

Media and Communications Session

Session report, 16 January 2015

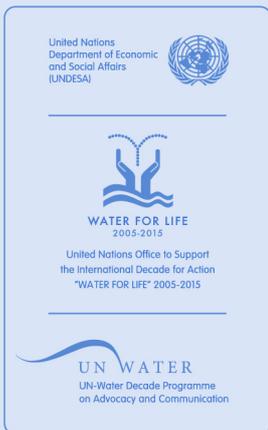
The UN-Water International Conference 'Water and Sustainable Development: From Vision to Action', which took place from 15-17 January in Zaragoza, Spain, gathered over 300 different stakeholders to discuss how to bring the post-2015 agenda into action. After setting the scene on the current proposals for the water-related Sustainable Development Goals, the second day of the Conference analysed the role of the different stakeholders in contributing to their implementation: governments, civil society, academia, business and media. In this framework, the UN Water Decade Programme on Advocacy and Communication (UNW-DPAC) led the media and communications session with journalists from across the globe and representatives of different UN agencies and communication programs.

The post-2015 agenda on water and sustainable development

The session began with a presentation on the Water related Sustainable Development Goals, the current process regarding these and the role of UN-Water in this framework. Questions were raised by participants concerning the role of youth in this process. It was clarified that the decision-making now is on the Member States and suggested to engage the youth at the national level to raise awareness among decision makers about the importance of water for the future. Interest on gender mainstreaming was raised and the UNDP Coordinator recalled that the UN-Water technical advice paper brings in human rights and gender perspectives. The importance of gender disaggregated data for monitoring was equally stressed. Journalist participants wanted to know more about UN-Water Initiatives to facilitate awareness raising of the SDGs. UN-Water shared their collaboration with a broad network of journalists engaged in the issue, and their work to reach those journalists and keep the network going. Participants were also invited to use the WWDR for media outreach and the 'Information briefs' on the implementation of the different sub-themes of current proposals of the water related SDG published by UNW-DPAC. These information briefs, available on-line, present key figures, challenges and tools for implementation useful for awareness-raising.

Water and Sustainable Development in the media: Where do we stand?

The next session reflected on how to communicate on sustainable development and talk to people in a language they understand. Sustainable development has become a widely used and acknowledged phrase, and



yet the term is not always well understood. Journalists have a strong and under-utilised opportunity to highlight the economic and social benefits to people. The question of how media professionals can specialise in sustainability, but be high-interest journalists?" is raised. Some options include cultivating high-status contacts with personal convictions and relationships with the very best photographers and filmmakers.

The debate continues discussing how and why water and sanitation in the media are relegated to the sidelines. WASH stories are considered to be insufficient in African media; the good news is that coverage of these issues in the continent has increased over the last decade. Examples of "bad WASH stories" are presented, i.e. those with mere superficial interpretation of WASH issues, to move to present the features of "Good WASH stories", those which, *inter alia*: feature real people and give voice to the marginalized from public debate and decision-making; expose malpractices in WASH Sector; and empower local people with knowledge to demand for services. Suggested solutions to improve this situation include training of journalists specialized in WASH and water integrity advocacy campaigns.

Tools and sources for reporting on water and sustainable development

Water and sanitation have been neglected in the mainstream media for a long time. In 2013, WSSCC and the UN Millennium Campaign commissioned a GlobalPulse study in order to get a better sense of the social media conversation on these topics. The study over a 3-year period showed that conversations around sanitation are mainly related to cholera (33% on average) and that a high volume of conversations on water and sanitation occur around World Water Day and World Toilet Day. The category which showed the highest increase is Human Rights, followed by Gender and Health. The study noticed an increase of water and sanitation related issues coverage and considers the fact that they are treated with a human right, gender or health lens, is a major step as it shows a better understanding of the implications of the lack of water, sanitation and hygiene.

A key issue at the national level is obtaining information on a regular basis from sector ministries. Journalists' role is critical in make sure that the commitments that are taken at the international level are followed up, respected and implemented at the national level, and yet it is very challenging for a journalist in a developing country to track information or budgets, and to undertake fact checking with government officials.

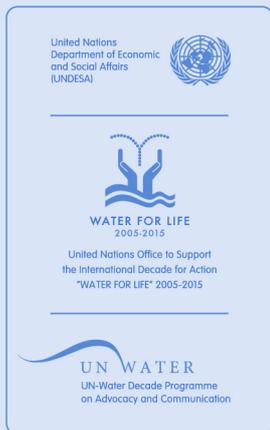
The next part of the morning is dedicated to a group roundtable discussion. Questions addressed include: Why is WASH not a favorable field for most journalists and communicators to report on, how has social media (facebook/twitter/blogs) affected WASH journalism, which issues pose the greatest challenge to reporting on WASH in participants' countries and what current WASH stories need to be reported most urgently.

Water communication campaigns and lessons learned

Today, the world is facing major water crisis and many put hopes on information, communication, marketing or media. However, studies on

Contact: Mónica Garces Solano.

E-mail: garcessolano@un.org T. + 34 976 72 42 20



water information, communication, perceptions, words, slogans, campaigns, etc. are insufficient.

The research and publication on 'Water Communication, Analysis of Strategies and Campaigns from the Water Sector' was developed to fill this gap. It includes a general outlook and retrospective of the history of the water sector in terms of communication, the landscape of organizations communicating on water and classification of topics, the differences between communication, information, mediation, raising awareness and examples of communication campaigns on water. Findings include a stereotyped way of communicating water, less related to social aspects, as well as the importance of aligning our messages in different fields: an opportunity to better explore is the linkages with the climate change sector.

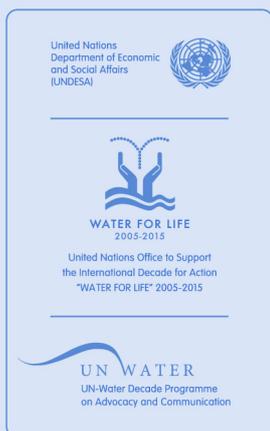
The communication work of UN-Water is presented, including several UN campaigns and World Water Day 2015 communications campaign. The challenge of bringing together different UN agencies to a common campaign while leaving space for each of them to relate it to their own topics is stated. Another challenge is developing a campaign on sanitation; World Toilet Day still hasn't reached so many people yet it's considered to be a good start. Proximity is an important factor: messages that are felt closer to the recipients have a stronger impact (ie 'Je suis Charlie' vs Boko Haram). Why raise awareness and what for? "If we are able to achieve a feeling of empathy then I believe awareness rising makes sense" said Daniella Bostrom, UN-Water.

Next, the End Open Defecation and WATERisLIFE campaigns were presented. In parts of the world where open defecation is not an issue, the fact that the issue is so poorly understood or even known is seen as the reason why it is not getting the attention and the response it deserves. To end open defecation there is a need to break the silence on this issue. The uniqueness of the End Open Defecation campaign is that it does not ask for money or signing of a petition, but it asks for people's time on the website. The campaign is always looking for on-the-ground content, photos and testimonials from communities that are directly affected by water, sanitation, and open defecation issues.

WATERisLIFE uses communication tools that provide clean water and stimulate discussion on safe water practices. They have developed innovative and emotional communication campaigns: the hashtag killer, 4 year old's bucket list, girl who couldn't cry and the drinkable book have won gold, silver and bronze Cannes Lions Awards, received top marketing and communications awards and have been featured in the Wall Street Journal and New York Times.

There was a roundtable discussion on solutions and how to improve campaigns. The world has changed, but is our communication changing accordingly? Sustainable development is a vague, broad and important topic: how to communicate sustainable development in a coherent way? Do messages attract target groups? Are they reaching intended audiences? These were some of the questions raised.

Some participants believed that communication strategies to bring awareness and change to the water sector should be alive, tangible and



achievable - and speak a language that is relatable to our current environment. Starting with the story may be a useful entry point. The perception of some international awareness-raising campaigns as irrelevant to local contexts, and more directed to a “northern/western audience” was expressed. The need to improve the communication process between UN agencies and the local people was underlined. As an example of effort in this line, the UN -Water webpage goes through different layers: the first screen is dedicated to a more general public, the next layer goes into more in depth information and whoever wants to read more after that gets the most technical data. The importance of counting with a very good editor not coming from the water sector was also stressed. Participants agreed that if journalists don't understand what technicians are saying they won't be able to communicate about it properly. The issue of funding for journalists was also raised- is it vital for WASH, who should do it and can it ever avoid conflicts of interest were some of the questions discussed.

Session Photos



Participants exchange on Water communication campaigns and lessons learned



Daniella Bostrom, UN-Water, presents UN communication campaigns and reflects on importance of proximity

**UN-Water Decade
Programme on Advocacy
and Communication**

United Nations
Department of Economic
and Social Affairs
(UNDESA)





WATER FOR LIFE
2005-2015

United Nations Office to Support
the International Decade for Action
"WATER FOR LIFE" 2005-2015



UN WATER
UN-Water Decade Programme
on Advocacy and Communication



Christina Samson presents the End Open Defecation Campaign



Media & communications session group photo

**United Nations Office
to Support the International
Decade for Action
"Water for Life" 2005-2015**

Casa Solans Avda. Cataluña, 60
50014 Zaragoza, Spain
T +34 976 478 346
T +34 976 478 347
F +34 976 478 349
water-decade@un.org
un.org/waterforlifedecade

Contact: Mónica Garces Solano.

E-mail: garcessolano@un.org T. + 34 976 72 42 20