical about the real political commitment behind the MDGs and that they tend to stress their preference for already existing campaigning processes. This is linked to the distrust of some of these organisations towards the institutions, such as the World Bank, IMF and OECD which pushed forward the MDG agenda in the first place. There are further reservations from civil society organisations who complain that they were not involved in the policy process leading to the Millennium Declaration and therefore can not sign up to them. Indeed, civil society itself has stated that “its approach to supporting the MDGs is not to campaign in favour of the MDGs per se, but to use these time-bound commitments in their on-going work as a tool to articulate how major structural, institutional and redistributive changes will be necessary to meet the MDG targets agreed by the international community (UN NGLS, 2003)”. UNDP stresses the need for civil society to play an active part in the campaign for the MDGs so that governments can be pushed harder and through its leverage with public opinion. NGOs have demonstrated that they have an expertise in getting people on the streets. UNDP is courting the NGOs to get them to do this for the MDGs.

The invoking of civil society to make support for the MDGs a “take it to the streets” issue, should also be considered in light of the “apparent” displacement of the more traditional, aid-supporting and development co-operation NGOs by global social movements that are sceptical of globalisation, global political leadership, the aid regime, the effectiveness of international organisations and free trade. This is an issue that will have to be addressed by MDG Campaigns.

SOME ANSWERS TO OUR QUESTIONNAIRE

Objectives behind the campaign: it must be home-grown and bottom-up. The campaign should act as catalyst and promote the MDGs as a framework for communications on development.

Target groups: Governments, policymakers, public opinion leaders, NGOs, youth organizations and other connected stakeholders.

How does it operate? Currently the Campaign acts as an advocate for the Goals at different levels. It will support, advise and give ideas to campaigners. It will not be developing communications tools of its own or use at various national levels. The Head of the Campaign speaks at international gatherings such as the latest one in Cancun, writes commentaries in opinion editorials, press releases and makes national pr visits. Other Campaign members, network with civil society peers, stimulate publicity events; collaborate with UNDP and other partners.

Challenges in developing a strategy:

One challenge is that there are not yet specific (SMARTT) targets and indicators for Goal eight which may very well be the most “political” and controversial of all the MDGs. The campaign is developing a petition for Goal eight so that some targets may be identified which will bring it closer to the other seven, e.g. Barcelona declaration on ODA in EU member countries.

Recommendations: Use MDGs as communications framework. Take a mixed approach using the synergy between the goals. Use the data that is provided by UNDP, UN Millennium Project, OECD, World Bank, Social Watch, your own aid agency.

UN Millennium Campaign: Advocating the MDGs globally

The Millennium Campaign with a staff number of eight/nine persons has a global remit. It is a small unit based in the United Nations established upon the special request of the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. Human resource limitations – associated with to the initial objective to avoid the creation of another UN bureaucratic body – restrict the power of the Campaign to organise its own concrete communications actions in UN member states². Instead, the Campaign is trying to stimulate debate and awareness-raising activities on the MDGs around the globe – using structures already in place in these countries.

2. Data on the budgetary situation of the Campaign was not available.

It hopes to provide leadership to budding and existing campaigns by government agencies, civil society and the private sector. It also represents a psychological support to the large operation and swell of energy that is necessary at every national and local level to hold governments accountable to the commitments they made when they signed the Millennium Declaration in September 2000.

After one year of operation (started in October 2002), the Campaign is about to finalise its global campaign strategy. The arrival of the Campaign Director in October 2003 implies that the team has been built and the Campaign's profile should improve. This is important as there is a misperception in some national-level and civil society quarters about what the Campaign is aiming to do. There is perhaps an exaggerated perception of the degree to which it will be involved in national campaigns. The Campaign should try to clarify its mandate and strategy as soon as possible. So far the Campaign's main message is the global deal between North and South with a particular focus on Goal eight. The public opinion problem it is dealing with is 'how' to make the MDGs a voter's issue'

The Campaign's communications activities

The Millennium Campaign has a responsibility to energise and mobilise a series of advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns on the MDGs. It is advocating pro-development policies in the North and pro-poor policies in the South. In practise what does this mean?

The Campaign is helping to strengthen the pro-aid constituency (considered to be opinion leaders, development NGOs and that strata of society which surfaces in opinion polls to be more supportive of development issues – women, better educated, etc) in donor countries in its efforts to use the Goals to change the image of ODA from giveaways to corrupt regimes to concrete programmes that can improve progress on health, education and poverty. It is conducting consultations with parliamentarians, development ministers, religious leaders, media, CSOs, trade unions and research institutions. These consultations have revealed that the MDGs are already serving as a framework for many initiatives. The campaign literature stresses the issue of aid effectiveness to gain public support; however, the continuous focus on achieving Goal eight by the campaign seems to contradict this agenda.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE UNITED STATES?

A large, national campaign is currently in the making in the United States and a number of organizations are willing to come on board. They include The Better Safer World Campaign, Interaction, Bread for the World, DATA, NetAid, various think tanks and research centres, etc. Many of these organisations are now actively coordinating their strategising in order to better work together and agree to some common activities.

The Campaign has held brainstorming sessions with well-known marketing and advertising professionals, religious leaders, the corporate world, and other societal leaders. The consensus was that specific attention must be paid and resources devoted to US campaign efforts if the MDGs are to be achieved. The UN Foundation is conducting polling to determine how the MDGs resonate with American citizens, including which goals are most supported, and the reasons that people would support or oppose an increase in US assistance to developing countries.

Many groups were impatient for the US Campaign to 'take-off', and now that a strategy is being developed, there is considerable energy, excitement, and commitment to work together and use the MDGs as a framework that unifies and highlights all the ongoing, interrelated efforts and campaigns on MDG issues. Currently, the groups are searching for the overarching message or "slogan" that unifies the work in a compelling and convincing way.

While it has stated that it will not get directly involved in national campaigns, the campaign will promote the MDGs through advocacy and awareness raising tours by the Executive Director and it will conduct more concrete campaigns in a few specific countries, for example, Italy, Spain, the United States and Portugal (see Boxes 3 and 4). Apparently these countries are among the 'hardest nuts to crack' on development awareness-raising. The procedure is to try 'mdgise' existing civil society networks and social movements to 'campaign them to campaign'. There is also an attempt to stimulate democratic debate and encourage reform of pro-development policies towards greater policy coherence.

Ongoing activities in getting this campaign on the road include building a website, developing a general campaign strategy and individual ones for priority countries such as the United States, conducting a mapping exercise (trying to make it a consultative process) for target countries with the intention of this mapping becoming more systematic – so as to identify potential partners/collaborators at local levels.

CASESTUDY: ITALY

Italy has been identified as one of the Campaign's strategic countries because there is no development movement in Italy. There are however popular peace and social movements which attract broad ranges of Italian citizens. The Campaign has developed a partnership with the peace movement and is 'selling' the MDGs as the road-map for peace.

This partnership culminated in a 'Peace March' which took place on October 12, 2003 in the Perugia region of Italy. The Campaign provided eight large doors which were placed at different stages of the march. Each door represented one of the goals. Italian CSOs set up information points at these doors demonstrating what they do in that sector and provided action ideas for the public. The follow-up programme is that the doors will move to the Italian museum of education and nation-wide school project will be launched on "How would you like to see the world in 2015?"

This activity is an example of linking peace and development using the MDGs as the framework. The Campaign will make the eight doors available for similar occasions in other countries. One idea proposed was to set up the eight doors outside a soccer stadium.

The Millennium Campaign is hoping to support activities similar to this in Spain, Austria, Belgium and France (other strategic countries). One reason why Italy was one of the first countries directly supported is that the occurrence of the Peace march was an opportunity not to be missed.

The Netherlands

In October 2003 the Dutch government published the policy paper 'Mutual Interest, Mutual Responsibilities'. Sustainable poverty reduction is the main objective of the Dutch policy. The Millennium Development Goals are their means of achieving it. The paper states that results and accountability will be the forces behind Dutch development cooperation. A new appraisal system and assessment framework is introduced for country and sector policies. The Netherlands will specify in advance how much it intends to spend on achieving the Millennium Development Goals for education, environment and water, AIDS prevention and reproductive health care by 2015. An annual evaluation on these results will be sent to parliament. In conjunction with other ministries the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will examine how progress made with sustainable development both at home and abroad can best be reported on. In the spring of 2004 a progress report will be published on the Dutch input on achieving Goal eight.

The Dutch National Commission for International Co-operation and Sustainable Development (NCDO) has adopted the MDGs as its framework for communications until 2006. In addition, the development co-operation section of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has given the NCDO responsibility and financial support for building public awareness about the MDGs in the Netherlands. The two bodies will coordinate this work. The MDGs are therefore the core of all the work that NCDO does and a significant budget is available for this work. Whether it is funding an NGO project³ or conducting its own awareness-raising projects, the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs are the driving frameworks. Up to the present NCDO has not conducted a specific MDG-focused campaign, although planning is underway to conduct one.

3. NGOs are required to outline how their project relates to the MDGs in their funding proposals.

The NCDO works very closely with civil society (officially it is a civil society organisation). Indeed, when its own leadership was committing NCDO to the Policy Framework 2003-2006 “World Citizens for the Millennium Development Goals” it expressed doubts similar to those of some parts of civil society about the sustainable political commitments of donors to the MDGs. While most actors would agree that the goals are worth supporting there is also a sense of risk based on failed development promises by political leaders in the past. The risk is investing financial resources, time and energy in programmes supporting something that could be inherently bound to fail because of its political nature and making promises to already sceptical citizens about development effectiveness. Will the political will that is paramount for the MDGs come through?

Box 5

DIFFICULTIES IN COMMUNICATING ABOUT MDGS?

NCDO says it is not difficult. The goals touch on issues that the general public cares about. It thinks that the eight goal may be more difficult to campaign about but states that it is certainly ‘doable’. There are numerous ways in which links can be drawn between goals one – seven and goals eight. Or example debt issues can be discussed in the light of health care expenses in developing countries.

Goals and procedures

There is a working principle at NCDO that campaigns should deal with issues that will resonate with the public. The 2002 public opinion survey demonstrated that the Dutch are more optimistic that gender equal education for all children aged 6 to 12 years and a reduction in the maternal mortality rate can be achieved. There is also greater public support for targeting these two social sectors. As a result NCDO is continuing with its education project and has started a development education project on health.

Current discussion within the organisation is about the possibility of undertaking an overall MDG campaign, which would start in 2004. Similar to other organisations NCDO is confronted with the dilemma of whether to create general awareness about the MDGs or to educate about the specific content of certain goals. It has already started to do the latter and is at a cross-road about doing the former. The debate is veering towards adopting a mixed approach, that is, it will deal with specific goals for certain projects (for example, health

and education) and it will present the MDGs as a whole in certain forums. It has yet to develop a strategy on the general MDG awareness-raising campaign. The planning around this will be supported by a 'corporate communications plan' and research on public awareness about the MDGs.

Current communication activities at NCDO

The two focal campaigns (education and health) are designed to create awareness about the issues themselves. They are financed and supported by NCDO in partnership with some of the major players already experienced in working on the issue and beyond that to more non-traditional organisations such as health care insurers in the case of the health campaign. Increased awareness about the associated development goal is an important but secondary objective.

The health campaign focuses on access to health care and, through the lobbying activities, on reproductive health. It therefore touches on goals four, five and six. The lobbying components are kept separate to the development education side and it is left up to the participating organisations which type of lobbying and fundraising they do. In the case of health, the campaign is working towards Cairo + 10 (see www.kansopgezondheid.nl) and is targeted towards youth.

Sweden

Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency and the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs are working together to build awareness and promote debate on the MDGs. There is a clear but integrated division of labour between the two, where both are responsible for targeted public awareness-raising and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is also working at the policy level, most particularly, by passing a Swedish policy for global development – *Shared responsibility- Sweden's policy for global development*. This government bill was presented to the Swedish Parliament in May 2003. These two bodies are working in close coordination with the UNDP, the Swedish UN Association and NGOs that receive grants for their information activities.

Sweden came to the international forefront of communicating about the MDGs with its December 2002 publicity campaign entitled "a present to us all for us all – the MDGs and halving global poverty by 2015." A working group comprising the Department for Infrastructure and Economic Co-operation, SIDA's Information Department, the Department for Natural Resources and the Environment, Policy Secretariat and SIDA-East has been established to implement and plan communication activities in different constellations until 2015.

SIDA'S TARGET GROUPS

SIDA has five sets of target groups:

1. *General public*: in particular certain sections of the public where they are more likely to achieve progress. They include people interested in development co-operation, those who want Swedish support to focus on trade and financial activities, and the Swedes who want to give priority to economic growth.
2. *Young people*: Priority to upper secondary, university student of economics and trade programs and future decision-makers found in the youth associations of political parties.
3. *Opinion leaders*: found in industry, the media, politics, NGOs and agriculture.
4. *Development co-operation sector*: includes Swedish partners in development co-operation.
5. *Sida staff*: to improve understanding of the particular theme.

Goals and procedures

In terms of how it communicates about the MDGs the working mode is to use them as the platform for all communications. In so doing, it takes a mixed approach, focusing on the goals in general with a core positive message that “it’s possible to halve poverty by 2015” as well as selecting a different annual MDG theme until 2015. The theme for 2003-2004 is the importance of growth for poverty reduction. It was launched on October 17 – World Poverty Day.

Not unlike other organisations, SIDA finds itself confronted by a number of dilemmas. The central issue is the conflict between trying to communicate about the Goals as a whole versus taking a thematic approach. There is a sense that the complexity of the issue is somehow lost whichever solution is chosen. Goal eight, which is most relevant to the rich countries, is limited because there are no concrete commitments and time-lines associated with it. It is also more controversial and requires increased sensitivity in communications. Furthermore, public support for Goal eight is less of a ‘given’ than for the other seven. Nevertheless, SIDA asserts that the MDGs are not too difficult to handle. In fact, they are very practical for communications because they have a deadline and they provide a useful platform for building partnerships with others, both traditional and new partners such as the private sector.

Communication activities

All planned activities are supported by public opinion and focus group research. This research also serves to test core messages and monitor the effectiveness of communications. A variety of channels are used to communicate the message. They include: TV-commercials, ads, supplements in daily papers, conference, seminars, website, printed materials, fact sheets, posters etc. The activities have clearly set-out time-lines and stages. For example the 2003 campaign commences with a) The Annual Conference on Development on October 17th, and b) a mass communication initiative that starts one week before the Conference. Educational and other activities continue until the following June. The planning for the subsequent year's campaign starts in January.

Finland

The Information unit at the Department for Development Policy in the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented a document on the information challenge of the MDGs at the annual meeting of DAC Heads of Information in June 2003. The key working principle in Finland's communication on the MDGs is that they are both a cross-cutting issue in all information and communications as well as specific information efforts. It intends therefore to take a mixed approach in its communications. Peer pressure plays an important role in the Nordic countries where regular meetings (policy and planning) take place between them on communication issues. It is interesting to note the similarities between these countries in terms of types of strategies and the fact that they are implementing campaigns on the MDGS, because they work together.

The Campaign started in 2002 and among the activities it is running on the MDGs are articles in its own public media such as the newsletter and magazine. Posters on each goal have also been distributed to schools and displayed in meetings, seminars and public events.

Collaboration is a top priority in this campaign, especially with civil society, development NGOs, the Finnish United Nations Association and the National Board of Education (MDGs have been included in the high school education programme on sustainable development). According to the Finnish authorities further collaboration in terms of building synergies for MDG information activities are envisaged.

Communication Examples

The advent calendar (2002): This web-based calendar had 18 windows for the days leading up to Christmas. Each window represented one of the 18 targets of the MDGs – first with a photo and then background information.

Organised a visit from the Head of the UN Millennium Campaign which is used as an opportunity to discuss the MDGs with NGOs, Finnish UN Association, etc.

Seminars: targeting NGOs and other interested groups.

Building awareness internally in the Ministry through provision of information and training sessions on internal communication.

Difficulties

Goal eight is considered to be more difficult to communicate about than the others. Given its policy coherence focus it is considered to be controversial and less straight forward to communicate about, especially when national policies are not necessarily formed on the basis of policy coherence. Finland needs support from NGOs in the MDG campaign in the form of lobbying for policy change.

The United Kingdom

The Department for International Development (DfID) has been a constant supporter of the MDGs since they first appeared in the OECD as the International Development Targets in the mid 1990s. While DfID is currently developing its communications strategy on the MDGs (at mid-development point) it has been surveying public and youth attitudes to the IDGs and later the MDGs since 1999. This opinion research serves as input to the strategy development. The aim is to make the MDGs an integral part of DfID's communication strategy.

The goals of the strategy are still not clear but it is likely that communications will take a specific goal approach (rather than treating them all together) aimed at various age groups in the United Kingdom. It will also try to introduce an action element where after providing accessible and understandable information recipients might ask what they can do. Some ideas in DfID on communication themes include water targeting children, trade and debt targeting young idealists, education at young parents, Aid Works at taxpayers and child and maternal mortality at grandparents. Furthermore, the way in which the goals

are messaged is a challenge as there is a risk that they are perceived as too big an agenda to be successful. The campaign will therefore have to point out that it is possible to achieve the goals.

One particular public opinion anomaly that DfID considers in its work is whether to deepen the understanding of the 70% of people who consistently say they are concerned about development or try to bring the 30% who are unconcerned into the picture. This is a concern that it is confronted with regularly and there does not seem to be a clear answer.

DfID is looking at working with bigger NGOs in this communications campaign. It is interesting that many of the large British NGOs are already lobbying on Goal eight issues such as fair trade and agriculture. In addition, DfID works with a broad network of partners, including Ministries for Education and development education networks across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

There is an enormous diversity in civil society involved in development related matters, many of which support global equality and poverty reduction but not via aid and development co-operation or other politically-lead initiatives, such as the MDGs. Some civil society organisations strongly support the MDGs (for example, the three outlined in this paper) however, they are not necessarily representative of civil society in general. There are also the CSO/NGOs that have ongoing awareness-raising campaigns on issues which for them take precedence over the MDGs. For example, many members of the US NGO umbrella organisation – Interaction – consider that campaigning for the implementation of the Millennium Challenge Account is more relevant to the US situation than the MDGs. Here, scepticism about the political will behind the Goals has resulted in very little debate about them. Similarly, many UK-based NGOs have launched strong campaigns on trade and debt, which are linked to the Goals but were not conceived within the MDG framework, are not focused on aid effectiveness and make limited reference to the MDGs.

The NGOs overviewed in this paper, were created for development awareness-raising purposes and/or work closely with the UN system. They are therefore different to the world of Oxfam-Novib, Christian Aid, Catholic Relief Services, etc. and live in quite a different world to that of the global social movement, Porto Allegre-type activism. Because they intend to support the Campaign, they provide useful information and ideas from the civil society perspective.

NetAid

NetAid is a non-profit organisation working in partnership with the UN and the private sector. Its initial budget came from the multinational IT company Cisco Ltd. It is dedicated to increasing support in developed countries for policies and programmes that improve the lives of the world poorest. The operationalisation of NetAid in 2000 coincided nicely with the adoption of Millennium Declaration and the MDGs and therefore in some sense the Goals have been a working framework for NetAid from the beginning.

NetAid is currently entering its strategic planning process for a 3-5 year period. It sees no value in having a parallel strategy to the Millennium Campaign and so NetAid is waiting for the Millennium Campaign Strategy before developing its own strategy on the MDGs. In the mean-time NetAid has been linking the MDGs to ongoing educational projects as well as setting up broader MDG web-based activities. It is targeting younger members of the population (between 12-32 year olds) who find the internet relatively accessible. Examples include the “access to education for all” project in 2002 and 2003 which had no difficulty in making a connection with Goal two. This was a very successful project where 1.8 million people world-wide signed the petition for education for all. The project culminated in a global classroom. It entered the Guinness Book of Records as the largest lesson ever taught. A second example is the MDG quiz accessible at <http://www.netaid.org/campaigns/mdg/challenge2015.pt>. This quiz provides background information to the relevant goal upon the selection of an answer. They have also organised an MDG essay competition <http://www.netaid.org/go/Challenge2015-Essay>.

This current work on the MDGs is considered as exploratory. NetAid is piloting different ideas on the web and is monitoring their reception monitoring to see what people are interested in. Because communications are web based they can track visitors as a measure of effectiveness. During the first six weeks of the MDG quiz approximately 1 500 people took it. Its website is also promoting the MDG-focused HDR 2003.

NetAid has learned that it is not necessarily beneficial to focus on all eight as communications works when people connect with the message. It was reiterated that communicators should use one goal to open up the door to the others.

The World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA)

The WFUNA secretariat, which provides leadership to 130 member United Nations Associations endorsed the Millennium Declaration straight away. The Declaration and the MDGs therefore became part of its communications programme in 2000. The central focus for WFUNA is the Millennium Declaration because the member states signed up to the Declaration.

Current communications activities include the MDG electronic messaging service, a civil society survey on attitudes to the MDGs in collaboration with the North-South Institute in Canada (We the Peoples in 2002 and 2003), a

newsletter with a section on UN Partnerships in Action: Implementing the Millennium Declaration (online subscription). It also organises monthly meetings with civil society and UN secretariat at the UN. They normally invite a guest speaker and discussion topics are linked to the MDGs.

WFUNA comments that communications about international development should not just focus on the MDGs, although it agrees that there are various indirect ways of communicating about them due to their connectivity to all development issues. It sees a danger that the MDGs are the only 'multilateral game in town'. It also adds that aid to NGOs should not be made conditional on them campaigning for the MDGs but it stresses that importance of continuing to build awareness in civil society about the MDGs and bringing them on board in the Campaign. Support from civil society and their campaigning spirit is crucial for the achievement of the Goals because they can talk more frankly and critically than official development agencies.

The Better World Campaign

The Better World Campaign is a bipartisan, United States-based, non-profit national education and outreach effort dedicated to enhancing awareness in the United States for the vital role the United Nations plays around the world. The campaign is a project of the Better World Fund created by Ted Turner.

Their MDG strategy is 'on-hold' as they are waiting to develop their US campaign strategy in synchrony with the Millennium Campaign. They hope to work in partnership with the Millennium Campaign because they believe that working in a coalition will make the campaign stronger. The UN Campaign can benefit from the Better World's strength and expertise in political lobbying. When it comes to target groups, it focuses on opinion makers in politically powerful communities, the private sector and perhaps the general public. An activity might be to invite a key UN figure (such as Mark Malloch Brown the UNDP Administrator) to visit some strategic states and organise radio interviews, a public event with the individual as key-note speaker, interviews for a specific newspaper and perhaps finish up with a small off the record dinner in the evening. Experience demonstrates that these visits generally get positive receptions.

The thinking at The Better World Campaign on how to communicate the Goals is that they will have to 'sell' it to the American public issue by issue using the goals that resonate with the American public and issues that they are particularly supportive of. Interlinkages will be made between the goals but

they will not address all of them at once, for example, the campaign may pick up on the broad concern in the US about HIV/AIDS.

The Better World Campaign commissioned a survey on American attitudes to the MDGs in 2002 and will use the results as a guide for targeting (Public Opinion Strategies, 2002). Given their expertise as lobbyists they intend to treat it like a political campaign. In terms of performance targets this organisation would like to target in terms of legislation such as a certain percentage of money budgeted in Congress allocated to USAID. The budget will not allow for a national TV blitz because there must be considerable investment for a television Campaign so that standards are good and competitive.

Table 1

SUMMARY OF STATUS OF STRATEGIES

Country/Institution	Public Opinion Survey on MDGs	Communications Strategy		
		Not yet	In process of development	Yes and implementing
DfID (UK)	Yes		R	
Finland	Yes			R
NCD0 (The Netherlands) and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Yes		R	
SIDA and the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs	Yes			R
NetAid	No	R		
UN Millennium Campaign	No			
UNDP	No			R
Better World Fund	Yes	R		
WFUNA	Yes (civil society survey)			R Waiting on UN Millennium Campaign Civil Society Tool-kit
World bank	Yes (one question on MDGs asked in the <i>Global Poll</i> (2003))	R Unclear if there will be one on the MDGs		

Source: Interviews undertaken by researcher September – October 2003.

This concluding section summarises the main ideas which came from this research on what should be done to get this campaign going. There was a good degree of overlap between the comments of different persons interviewed.

Every developing country has been asked to work with UNDP field offices to prepare progress reports on the MDGs by 2005. However, there is no effort to prepare reports from the industrialised countries about their efforts to keep the promises in Goal eight. A campaign is mounting to address this issue among civil society supporters. Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Sweden and Belgium have decided to prepare such reports, working in collaboration with each other on a common format, with support from the OECD/DAC Secretariat.

Campaigning ideas emerging from the research:

- 1. Involve and work with civil society:** There is a fundamental need for support from civil society in the public campaign for the MDGs and for lobbying governments to meet their commitments. It occupies the space which can raise questions that governments can not. Government agencies should create space to dialogue with civil society to enrich their own communications. Civil society could also be convinced to lobby for country reports on progress towards Goal eight. It was stated at the recently convened United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS) consultation between the UN and civil society that “the political function of NGOs in advocating for changes in legislation and resource allocation at national and international levels remains indispensable for achieving the UN Conference commitments and the MDGs (UN NGLS, 2003).
- 2. Take a mixed approach:** Direct and indirect communications will work in support for the MDGs. Incorporate the MDGs in existing campaigns or make links to them in new ones. Do not be too hooked on the labels.

3. Communications should be **country specific**, avoid jargon and big terms. The MDGs should be translated from technical jargon into formulas that, true to their actual meaning, can be readily understood by the men and women in the streets (Bissio, 2003).
4. Go for '**Grab you by the Collar**' messages. The message could focus on the solution to the problem and the opportunities provided by the MDGs. Get help from focus groups meetings and professionals in the marketing and campaigning world.
5. **Involve youth**: they will be the adults and taxpayers of 2015.
6. **Be opportunistic**: Organise events around United Nations International Days (such as the World Poverty Day, etc) as the likelihood of getting press coverage may increase.
7. Use **public opinion research** to enable better targeting.
8. **Think about impact**.
9. **Collaborate** with other government departments, traditional and new non-governmental actors and the private sector.
10. Do not forget **internal staff** – get everyone on board.

References and Resources: Facts, Figures, Stories for communications

There is an abundance of research tracking progress towards the goals, which can provide realistic and local information for communications activities. This research will however have to be translated into a language which can be easily understood by different publics. This translation is generally left up to the communicator in question when they take the data. The Internet, in particular, provides sufficient quantities of information on the MDGs. The benefit here is that information can be quickly accessed and downloaded and most research centres make it freely available.

This section provides an incomplete list of organisations that produce work that is directly relevant to the MDGs. In addition, national development agencies probably have data on the MDGs and progress towards their achievement.

The Millennium Project

Background Papers of the Millennium Project Task Forces on all goals.

<http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/html/about.shtm>

The United Nations Development Group

The website has devoted a whole section to the MDGs. Very useful resource:

<http://www.undg.org/content.cfm?id=496>

The United Nations Statistics Division

Official statistics on progress towards the Goals and annual reports.

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd>

The United Nations Development Programme

General: <http://www.undp.org/mdg/>

Human Development Report 2003:

<http://www.undp.org/hdr2003/>

Millennium Development Goals: A compact among nations to end human poverty

Country Reports on progress towards the MDGs:

<http://www.undp.org/mdg/countryreports.html>. Forty country reports were prepared by October 2003.

The Centre for Global Development

The Centre for Global Development has started to 'Rank the Rich' through its commitment to development index. This research as well as much more provides useful, catchy data on the performance of the Industrialised Countries in international development (see <http://www.cgdev.org/>).

World Bank

Focuses on poverty reduction rather than the MDGs but is a strong advocate for the MDGs. The website provides an abundance of information and statistics on different development areas – www.worldbank.org.

Information on the MDGs is referred to in documents at: <http://www.development-goals.org/>.

Social Watch

For a civil society perspective on progress towards the MDGs go to: www.socialwatch.org.

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