

Extract

## **Bridging the Gap: A resource for Municipal Solid Waste Management**

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### **10.1 Communications and awareness raising**

The ubiquity of waste has the effect of making it invisible to those who generate it. In developed nations with efficient waste management systems waste is collected regularly with its treatment kept largely out of sight. Whilst this is advantageous to the population, they are rarely afforded the opportunity to observe and thus appreciate the scale of the problem they are contributing to. In less developed regions with poor waste management, dumpsites and littered streets are the norm'; something people grow accustomed to, learning to live around the problem.

This creates a challenge when governments commit to make improvements to how waste is managed because regardless of the systems, operations or technology that may be considered appropriate to deliver on this objective, their success is almost always dependant upon public participation.

Some improvements do not require direct public participation but this does not mean they can be ignored. Improvements can often lead to increased costs charged to users in the form of higher taxes or waste tariffs so demonstration of the value of benefits is needed for these price increase to be accepted (and paid!). And local populations can object to physical developments such as new landfills or treatment facilities being built close to where they live. This can lead to obstruction, delays and increased costs.

All of these are challenges addressed through the use of communications.

*Example:*

*Baku, Azerbaijan*

*In 2011, The Ministry of Environment in Azerbaijan embarked on a major development of waste management on the Absheron Peninsula centred around the construction of an Energy from Waste facility. This required the remediation of Baku's principal dumpsite and thus the displacement of around 1,000 people who had been earning a livelihood from scavenging and informal recycling operations. Communications were needed to overcome three critical challenges:*

***NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard).*** *The Energy from Waste facility was to be a major construction project causing disruption to the roads and communities during its build phase. When finished, it would be a very large industrial building, affecting the views of many local people who were also concerned about the threat of toxins being emitted from the stacks. Communication and engagement with those communities affected was needed during the initial planning phases to reassure people and foster support for the project so that it could progress unhindered through public protest and disruption.*

**Livelihood Displacement.** *Waste pickers and the informal recycling sectors were well regarded in Baku providing services that people had grown grateful for; keeping streets clean, collecting larger items of waste and so on. There was a fear that the reforms to MSWM would render these individuals and business redundant. In fact, the plan was to absorb them into the project; formalising the informal sector and providing employment for waste pickers. Again, to avoid protest and disruption, this fact needed to be communicated to the wider population so that they were aware of the inclusive nature of the project's ambitions.*

**Participation.** *In order for the Energy from Waste facility to operate effectively, waste delivered to it would need to be separated into wet/organic and dry/packaging materials. To facilitate this, dual compartment bins were installed across the city and communications in the form of signage, leaflets and advertising were used to encourage the correct use of these bins.*

Around the world we find correlation between those regions operating the most successful and efficient waste management systems and those that made the greatest commitments to the application of communications.

Communications and Awareness Raising must therefore be included within policy decisions at the earliest stages of developing new and / or improved services with sufficient budget allocated over a sufficient period of time.

### **10.1.1 Knowledge gaps**

Communications and the processes that are used in its creation are subjects that rarely feature in formal training for waste professionals and others working in the sector. Internal resources within Government organisations and local authorities tend to be functional in their scope; capable of producing a website and some leaflets but lacking in the wider, more strategic aspects of communication that are necessary, particularly in a behaviour change context. The consequences of this includes:

- Campaigns that do not align or align poorly with policy
- Short term campaigns
- Underfunded campaigns
- Consideration to the need for communications given too far along the development path
- Poorly produced materials (adverts, leaflets, etc.)

Ultimately, communications that suffer these will underperform and cause financial loss. They may even undermine the entire waste services.

It is therefore important that those Managers and Officers with overarching responsibility for waste management build a greater understanding of the communication processes. They do not need to become communication 'experts' but building understanding is necessary to properly commission – and use - communications. There are four areas of learning that should be prioritised:

1. Understanding the differing roles between strategic and tactical communications and the interdependency between them.
2. The different layers and channels of communication that exist and what each is designed to do – the outcomes one can expect from each.
3. Calculation of appropriate communication budgets.

4. Practical aspects of communication planning including scheduling, procurement of specialist service providers, use of creative content, monitoring and evaluation.

### 10.1.2 Funding Communications

One consequence of a lack of institutional understanding about communications is that campaigns are sometimes underfunded. This is because a) the cost and value of the services and products that go towards the creation of campaigns are either not fully appreciated or understood, and b) it is not always obvious as to the positive financial impact good communications can have.

Campaigns and communications are all too often considered a cost when in fact, they are an investment. The table below shows some examples of campaign types and the potential, positive financial impact they may deliver:

A Campaign that....	Financial impact
Encourages people to recycle more and recycle correctly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased material capture leading to higher income from the sale of those materials</li> <li>• Increased material quality increasing value of that material</li> <li>• (Where high disposal costs apply): Savings from avoided disposal costs</li> </ul>
Asks people not to dump waste illegally or drop litter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in municipal operating costs</li> <li>• Reduction in healthcare costs through a reduction in conditions caused through dumping waste and littering</li> <li>• Beautification leading to increased tourism and inward investment</li> </ul>
Raises awareness of new waste treatment facilities and infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost saving through the fluid and timely delivery of infrastructure, unhindered through protest.</li> <li>• Avoidance of costs associated with public protest</li> </ul>
Reduce the amount of waste that people generate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Savings in operational costs</li> <li>• Savings in disposal costs</li> </ul>

A good, well planned and properly funded campaign should always deliver financial outcomes greater than the cost of delivering that campaign.

#### **Example**

*Northern part of Cyprus*

*As part of a range of measures to reduce dependency on the region's only landfill and overcoming the trading restrictions that limit the sale of recyclable materials, a campaign was developed that*

supported civil society organisations who contribute to waste reduction. One of these was a charity that accepted donated clothes which it would sell to raise money to support its work for cancer patients.

The campaign featured a cartoon character of a shirt with the headline 'Just an Old Shirt? – Think Again', prompting people to donate their old clothes, textile and unwanted household items to the charity.

The campaign used outdoor advertising, newspapers, radio and social media.

The result led to a ten-fold increase in donated items. The charity was able to expand into several stores and introduced street side clothes banks for people to drop off donated items.

The amount of textiles being sent to the landfill decreased significantly.



Above (left), one of the advertisements used in Cyprus to encourage people to donate old clothes rather than throw them away. The results of the campaign gave the Civil Society organisation the confidence to invest in street-side recycling for donated clothes (above, right).

### 10.1.3 Types of communications

Communication is not homogenous. It is multi-faceted with near infinite permutations in terms of its use, application and tools. To help narrow the choices, we can divide communications into Strategic and Tactical.

**Strategic Communications:** Provides a common framework of objectives which defines the overarching messages and visual integration achieved through branding.

**Tactical Communications:** The physical means used to deliver these messages to the target audience; the advertising media to be used and the means of engagement.

To help narrow the field further, it is possible to consider three distinct types of communication that typically apply to waste management as shown in the table below:

Types of communication	Examples of purpose of communication type	Theme examples	Typical channels used
<b>Raising Awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alerting populations of impending changes to services.</li> <li>Highlighting negative consequences of certain actions.</li> <li>Promoting new opportunities and options for waste disposal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negative impacts to health from illegal dumping</li> <li>Impacts on livelihoods from plastic marine litter</li> <li>Promotion of new waste treatment facility being constructed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broadcast – News and Documentary</li> <li>PR</li> <li>Social Media</li> </ul>
<b>Behaviour Change</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stimulation of changes in how people deal with the waste they generate.</li> <li>Shifting attitudes and opinions towards the positive</li> <li>Fostering support and advocacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Waste reduction and reuse</li> <li>Litter reduction</li> <li>Illegal dumping</li> <li>Sustainable consumption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National campaigns – broadcast, press, transport and outdoor.</li> <li>Social media</li> <li>PR</li> </ul>
<b>Action-focused</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Service participation</li> <li>Instructional information</li> <li>Payment of tariffs (and or willingness to pay more)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recycling service usage</li> <li>New waste service usage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Signage</li> <li>Direct engagement</li> <li>Leaflets</li> <li>Community engagement</li> </ul>

The lines between these different types of communication are rarely fixed. In many cases, campaigns feature all types – raising awareness of a problem (Awareness Raising), using that awareness to encourage a change in behaviour (Behaviour Change) and enabling that behaviour change through instruction and guidance (Action-focused).

It is however, important to recognise the difference that exists. For example, an Awareness Raising campaign will only ever achieve awareness. If there is expectation that people will act upon that awareness, you must ask them to do so requiring the inclusion of Action-focused communication.

Categorising communications in this way also helps to identify and assign institutional roles and responsibilities.

#### 10.1.4 Strategic Communications and Planning

Communications should never be ad-hoc. It must be properly planned and carefully aligned with the policies it seeks to support. Strategy enables this by considering eight critical factors as described in the following table:

<b>1. The issue</b>	The issues that prevail, the context and reasoning behind the need for communications; the justification of what you are looking to do.		
<b>2. Strategic aim</b>	What is it that the communications needs to do, described in the broadest sense.		
<b>3. Communication objectives</b>	Applying the ‘SMART’ principles (Specific, Measurable, Realistic and Time-Bound), what are the things that the communications should achieve, how and by when.		
<b>4. Expected outcomes</b>	When a campaign has ended, what outcomes you expect to see. The tangible, measurable results – not just how many leaflets were printed or page views.		
<b>5. Audience</b>	<b>6. Take-away messages</b>	<b>7. Evidence</b>	<b>8. Evaluation</b>
Who do you want to target and reach – and why?	What are the headline messages you want the audience to retain when exposed to the communications?	What evidence exists to justify the approach being taken	How are you monitoring and measuring campaign and communication performance?

When planning the implementation of the strategy, several things need to be considered

- **Ability to act:** Messages need to be supported with the ability of people to act upon them. For example, if a campaign is encouraging people to use litterbins, are there enough litter bins available? Are they in good order and emptied frequently?
- **Alignment with services:** If a campaign is promoting the launch of a new recycling service, the messages need to appear just before that service starts. Too soon and people will forget about it. Too late and people will have new containers that they don’t know what to do with.
- **Procurement:** An assessment of what services will need to be brought in should be done early and consideration given to the procurement process and time needed for this.
- **Lead-times:** It is important to be aware of how long things take to produce. It is often the case that media owners require several week’s (sometimes months) notice for advertising space booking.

- **Internal procedures:** How long will it take to get approvals on campaign artwork? Who has the authority to sign off proofs. These factors should be established early as gaining approvals can sometimes be a lengthy process.

Another factor to consider early in the planning process is budget; the amount and availability. If the communications is to support a major service change that requires significant participation from the public, then an appropriate level of funding will be needed. If this is not possible it may require a review of the service specification because if insufficient participation is attained, it could result in that service underperforming or even failing.

And depending on the source of communication funding, time needs to be allowed for this to be secured.

### **10.1.5 Evaluation and measurement of communications**

Communications often exist in a highly dynamic environment and is influenced by any number of external factors. For these reasons it is important to consider monitoring campaign performance and building in the ability to adapt if need arises. This combines objective and subjective assessment.

The ultimate test of effect is the impact a campaign has on the topic being conveyed. For example, if a campaign is promoting the use of a PRO-provided recycling service, it is possible to track any increase in material capture during the campaign. The same for a campaign seeking to reduce illegal dumping; a reduction in these would indicate positive impact. These outcomes can be combined with campaign measurement tools such as OTS (Opportunity to See; the number of times a person has an opportunity to see a single advert), social media analytics and so on.

If the campaign measurement tools show good results yet the impact is poor, one can consider what external influences may be impacting on performance. For example; the outbreak of Covid in 2020 caused many people to change their daily habits rendering many campaigns obsolete from their intended objective. There may also be more fundamental issues such as broken bins, substandard collections or seasonal impacts such as poor weather.

All of these factors are also used to report on a campaign's performance once it is finished. Being able to demonstrate a campaign's effect in terms of both its reach and impact on services as well as operational objectives is useful in planning future campaigns (knowing what works and what doesn't) and justifying further investment in communications.

### **10.1.6 The dispersal of powers and responsibilities between government and local authorities**

The point at which the effect and impact of communication is felt most is at the local level. People tend to be more responsive to messages about things that affect them and their communities rather than those to that speak to the nation. Modern print production techniques and social media make it possible to create and deliver messages with astounding accuracy, even directly to an individual. However, there exist a number of issues that makes it difficult to capitalise upon this opportunity.

- Capacity does not always exist within Local Authorities to the level needed to properly administer and manage this type of communications.
- Local budgets may fall short of what is needed to run a meaningful campaign.
- Local politics can sometimes influence local communications which might not always align with national policies.

- Local authorities are also prone to apply short-term thinking to communications. For example, an Anti-Litter campaign may have some good impact in reducing the amount of litter on the streets. So once a target has been reached, a Local Authority may consider the project complete and unwilling to agree further expenditure. However, without the behavioural prompts the campaign delivered previously, the amount of litter begins to rise again, possibly to the level before the initial campaign was used.

Communications should be a collaborative endeavour between those entities that stand to benefit from the outcomes that communications can deliver. Those benefits differ according to the type of entity and this determines how those responsibilities can best be shared amongst them. The table below provides an example of this looking at National and Local government as well as Producer Responsibility Organisations.

Entity	Objective	Types of Communication	Outcomes
<b>National government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting national targets</li> <li>Closer alignment to international standards</li> <li>Meeting obligations set by donor organisations</li> <li>Economic and social prosperity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic</li> <li>Awareness Raising</li> <li>Behaviour change</li> <li>Setting the scene, providing broad, brush-stroke messaging.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National awareness of the need to change.</li> <li>Awareness of the benefits.</li> <li>High propensity to act when the time is right.</li> <li>High propensity to pay more for better services</li> </ul>
<b>Local authorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring maximum efficiency of waste services</li> <li>Delivering maximum value</li> <li>Improved local environmental conditions</li> <li>Improved cost efficiencies of service delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tactical</li> <li>Behaviour Change</li> <li>Action-focused</li> <li>Building on the national awareness, adapting to local dynamics and the presentation of the means to act along with instruction on how to act.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Widespread participation in services</li> <li>Improved behaviours towards waste</li> <li>Positive shifts in consumer habits</li> <li>Support for infrastructure development</li> </ul>
<b>Producer Responsibility Organisations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maximising material capture</li> <li>Reduction of material contamination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tactical</li> <li>Action-focused</li> <li>With people ready to change behaviour and act, here they are guided to means to act in the correct manner, regularly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased material capture</li> <li>Increased material quality</li> <li>Increased revenue</li> </ul>



## Example

### National Recycling Campaign and regional adaptation

#### Waste Resources Action Programme: United Kingdom

In the late 1990s, the UK government adopted the EU Landfill Directive and set about transforming waste management. Over the following 10 years, recycling capacity was significantly increased and over 600 local authorities began introducing kerbside recycling services of differing specifications and complexities. To oversee and support this transition, the government created an agency; the Waste Resources Action Programme (WRAP) whose remit was to a) stimulate demand for recyclable materials and b) ensure that demand was met. As part of its responsibility for the latter, it developed and administered a national Recycling Campaign; 'Recycle Now' which had two distinct though interlinked roles.

**National level:** A recycle brand identity was created comprising logo, colour palette, typographical styles and common messages. A set of icons were created denoting individual waste streams that could be recycled. Numerous campaigns were then run via TV, Cinema, national newspapers and magazines.

**Local level:** Graphic assets (such as artwork templates) were made available to local authorities enabling them to develop communication materials adapted for local use and run local campaigns using the national style.



Left: The national brand identity for recycling applied to all communications regardless of location.

Left: Standardised material icons applied in all communication contexts relating to the separation of materials (for example at recycling centres).

Left: Examples of how regional authorities adapt the national identity for application to local communications.



Left: Examples of communication materials produced for local services but adopting the national identity.

This approach provided a number of benefits:

- *Both national and local campaigns were visually integrated increasing recognition and awareness*
- *Local campaigns adhered to the national communication strategy whilst still being relevant to local services.*
- *Local communications benefited from the heightened awareness that was created with the national campaign*
- *Local authorities avoided the need to invest larger budgets appointing specialist service providers (such as graphic designers) to develop campaigns from the ground up.*

*WRAP provided a range of supportive measures including capacity building, developing strategic communication competencies amongst local authorities which further boosted the effect.*

This is a good example of the dispersal of ownership and responsibility between national government and local authorities where the role of the latter is to support national policy through local services.

Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted a similar approach with an awareness and behaviour change campaign designed to support waste sector reform in the country. Bosnia and Herzegovina comprises three very distinct regions each with differing cultures to a level that makes it difficult to embrace the concept of 'national' in such a context. However, a national campaign was created but with the ability for regional adaptation.

National or wider regional government should focus on strategy and 'big-picture' communications with local authorities delivering tactical, locally focused implementation of that strategy.

#### **10.1.4 Importance of institutional ownership of communications**

A vital factor that contributed to the success of the Recycle Now example was that WRAP had a government mandate to develop and oversee its application. WRAP itself worked under the mandate of a government ministry. This is important as without such authority, ownership of communication responsibility can ebb and flow between and within government entities leading to disjointed campaigns and a loss of strategic aim.

#### **10.1.5 Summary**

Communications is a vital component for waste management and the changing of behaviours towards sustainability and particularly for the building of a circular economy. It must be strategic, properly planned and appropriately funded, led by government institutions with competent staff and aligned to policy.

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#### **About Mobius Insight**

Mobius Insight is a thought leadership programme offered by Mobius, one of the world's leading providers of behavioural change communications for the waste and resource recovery sector. Working globally across many varying regions enables us to gain first-hand experience of how behaviour change can best be used to achieve social gains and economic improvements. Our aim is to share this learning and experience with the wider, global waste management community through published papers available on our website, conference participation and commissioned studies.

#### **About the Author**

Stephen Bates is one of the world's leading experts on behavioural change for waste management and the development of communications needed to stimulate change. In the UK, he has worked with over 130 local authorities and is the strategic architect behind some of the most effective campaigns and initiatives of their type. Internationally, he has worked for governments and donor institutions in over 20 countries, particularly in transition economic regions. He is a member of the Collaborative Working Group for Solid Waste Management in Low Income and Developing Economic Regions and is a prolific speaker on the subject of Behavioural Change in Waste Management.

#### **Conference Content**

This paper is available for presentation at conferences, delivered by the Author.

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