

REPORT

Annual Meeting of the OECD Development Communication Network (DevCom)

OECD Boulogne, 21 November 2017

The 2017 DevCom Annual Meeting brought together more than seventy senior communicators, policy experts and innovators from government institutions, multilateral organisations, NGOs, businesses and foundations. They:

- Took stock of progress in engaging citizens, schools and businesses in support of the SDGs;
- Discussed the need for “listening architectures”, considering the outcomes of recent policy consultations and international surveys;
- Shared lessons and examples from successful communications campaigns, including digital public engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean; and
- Discovered innovative platforms to engage with citizens and understand public attitudes.

6 KEY MESSAGES FROM THE 2017 DEVCOM ANNUAL MEETING

1. **SDG awareness** is on the rise, but there’s a long way to go. Sharing experiences (through tools like the [SDG Communicator](#)) and joining forces on public engagement will be pivotal, including with policymakers from developing countries.
2. **Strategic, effective and inclusive development communications** requires: a combination of results, data and relatable human stories; strong visuals and videos; and a new set of skills to facilitate action, engagement and dialogue.
3. **A whole-of-government approach** remains a distant yet necessary target; communicators in OECD countries have the particularly hard challenge of finding stronger connections between domestic and global SDG agendas.
4. **Understanding audiences**, [becoming better listeners](#) and collecting feedback from partners and citizens around the world is paramount.
5. **Gender equality** and women’s empowerment (SDG 5) is an important theme for DevCom members and partners, with several campaigns being prepared for International Women’s Day on 8 March 2018. DevCom can help bring them together and amplify their impact.
6. These are challenging times for **freedom of expression**. Further reflections are needed on how to better engage with and support **journalists** as long-term partners.



WELCOME REMARKS

Mario Pezzini, Director of the OECD Development Centre, welcomed the diversity of participants in the room (see [List of Participants](#)). In the “SDG era”, we need to bring together and understand a diversity of development narratives, recognising that “development” can mean very different things for different countries and stakeholders.

Mr. Pezzini stressed the need for [better listening](#), including more *genuine* listening (i.e. giving citizens real voice in the design and implementation of policies) and more *inclusive* listening which implies hearing views from emerging and fragile countries, or disenfranchised citizens in rural areas. He also invited participants to engage with [The SDG Communicator](#), DevCom’s new platform to share stories and advice on engaging citizens for sustainable development.

He closed by highlighting the role of DevCom as a community that can understand public perceptions and develop tools to reconnect with citizens in a critical time for international development cooperation.

I. TWO YEARS IN: WHERE DO WE STAND ON SDG ENGAGEMENT?

Bathylle Missika, Head of Partnerships and Networks at the OECD Development Centre, opened the session with insights from [survey data on the SDGs](#):

- Awareness of the SDGs has grown from 29 to 35% since 2016.
- People in emerging economies are the most optimistic about the SDGs.
- 90% of people think businesses should be involved in the SDGs.

Hannah Cole, Head of Communications at the European Commission’s Directorate General for Development Cooperation, discussed how the new [European Consensus](#) provides strong hooks for public engagement around development issues by focusing on relatable subjects (e.g. gender equality; young people) rather than abstract concepts. The aim of EU campaigns like [#2030isnow](#) is to move from public awareness to real engagement. The challenge is to find “real value statements” with broad Europe-wide appeal (e.g. “end violence against women”), but to be able to tailor messages to diverse national contexts.

Alison Bellwood, Director of the World’s Largest Lesson at Project Everyone, highlighted the value of positive and simple language, as well as colourful imagery, in reaching 8-14 year-olds around the world (see [presentation](#)). The SDGs are proving to be a powerful teaching tool, reminding teachers of why they chose their profession in the first place. The challenges include reaching ministries of education in OECD countries and lifting sustainable development out of the “geography/science” silos. We need to make the SDGs more relevant to day-to-day lives, encouraging children to design their own solutions rather than pre-defining their actions.



Susanna Zeko, Managing Director of The New Division, stressed that there was a long way to go in promoting genuine SDG engagement within the business community. She argued that focusing on specific SDG targets ([#targets4action](#)) would remind businesses of the measurable goals they needed to help achieve. She also pointed to the need for *internal* communication in businesses to help SDG solutions emerge at all levels of business, from senior management to employees. One key message to get across is that it is easier to mobilise investment if you can link it to the SDGs.

In the **general discussion**, some participants highlighted the challenge of communicating about global development in a context where political leaders are adopting more isolationist approaches, and where journalists seek scandals, not success stories. Participants agreed on the need to tell human and relatable stories behind the goals, rather than focusing on the goals as a “bureaucratic” development agenda. Moreover, both individuals and businesses can be “doing” sustainable development without using the language of the SDGs.

Migration was highlighted as a delicate subject: some communicators want to tell positive stories about migrants, while others fear that such stories will provoke anti-migrant sentiment among some audiences. The [Together](#) campaign aims to promote safety and dignity for refugees and migrants. Several participants mentioned forthcoming communications initiatives and campaigns related to SDG 5 on **gender equality** and women’s’ empowerment, and encouraged DevCom to focus on this issue in 2018.

II. BETTER LISTENING IN A POLARISED WORLD: WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING ABOUT SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

Richard Wike, Director of Global Attitudes Research at the Pew Research Center, opened the session by sharing two findings that highlight the value of and need for better listening:

- In wealthy countries, attitudes to foreign aid correlate closely with attitudes to other policies. We need a more cross-sectoral approach to understand and engage with the public.
- The priorities of international development cooperation often poorly reflect the policy priorities expressed by citizens in developing countries.

Jacqueline Théoret, Executive Director for Strategic Communications, International Development at Global Affairs Canada, provided an overview of the [consultations](#) that saw more than 15,000 people and partners contribute to Canada’s new Feminist International Assistance Policy. In 2018, Canada will host the G7 and deliver its voluntary review on the SDGs to the UN High-Level Political Forum: an impetus to engage Canadians for the SDGs. Ms. Théoret stressed the importance of message testing and social media analysis to better target audience groups in different countries, on different social media platforms and at different times of day.



Nick van Praag, Director of Ground Truth Solutions, called for a more client- or customer-focused approach to international development co-operation. He shared survey findings from 6 countries affected by humanitarian crises, comparing the views of affected people, humanitarian field staff and local organisations.

These surveys provide valuable insights on the efficacy, fairness and relevance of humanitarian operations, and crucial feedback on what people really need (e.g. funding or institution-building?). The findings also highlight the need to communicate locally and demonstrate that people's concerns are being heard.

Nicholas Piachaud, Policy and Advocacy Manager at the Varkey Foundation, shared findings from the [Generation Z: Global Citizenship Survey](#) (of young people born between 1995 and 2001 in 20 countries). Overall, young people say they're happy, but women are less likely to be happy than men, and people in emerging economies tend to be happier than people in OECD economies. Young people are pessimistic about the future, and united about the need to end discrimination. For communicators, it is important to note that young people's top influencers are not celebrities or political leaders, but parents, friends and teachers.

As in the previous session, participants in the **open discussion** stressed the need for better storytelling, with more relatable and visual content to give stories a human face. They agreed on the need for partnerships to source powerful stories, for example with international news organisations or media schools in developing countries.

III. WORLD CAFÉ: BETTER LISTENING FOR MORE ENGAGED AUDIENCES

In this session, participants had an opportunity to meet the people behind four innovative new platforms designed to give citizens a voice and better understand audiences.

Martijn Lampert, Research Director at Motivation International, presented [World of Globalities](#), a visual, research-based tool that allows users to explore different target audiences according to their values, opinions and other characteristics.



Jonathan Andrews, I Am Able Campaign Leader at the Commonwealth Youth Council, and **Rohit Pothukuchi**, Founder & Chief Executive of Verdentum, presented their [collaborative platform for I Am Able](#), which allows campaigners in different countries to share information on activities data and photos to help track and improve their worldwide campaign in real time.

Laura Hildebrandt, Policy Specialist at the UN SDG Action Campaign, presented [MYWorld 2030](#), an easy-to-use survey tool that invites citizens to choose SDG priorities and share their views on progress to date. The results help gauge SDG awareness and promote dialogue with policy makers.



Ben Fowkes, Commercial Director at Delib presented a range of new [tools to promote digital democracy](#), including public consultations, budget simulators and tools for dialogue.

IV. KEYNOTE: EMPOWERING JOURNALISTS FOR HEALTHIER MEDIA LANDSCAPES

Aaron Sherinian, Director of Communications at the Aga Khan Development Network, delivered a powerful keynote [presentation](#) on the need to support journalists during a period of immense transformation in the media business. He highlighted several principles, including:

- **Embrace the Agenda.** Building on the MDGs, the SDGs give us a great to-do list. We can measure how we're doing, and the deadlines give us jeopardy.
- **Think Extrasensory Perception (ESP).** Don't focus on the new technology. Focus on new engagement opportunities.
- **Rinse & Repeat.** Don't be afraid to repeat the same messages. The journalists you pitched to recently have probably moved on!
- **Less Pitch, More Partner.** Development communicators and journalists have a shared agenda, and both are aiming to reach the same audience of 7.3 billion people!
- **Date Your Data.** People don't just want the numbers. They want to hear about people: we are so busy being careful, we forget to be human! Mr. Sherinian used word clouds to demonstrate that people like talking about their localities: we need to remind people that development happens at home, not far away.
- **Go Young.** A growing population of young people doesn't just want to hear about the problems. They want to know what is being done about global problems (solutions) and whether it's working (evidence).

Drawing on feedback he had collected from African journalists, Mr. Sherinian reminded development communicators that there is no longer a "development beat" with journalists ready and waiting to receive our pitch. Journalists need support to craft stories that go beyond the usual politics, and that allow them to work independently.



V. CITIZENS & THE SDGs: DIGITAL INNOVATION IN LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN



Amalia Navarro, Director of Communications at the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB), shared her experience building a communications network to help prepare the 2018 Ibero-American Summit in Guatemala. The Latin American and Caribbean region has embraced digital communication, with social media uptake greatest in Paraguay, Costa Rica and Uruguay. Whatsapp and Facebook have become important

platforms to discuss public policy, sustainability and climate change. SEGIB's [#Diferentementelguales](#) campaign has used the huge popularity of music to reach citizens across the region. Other campaigns have taken more decentralised approaches, with each country tailoring messages to their needs: communicators today need to work through networks and be less afraid of losing control.

Maria del Mar Oña Hernandez, Director for Communications at the BBVA Microfinance Foundation, discussed the Foundation's efforts to give voice to the vulnerable. In a series of videos, tell first-person stories about the beneficiaries of the Foundation's programmes. Ms. Oña Hernandez had a positive take on the phenomenon of "fake news". While people want brief, timely audio-visual information, they have also begun to seek out higher quality information. In this context, the Foundation has translated its latest 400-page annual report into an engaging [3-minute video](#).

VI. SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS: PEER LEARNING FOR SDG COMMUNICATORS

Julia Lehmann, Head of Public Relations at the German Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development, [shared insights](#) from the [#17Ziele](#) and other campaigns that have aimed to take the SDGs to where people already are, whether on trains, in cinemas, at music festivals, at club meetings or on fashion blogs. Success factors include focusing messages on how citizens can actually help (e.g. [sustainable buying](#)) and finding partners with direct links to target groups.

Jenefaa Gillis-Harry, Deputy Director of the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs, Nigeria, highlighted the importance of data and monitoring in support of both policy making and awareness-raising. He also pointed to the value of partnerships to help engage citizens: multi-sectoral engagement has seen more than 3 million Nigerians participate in MyWorld 2030.

Participants broke into **small groups** to share experiences, with each group focusing on a different dimension of SDG communications:

- **Erja-Outi Heino**, Director of Development Communications at the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, [presented](#) her Ministry's effort to demonstrate results by compiling "[100 results](#) of Finnish development work", combining human stories, photos and results data.
- **Soyeon Shin**, Manager of the Office of Public Relations & Communication at the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), [presented](#) two initiatives to promote global citizenship: the [ODA Education Centre and the Global Village](#).
- **Chiara Popplewell**, Director of Public Outreach at Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, shared the experience of raising SDG awareness among young people at Ireland's biggest music festival, [Electric Picnic](#).
- **Noemie Bauer**, Global Corporate Social Responsibility Manager at Pernod Ricard, shared a [private sector perspective](#), focusing on how the SDGs can make business sense, how employees can be engaged (e.g. volunteering programmes), and how businesses can promote SDG awareness and SDG-friendly behaviours (e.g. safe driving) through their communications and public engagement programmes.



Laura Hildebrandt, Policy Specialist at the UN SDG Action Campaign, summarised takeaways from the session and confirmed that the Campaign and DevCom would take careful note of ideas as they collaborate to promote peer learning for SDG communications.

- To communicate about the SDGs in the “fake news” era, we need to **combine compelling evidence/data with relatable human stories**.
- To achieve wider outreach, we need to get even better at **graphics, images and video**.
- We need to get **more strategic** about communications, for example:
 - integrating communications into the programme cycle, from design to evaluation;
 - defining better measures of communications impact (i.e. beyond clicks); and
 - testing messages, particularly on difficult audiences.
- To engage with young people, focus on **actions and behaviours**, not just awareness.
- We need to continue deepening **partnerships** with universities, NGOs and businesses.
- We need to **strengthen and promote platforms** for people and partners to design their own messages, make their own commitments and share their feedback on the SDGs.
- Communicators will always need to tailor work to their local context. To help, the UN and OECD can provide templates and provide clearer overviews of materials and good practices.

VII. WRAP UP

To close the event, DevCom Co-Chairs **Jacqueline Théoret** (Global Affairs Canada) and **Anja Prodöhl** (Programme Manager for Communications at Swiss Development Cooperation), together with **Bathylle Missika** (OECD Development Centre), shared key messages, providing valuable guidance for DevCom activities in 2018.

On the first page of this report you will see the **six messages** we took home. **Share your feedback and ideas with us, and make DevCom your go-to platform to exchange with peers around the world** (Dev.com@oecd.org; www.oecd.org/dev/devcom; www.sdg-communicator.org).

