UNESCO
United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Audit of UNESCO's Communications Strategy and Framework

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Results of the Audit

UNESCO's communication activities involve a wide range of personnel, offices and priorities. Against a backdrop of budgetary shortfalls and evolving technologies, much has been achieved through, for example, better management of publications, increased public access of UNESCO's internet, rapidly growing use of social media, better monitoring of communication effectiveness and a range of good initiatives by certain sectors and offices.

Nevertheless, noting that UNESCO spends $12.6 million annually on public information and visibility, as well as some $25 million in programme activities such as publications, meetings and conferences, more needs to be done to strategically manage communications. As a priority, the Sector for External Relations and Public Information should, in collaboration with its stakeholders, (i) update UNESCO's communication strategy, (ii) clarify communication roles and authorities across the Organization and (iii) introduce better web governance. The audit report includes 11 recommendations to improve UNESCO's communications.

Background

1.   Effective communications serve to project an Organization's image and values, support resource mobilization and increase programmatic impact. UNESCO's external communication activities are undertaken across the Organization, with the Sector for External Relations and Public Information (ERI) holding primary communication roles including:

- making UNESCO's mission and programme known to the wider public

- maintaining effective media relations

- strengthening communications with and between National Commissions

- building better communication with and amongst NGO partners and increasing the visibility of cooperation with NGOs and

- strategically positioning UNESCO within the UN system and demonstrating its impact in achieving development goals.

2.   The Director-General, supported by the Speechwriting and Communication Section of the Office of the Director-General, fulfils wide-ranging communications with Member States, partners, media and the public through speeches, editorials and press releases.

3.   In addition to the above, UNESCO's Programme Sectors, Field Offices and Liaison Offices undertake varying communications initiatives regarding their respective areas of responsibility.

4.   UNESCO communicates through a wide range of channels that include websites, press, social media, printed material, meetings, conferences and events. In addition, UNESCO engages a diverse network of partners such as National Commissions, Goodwill Ambassadors, Category II Centres, Academic Chairs, Associated Schools and Clubs who support to varying degrees UNESCO's communications of programme relevance, priorities and accomplishments. UNESCO's values are promoted through various mechanisms, for example, association with the commemoration of historic events, anniversaries, prizes and International Days.

5.   IOS estimates that the Organization-wide communication costs for public information and visibility activities total $12.6 million per year, comprising $12.1 million in direct staff costs and $0.5 million in activity costs. Other activities relevant to communicating UNESCO's programme include programme publications and other printed material ($18 million) as well as programme meetings and conferences ($7 million).

Scope, Objective and Methodology

6.   This audit was undertaken to determine whether UNESCO's communications strategy and framework are clearly established, effectively implemented and efficiently managed. In answering the above objective, the audit examined:

- What and with whom UNESCO communicates
- How UNESCO communicates
- The efficiency and effectiveness of UNESCO's communication efforts

7.   The audit was performed in accordance with the *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing* and considered external communication activities for 2010/11 and 2012/13 as well as plans for 2014/15.

8.   The audit methodology included an assessment of UNESCO's communication plans and strategies, and benchmarking with comparable organizations. The audit also involved interviews with key managers, reviews of relevant documentation, attendance and observation of ERI daily meeting and staff retreat, analyses of workflows and examination of stakeholders' roles and responsibilities. IOS also compiled an estimate of UNESCO's communication costs and reviewed the principal communication tools, channels and assets.

Audit Conclusions

9.   IOS has assessed UNESCO's overall communication strategy and framework as falling between 'planned' and 'institutionalized' as indicated in the maturity model below.[1] This indicates that a corporate communication strategy should be adopted and communication roles, responsibilities and resources should be better institutionalized to maintain a consistent level of performance.

Figure 1: IOS assessment of UNESCO's communications maturity model
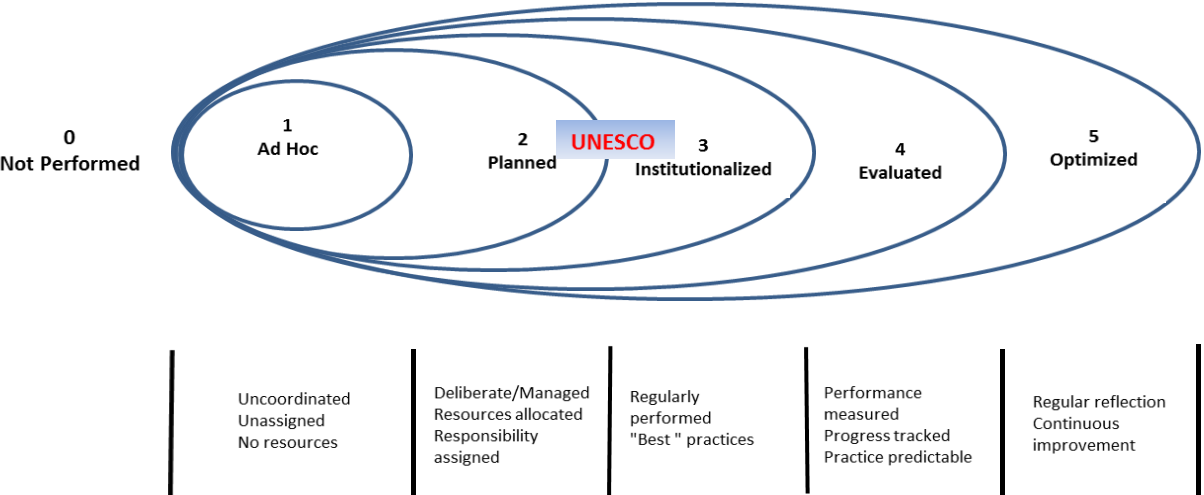

Achievements

10. UNESCO ranks very favourably in a recent global survey measuring awareness and positive opinion (2013 WIN/Gallup survey). Consistent with this, the audit noted a significant increase in UNESCO's communication in recent years, for example, through UNESCO's website. The website is a main communication channel and is available in the six official languages. This site has recorded an increase in the number of visits and views[2] over the past three years as shown in Figure 2 below.

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[1] This assessment is based on information gathered through structured interviews, document reviews and benchmarking.

[2] A page visit is a series of page requests from the same uniquely identified client within a time of no more 30 minutes. A page view is counted when the page requested by the user is loaded into the internet browser.

Figure 2: UNESCO's public website traffic

Web traffic on unesco.org from September 2011 to May 2014   *Source: Google Analytics*
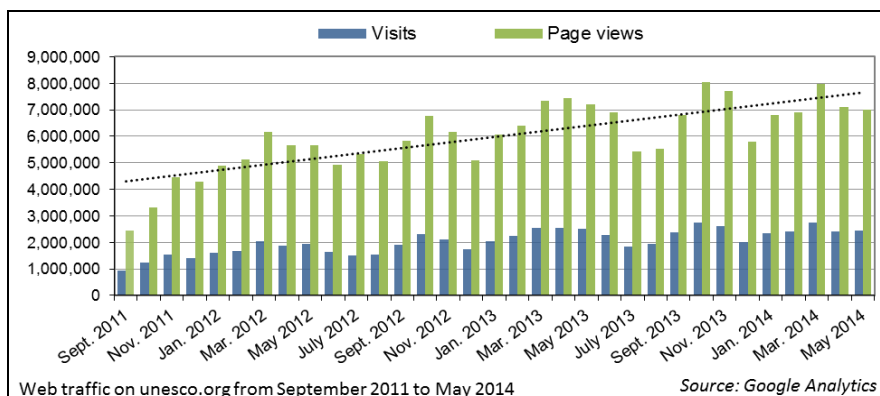
11. The Director-General's editorials and blogs regularly promote UNESCO's views on topical issues. During the past year, records show that the number of mainstream media articles on UNESCO has increased by 37 percent and social media followers have increased tenfold (from 200,000 to 2 million).

12. Programme sectors have developed their own communication practices:

- The Education and the Communication and Information sectors have developed toolkits to promote programme visibility and uniform messaging.

- Some individual projects and programme activities include plans and budgets for communications. For example, the Global Monitoring Report provides for communication and visibility.

- Printed newsletters of field offices are being eliminated and replaced with e-newsletters to support cost-effective dissemination.

13. A number of field offices proactively communicate their programmes:

- Santiago Office promotes the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE) across Latin America and the Caribbean using a communication and fundraising plan.

- Bangkok Office disseminates public information, manages publications and knowledge management while promoting Education for All (EFA) and UNESCO's role in the post-2015 development agenda within the Asia Pacific Region.

- Brasilia Office coordinates the Criança Esperança project, a significant communication and fundraising effort for raising awareness and supporting social development.

14. Progress has been made in other areas as well. The Publications Board established in 2011 oversees UNESCO's publication process by ensuring alignment with programme priorities, applying quality standards, reviewing gender neutrality and assessing the publications' costs and intended contribution to results.

15. Since 2011, ERI/DPI monitors UNESCO's communication activities and disseminates a monthly visibility report. This report raises awareness of trending topics, publications and major events at Headquarters and in the field.

16. The above achievements are particularly noteworthy in light of reduced budget and personnel during this period.

Key Challenges and Opportunities:

17. Very few of the staff entrusted with communication responsibilities are aware of any UNESCO communication strategy, notwithstanding the fact that the General Conference

approved a formal Communications Strategy[3] in 2001 and ERI developed and disseminated a subsequent document in 2011 entitled *Programme of Action and a Vision to Enhance UNESCO's Visibility*. ERI pointed out that this subsequent document could be seen as UNESCO's current communication strategy; however, IOS notes that it is not available in official document repositories or otherwise institutionalized (e.g., it is not included in UNESDOC or incorporated in UNESCO's administrative guidance) for continued reference across the Organization. Further, these two documents (i) were independently developed, (ii) are not consistently recognized or implemented and (iii) together do not provide a coherent or integrated strategy. At the same time, additional communication plans and strategies are to be developed in various areas such as Priorities Gender Equality and Africa. Taking into consideration the General Conference's endorsement and the comprehensive nature of the 2001 Communication Strategy, this document – with appropriate updating – could effectively serve as the strategic platform for UNESCO's communications. It could thereby also support and provide context for the more specific communication initiatives emerging across the Organization.

18. While there is considerable recognition of UNESCO's name and logo, and guidelines are in place regarding the use of the name and logo, UNESCO has not yet developed a branding strategy in order to better promote its values, messages and image.

19. In recent years, UNESCO's overall budget reductions have had a major impact on the resources available for communications of public information (see Figures 3 (a) and (b) below).

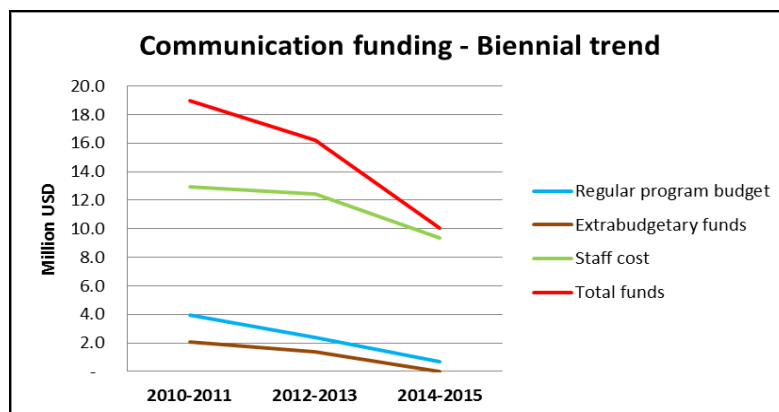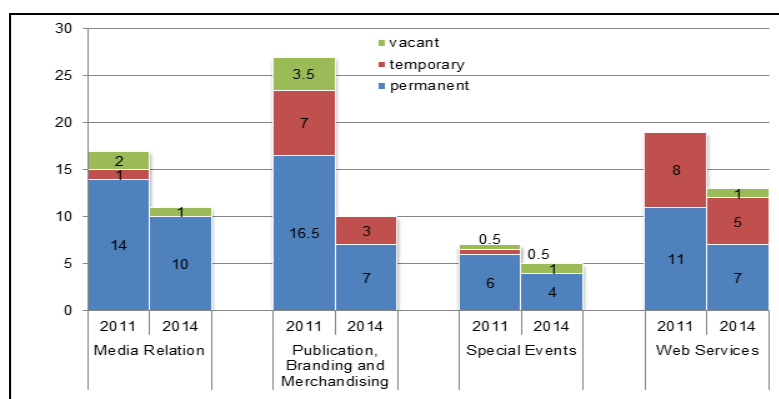**Figure 3(a): ERI/DPI funding 2011 – 2015**

Figure 3(b): ERI/DPI posts comparison 2011- 2014

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[3] Comprehensive strategy to raise the visibility of UNESCO's action through strengthening the coordination of information and dissemination of activities within the secretariat" (161 EX/43) was presented and endorsed by 31 C/Resolution 37 (2001). In preparing this document, the Director-General established an Expert Group composed of journalists, publishers and specialists in public relations and in the information sciences and new information technologies to advise in formulating the communications strategy.

20. In addition to the resource reductions in ERI/DPI, communication focal points at Headquarters and in Field Offices are being reassigned to other duties as a reaction to UNESCO's budgetary challenges. As a result, capacity is dispersed and functions are understaffed, limiting ERI/DPI's ability to communicate on UNESCO's wide range of actions and events. Additionally, a small team of temporary personnel maintains UNESCO's web presence impairing service delivery and increasing continuity risks. With the rapid growth of social media, there is also a need to ensure sufficient risk management in this area.

21. Unlike some other organizations, UNESCO's communication efforts are not clearly aligned with its fundraising activities. For example, World Food Programme's communications strategy specifically provides for communicating in donor countries the results of its work. Other entities such as UN WOMEN combine the fundraising and communication functions. In times of budget shortfalls, a more coordinated approach has the potential to yield cost-effective results for UNESCO.

22. UNESCO's public information roles, procedures and accountabilities are not formalized. For example, authorities and delegations for addressing the news media are not defined, leading to uncertainty of staff roles and risk of inappropriate statements. Further, ERI/DPI's authority to engage and lead house-wide communications is unclear; the relevant sections of UNESCO's Administrative Manual are not prepared and have remained under development for several years.

23. Better coordination and information sharing is needed in managing UNESCO's daily communication agenda and in responding to emerging issues. In order to improve the timeliness and reliability of internal coordination, the current interface between ERI and ODG should be strengthened through a better process of information sharing and communication priority setting at a higher level.

24. UNESCO's website management has become unwieldy and web governance needs improvement. The website currently links to approximately 3.6 million pages, many of which are obsolete and hosted on a non-standard platform (TYPO3). This creates challenges in coherently presenting information and also increases risks to website security. Further, the principal content focuses more on news and events than on results achieved, a point for consideration through a web governance process.

Other matters for consideration:

25. As part of its 2011 Programme of Action and Vision to Enhance UNESCO's Visibility, ERI launched a number of initiatives and tools intended to support senior management in communicating effectively with the media and external stakeholders. About half of these have been shelved due to lack of consensus as to their usefulness. As the communication strategy and priorities are updated, we believe that these initiatives and tools should be revisited to determine which of these can add value to UNESCO's communication management.

26. UNESCO can better leverage its large network of partners for communicating its programmes. While the strategic intent of engaging the network is generally clear in the respective partnership strategies and agreements, it is not consistently operationalized and ERI could give priority to introducing basic tools for UNESCO's partners to promote visibility and communication.

27. Certain communication assets are under-used and exposed to deterioration and loss. UNESCO's 70th anniversary presents an opportunity to revitalize the audio, library, video, film and photo collections and to better showcase the Headquarter premises for improving UNESCO's visibility. In this regard, efforts are underway to revitalize the collections through extrabudgetary fundraising.

28. Some UNESCO partners are authorized to use UNESCO's logo. While this promotes UNESCO's visibility, there are frequent instances of incorrect use and inconsistent display of the UNESCO logo. Actively monitoring the logo use, and engaging where misuse is identified, will manage risks of negative visibility.

Table of Recommendations

Principal Recommendations

Recommendation 1: ERI, in collaboration with involved stakeholders, to update the Communications Strategy to reflect UNESCO's current priorities, financial and operational realities and the evolving communication environment.

Recommendation 2: ERI to (i) elaborate a concept note and engage with programme sector budget holders to plan and provide resources for enhanced communication services through chargeback mechanisms; (ii) strengthen the Headquarters web team by exploring synergies and identifying complementary skills within other media and technical teams; and (iii) develop a pool of designated communication officers in Headquarters Sectors and in Field Offices for receiving and disseminating consistent and priority messages both locally and globally.

Recommendation 3: ERI, in consultation with BSP/CFS, to better align UNESCO's communication activities to fundraising efforts. This should include guidance for programme sectors to communicate and promote visibility of programme delivery as a means for fundraising.

Recommendation 4: ODG and ERI to assess their current practices for engaging with one another in establishing and responding to communication priorities in order to better address the priorities of the Director-General. This should include (i) establishing a more structured approach to relay the messages of the Director-General (e.g., through weekly coordination meetings at senior level or designating a senior-level focal point or spokesperson in ODG for managing and coordinating the Director-General's communication agenda) and (ii) jointly assessing their mechanisms in place in order to ensure a common understanding of workflow, needs and expectations. IOS can facilitate this joint assessment if needed.

Recommendation 5: ERI to complete and issue in UNESCO's Administrative Manual the policies, procedures, roles and accountabilities for public information and communications including social media.

Recommendation 6: ERI, in collaboration with KMI and under auspices of the Knowledge and Information Technology Management Advisory Board, to establish UNESCO's web governance and incorporate it in the Administrative Manual Item 13.7, Web Portals. This should include emphasis on key messaging and multilingualism.

Other Recommendations

Recommendation 7: ERI to review and align UNESCO's current communications plans, priorities and tools to the updated communications strategy and available resources.

Recommendation 8: ERI to introduce basic guidance and tools for UNESCO's partners to promote visibility. Further, ERI together with the involved services should take stock of standard partnership agreements to include clear expectations of partners to support UNESCO's visibility and to promote UNESCO's objectives and programme of work.

Recommendation 9: ERI (i) in collaboration with KMI, to consolidate the use of communication assets including the library, bookshop, audio-visual archives and photobank; (ii) in collaboration with KMI, to launch the joint project proposal for revitalizing and preserving UNESCO's audio-visual archives, photobank and records of field offices' on-going actions; and (iii) to develop and implement a plan and revenue model to enhance UNESCO's visibility through tours of the Headquarters premises.

Recommendation 10: ERI to establish (i) mechanisms to improve visibility and protect intellectual ownership of the UNESCO logo and (ii) a branding strategy (potentially as part of its communication strategy) communicating UNESCO's character and values.

Recommendation 11: ERI to strengthen its communication monitoring and management by (i) introducing qualitative analytics relative to UNESCO priorities and key events; (ii) introducing sector / field office dashboards; and (iii) assessing together with Programme Sector staff the effectiveness of key communications and identifying how communications can be improved using the analyses presented in each monthly visibility report.