
ACT – CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION (CSO)

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (OD) INFORMATION SHEET

COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA

WHY do we need this OD Information Sheet?

The purpose is to introduce CSOs that have not participated in ACT's training, Coaching and Mentoring support, to the importance of developing an effective Communication and Media Engagement Strategy. The content takes into consideration the context of the situation of the CSO as well as those of the media, and it demonstrates how each of the communication and media engagement strategy components can be planned, implemented, and managed from a CSO's perspective.

All elements of the work of ACT mainstream Gender and Social Inclusion (G&SI) and a Rights-based Approach (RBA) to strengthen the sustainability of the work of CSOs.

WHAT is Communication?

Communication is the art of ensuring that the right **message**, gets to the right **audience** through the right **channel** at the right time. The basic elements of the communication process include the **messenger**, the **recipient**, the **message**, the **channel** and the **feedback**.

Firstly, the communicator should develop an exact understanding about concepts, beliefs or data that s/he wants to transfer. Then s/he translates the idea into words, symbols or some other form of message which s/he expects the receiver to comprehend. The communicator picks out an appropriate medium for transmitting the message. The message is then received by the recipients. The receiver then acts upon the message as s/he has understood it and the effectiveness of the communication is measured through the response or feedback. If the communication brings about the desired changes in actions or behaviour it is said to be successful communication.

WHAT is a channel of communication?

A communication channel is the medium through which the sender passes the information and understanding to the receiver using, for example: **writing**, **speaking**, **graphics**, **video**, **digital**

bitstreams, drama, etc. Each channel of communication has its own characteristics that should be considered, including cost, speed of delivery, and the efficiency and effectiveness of reaching the intended audience. Depending on your communication objectives, one channel may be more effective than others.

WHAT is a communication strategy?

A communications strategy, or plan, is a document that expresses the goals and methods of a CSO's outreach activities, including what a CSO wishes to share with the public and whom the CSO is trying to reach. It provides a roadmap for the CSO for raising awareness, promoting interest and building participation.

HOW to draft a communications strategy, with clear advocacy goals

All communications strategies should have the following elements, at the very least:

- A problem statement explaining what the overall context and communication operational environment is, specifically focusing on the critical concerns/challenges.
- An overview of the current communication status of the CSO (results of a SWOT exercise basically), clearly detailing the current practices/strengths/opportunities, as well as weaknesses/gaps/threats. The communication strategy should explain how the CSO will leverage the positives and counter/mitigate against the negatives.
- A section stating the objectives. It is advisable to develop an overall objective/goal and specific objectives.
- A mapping of key influencers and target audiences (who they are, why they matter and what we are hoping to get from them).
- A section on key messages to reach the agreed objectives.
- A section on communication platforms to be used for the distribution of key messages and products, with a special emphasis on the website, the social media platforms, the newsletter (or whatever else they want to use to regularly keep in touch with their audience).
- The strategy should explain clearly the role and purpose of each of the channels, and provide tentative timelines for updating/issuing messages, etc.
- A brand section.
- A media relations section (which outlets to targets, primarily).
- An action plan, with budget and timelines, where every action is linked to objectives. The action plan should be limited to the time for implementation.
- A monitoring framework for the action plan, if possible, with specific quantifiable indicators (the action plan could include a survey to the target audience to assess the effectiveness of the communication practices half-way through the year).

HOW do we communicate content externally?

1 Success Story development

What is a success story?

A success story is the information that creates clarity and provides proof of success or change using the person or people whose lives have been positively and sustainably impacted by a specific intervention. This should be presented as the centre of the narrative in an interesting way.

A success story has a simple formula: use powerful statistics, communicate progress and bring it to life with a personal narrative as well as some beneficiary quotes and colourful action photographs. A good success story should reflect the following outline: a punchy **headline**; **body** of the story, **challenge(s)** encountered; **context** of the assistance; **human-interest** angle; **results** therefrom, **specific activities** of the project; **changes** for the beneficiary (ies), their family and community, key **lessons learnt**, some **beneficiary quotes** and sharp **action photographs**.

2 Photography and the use of photos in development work

Photographs freeze memories - capture moments in real-time and tell a story. All projects or activities need a range of stories with high-quality images that will provide evidence of the impact of the intervention. All photos should be sent with captions, credits and (where possible) quotations.

3 Media engagement and management

Media engagement is the process of working with the mass media to get coverage of the issue. The mass media is a vehicle for transmitting information to large audiences that range from local, regional, national and global. It includes newspapers, magazines, television, radio, film, and digital or online media - which is any form of media that use electronic devices for distribution. All newspapers, magazines, television and radio have online versions and presence.

Why and when to use it

There are many purposes that can be served by engaging with the media, including:

- To inform/educate different groups about an issue and through that get visibility
- To highlight and explain important yet little known, or poorly understood, issues
- To get the attention of policy-makers and the general public
- To gain public support for the cause
- To attract interest from potential funders or partners
- To empower the audience to contribute to ongoing public debates

- To inspire people with new discoveries and ideas
- To increase the number of people contributing to ongoing public debates
- To encourage new conversations with new audiences

Journalists/journalism: who and what they are

A journalist is an individual that collects/gathers information in the form of text, audio, or pictures. S/he processes them into a newsworthy form and disseminates it to the public. The act or process mainly done by the journalist is called 'Journalism'. The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they want. Journalism works in the public interest: for building the community, for citizenship and to for improved and better governance.

Some examples of media engagement tools and processes

Media tools are the materials or content that a CSO uses to engage the media. The media engagement tools available to CSO's are: press releases, press statements, position papers, opinion pieces, articles/features, press conference, question and answer (Q&A), opinion piece, photo stunts, media visits, media briefing notes, fact sheets, public service announcements (PSA), feature articles, blogs podcasts, etc.

There are two major ways a CSO can engage the media: by doing so directly themselves, or by building and developing media partnerships.

Direct media engagement:

Working with the media requires a deep understanding of how the media works. Think about what the CSO is trying to achieve. Different types of media will help the CSO to reach different audiences.

- **Do your research** - Whichever media outlet you decide to approach, make sure that you fully understand the medium, the tone, style and the needs of the target audience.
- **Take advice** - If you have a press office, or colleagues who are experienced in dealing with the media, seek their assistance. Working with the media requires an understanding of how the media works.
- **Think ahead** - Whether you are sending a press release, writing for a magazine or pitching a television programme, give yourself plenty of time. Media outlets have varying (and often lengthy) lead times.
- **Time it right** - Timing is crucial when working with the media. Success with the news media often depends on how current a story is, and whether it can be supported by other major news and events. It is also in danger of being overshadowed if there are a lot of other things happening. Working in TV is very dependent on the scheduling and the 'fit' with strands of programming being aired at that time.

- **Look for the bigger picture** - Any media organisation is primarily concerned with appealing to its broadest audience. Think about the implications of your research that are relevant to their target audience.
- **Mind your language** - Whatever the medium, your audience is likely to consist of people who know nothing of your research. Think carefully about the language you use, avoid using jargon and make use of anecdotes and narrative to elicit interest.
- **Think local** - Local print, radio and TV media are a great way to reach a specific audience, and they are often looking for new content.
- **Think about the needs of the medium** - Each media organisation will be driven by its own agenda. Think about what they look for when commissioning content. What aspects of your research, or activity, lends itself to visual or audio elements, or opportunities for audience participation.

For example:

- Television requires video footage and strong visual imagery
- The print media require striking imagery, such as photographs
- Radio and podcasting require audio elements, such as sound effects
- Digital technology often requires an opportunity for audience interaction

There are three keywords to keep in mind when engaging with the media. These are:

‘Salience’ To make sure your campaign receives coverage, it needs to be ‘salient’ – important, timely, and relevant to a bigger context. If your campaign is not a salient issue, then get media attention by being seen as a campaign with something valuable to say about an ongoing debate or discussion. You can make an issue salient, by attracting journalists’ attention.

‘Dialogue’ To make sure you are part of the dialogue, keep an eye on the general political context, identify windows of opportunity to be heard, and target the media by presenting yourself as an informed voice on your issue.

‘Channels’ If, because you have expertise, you are a respected voice on an issue, journalists may approach you for a comment. If you are not at that stage of expertise yet, consider building your reputation and/or your network. Organise an event and invite some journalists, send them press releases, and send them emails commenting on their articles offering new points of view.

HOW to build successful media partnerships and media relations

Firstly, what are media relations?

relations are mutually beneficial relationships and engagements between a communications or advocacy practitioner and the /journalists. It takes purposeful effort and should be sustained by continuous engagement with those responsible for producing the news and features in the mass.

Why Relations?

It is a deliberate and strategic relationship with the for the purpose of informing the public of your CSO's mission, policies and practices - in a positive, consistent and credible manner. It can be reactive or proactive.

What does each party want?

The Communication/Advocacy Practitioner wants to:

- Get stories out
- Use advocacy channels
- Build the CSO's profile
- Track perceptions and early warnings
- Reach beneficiaries/audience
- Clear the air/reaction in crisis situations

The Journalist wants: Timely, factual, novel, relevant to many, and impactful news. Locating the common interest amongst what both parties want, is the point where engagement happens.

What is a media partnership?

An exclusive cooperation between CSO and the selected media to share content or information that brings mutually beneficial publicity to all parties. Media partnership is suitable for all types of organizations, including CSOs.

What are the benefits of media partnership:

- Successful media partnerships can add credibility to both your CSO and your media partner's efforts, by way of solicited or unsolicited recommendations, testimonials from other entities other than the CSO providing the service or the direct beneficiary of the service; this is known as 'third party endorsement'.
- Media partnerships can help CSOs to reach a wider audience with their information especially, those with a low campaign budget.

- A media partnership contract ensures commitment by the media to publish your news and articles, which subsequently leads to the CSO and the media organization benefitting from their readership.

What are the limitations:

The media may have opposing interests and values from that of your CSO, hence it is important to make sure to do a lot of 'digging' to understand their views on the issues you are concerned about. The media are constantly approached with partnership offers; it is therefore important to have a good proposal for your potential partner that clearly states the mutual benefits of the partnership. Put more emphasis on what the partner may get out of it and what would be the added value of this partnership.

Who the CSO should approach

This usually depends on which media outlet is most likely to help to deliver your message in the most effective way and plan your approach strategically. For example, if your campaign has a highly visual element, look for a TV partner. If it is more targeted at the community members, work with local radio stations, etc.

What to offer

The CSO needs to be very clear about what to offer to the media partner – and what the expectations are in return.

Below are a few examples of what the CSO can offer

- Exclusivity of content materials (surveys, research results, pictures, videos)
- Exclusive interview with a leader in your CSO
- Exposition of the partner's promotion materials during conferences/fares.
- Incorporating the partner's logo in your promotion or publicity materials and websites.

What the CSO can ask for in return

- A series of articles or an interview
- Radio/TV programme devoted to your campaign
- Placing your materials on your media partner's website or social media platforms

How to finalise the agreement:

When the idea is agreed, make sure that you:

- Set out a written agreement that states what you each expect from the partnership
- Come up with clear terms of reference that assigns roles and responsibilities to ensure the smooth running of the partnership.

How to establish a Journalist network

Another way that a CSO can engage the media personnel more effectively is to establish a media working group. The media working group is a platform for selected journalists who are interested and passionate about the issues your CSO is working on, eg: Gender Based Violence, Health and Nutrition, etc. Because of their interest in your issues, members of the media working group will want to promote the issues through effective media coverage and reportage of their own free will.

What are the criteria for the establishment of a Media Working Group?

- Find out which journalists are interested in your issues
- Select a number of journalists and extend an invite for them to join the working group
- Ensure the selected journalists are a range of different media outlets
- Make sure the selected journalists cut across the print, broadcast and online media
- Allow them to set up their own rules of engagement and guiding principles, including meeting platforms
- Ensure they choose the group leadership among themselves
- Clearly define your CSO's expectations and the support you can offer the group
- Develop a work plan (for 6 months) in collaboration with the group
- Provide training and refresher training for the group from time to time
- Continue engaging with them and carry them along in all your CSO's activities

What is Digital/Social Media?

Digital media comprises both internet and mobile mass communication. Internet media comprises such services as e-mail, social media sites, websites and internet-based radio and television.

Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Social media is comprised of platforms to create and exchange user-generated content. They are different from traditional media, such as newspaper, books and television because almost anyone can publish and access information inexpensively using social media.

Who uses Digital/Social Media?

Digital and social media are popular among a diverse array of citizens, government agencies, CSOs and businesses around the world. It serves as a means for individuals to make new friends, for government agencies to interact with their constituencies, for CSOs to organise grassroots movements, and for businesses to promote their brands.

The goal is to share, to incite engagement and ultimately to foster a community of advocates for a cause. Social media is therefore a 'two-way street'. The most popular social media platforms include: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, etc. However, new platforms emerge daily, and staying abreast of these developments is critical to your CSO's social media success.

How to grow a CSO's constituency through social media

Every CSO's dream is to see a consistent increase in its audience followership and ratings on social media. Effective use of social media can help a CSO to achieve this by exposing their profile to an untapped audience. An audience may never have heard about a CSO, or be familiar with what it does, but if they learn about it, and find value in what they are sharing on social media they may choose to follow them, thus increasing the followership and audience ratings of a CSO's work. To achieve this, CSOs must create quality content that aligns with their purpose, and share it consistently through their social media platforms. It is also important to diversify the way the content is presented, to keep the audience eager, interested and always engaged.

Guidance towards best practice to increase a CSO's ability to reach a wider audience and grow its constituency

Create quality content

Creating quality content that resonates with the audience is key to a CSO's success on social media. The content should have a purpose and be linked to a CSO's programme goals, but it should also be light and engaging to appeal to a broad audience.

Engage with your audience

By engaging with its audience on social media, a CSO has the opportunity to foster relationships and build long lasting advocates. Much like any relationship, honesty and open sharing can contribute to mutual understanding and strengthen joint actions. Genuine interactivity can be achieved by asking questions and responding to comments. The goal is to build trust and encourage the audience to return for reliable and valued content.

Collaborate with those who share your values

A CSO may serve a local constituency, but collaboration with other individuals or causes can help connect them with a global audience. Think of collaboration as a means of expanding a network and mobilising new resources, thereby reaching a new audience and creating greater impact. A CSO can use social media to communicate with, and connect to, the networked audience, and together with its collaborating partners, amplify its efforts.

Advocate for a cause

Social media can be used as a tool to galvanise a group of supporters behind a cause through digital advocacy. It is a low-cost method to broadcast a message to supporters and keep them informed and engaged on updates instantly, in real-time. It also allows activists on the ground to easily connect with an organisation at any time and share updates from their advocacy efforts. And finally, social allows organisations to both segment and unify an audience and mobilise them towards action both locally and globally.

Call to Action: Social Media - 'Dos and Don'ts'

Do's	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Always check that you're posting on the right page• Occasionally showcase your CSO's culture and team• Respond to every Facebook message• Try to include visuals to your posts• Track results• Know the best time to post• Be dynamic, try new things and see how people respond to it• Keep up with current events and capitalise on big moments• Maximise profile bio; use your logo on profile picture and your branding on cover photo• Follow/like pages of common interest, comment and like other posts• Take advantage of third-party applications• Be consistent and regular on social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Post just for posting sake• Ignore negative comments, criticism, feedback• Post lengthy words or stories• Use jargon• Post the same thing across all platforms• Use every social network• Post away from big moments• Share passwords with anyone• Allow just anyone to post on your wall

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Find out more

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