

## Meeting Notes – 5th Communication Fortnight

### SDG Events

4 October 2023

The TTCOM (AL, AT, BE, BR, CH, PL, PT, UK, ZA) gathered for its 5<sup>th</sup> fortnight, devoted to innovative practices in the organisation of SDG Events. We wanted to approach events as a communication tool, to discuss and test whether - in a post-pandemic world - they still have a value as for “communicating sustainability”.

The results of the discussion are summarised below. The meeting recording and complementary materials are available on Teams.

The group learned about Switzerland’s innovative communication approach to SDG Events, presented by Benjamin Rothen, Head of International and National Affairs at the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO) and also Ambassador of the Swiss Diplomatic Corps, playing a major role as an Ambassador and Advocate for Data and Statistics. The presentation was structured around the following topics:

- Introduction why Switzerland hosted the UNWDF and why we launched the Road to Bern: [www.roadtobern.ch](http://www.roadtobern.ch)
  - Communication “outside” of statistics;
  - Including new stakeholders;
  - UNWDF “products”:
    - [https://upd-initiative.ch/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/BFS\\_SDG\\_Web\\_CoverInhalt.pdf](https://upd-initiative.ch/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/BFS_SDG_Web_CoverInhalt.pdf)
    - <https://www.upd-initiative.ch/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Flyer-Nachhaltigkeitsbroschure-en.pdf>
- The Unlocking the Power of Data initiative:
  - We continue with the communication “outside” of statistics: <https://www.upd-initiative.ch/>
  - Fresh communication: Colour violet;
  - What is the Unlocking the Power of Data Initiative about? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGrdCzVnicg>
- 26. January 2023: International Geneva : Can we beat the chimps with data and statistics? <https://www.upd-initiative.ch/event/international-geneva-can-we-beat-the-chimps-with-data-and-statistics/>
  - Why did we organize this event?
  - What were the goals?
  - How did we do the communication? <https://www.upd-initiative.ch/event/international-geneva-can-we-beat-the-chimps-with-data-and-statistics/>
  - Example X: <https://twitter.com/UPDInitiative>

### Main takeaways:

Benjamin kick-started the presentation by stressing the **importance of top-management buy-in to enact an effective communication strategy of data and statistics**. In the Swiss context, there is a strong commitment, at both national and international levels, to contribute to a better use of data, with the purpose of ultimately resulting in better lives.

The Project “[Road to Bern](#)” (series of events leading to the UN World Data Forum, which took place in Bern, in 2021) was highlighted, as part of the origin stories of the SDG events promoted by the FSO. The seminal work of Hans and Ola Rosling was also underlined as paramount to the communication approach that thus ensued. The publication [SDGraphical](#) **was a key element of the SDG communication strategy**. The FSO also devised a [Sustainability concept for the UNWDF 2021](#) to ensure that it was organised in a sustainable way, coherent to the message that the event was trying to get across. An updated version of this concept will be published soon, in an interactive dimension, where users will be able to insert relevant information about foreseen events and then get the relevant feedback with customised recommendations.

The “Unlocking the power of data” initiative was then highlighted and showcased by an inspiring video. **Data Literacy** is the underlying goal of this initiative, organised by 6 workstreams and following a strong motto “For better decision making, for a better future”:

1. Literacy – making data more accessible and understandable
2. Financing – advocating for the appropriate financial allocation
3. Management – data management in the public sector
4. Data science – encouraging members to getting acquainted with data science, to unleash the full potential of data
5. Climate change – how climate change affects demography
6. Health – partnering with the WHO to contribute to a more robust health system

[The SDG event](#) in January 2023 within this framework was organised around 4 workstreams and benefited from cartoon visuals and a crosscutting visual identity (violet).

Benjamin recalled Rosling’s idea that chimps are sometimes better decision-makers with their available information, whereas **humans’ capacity to harness and treat data is still lacking a direct correspondence in informed decision-making**. A thought-provoking video was also referenced in this regard.

The use of X (former Twitter) was also highlighted. The FSO regularly releases videos but is increasingly being challenged by a greater interaction with bots and users often times fuelled by populism and biased or purposefully misleading information (fake news). The group was questioned about their approach to this issue (managing social media with the rise of bots, populism, fake news, etc).

Benjamin concluded the presentation by acknowledging that one of the most pressing challenges is how to start talking not just about statistics and data, but highlighting the actual data and their meaning.

#### **Highlights from the Discussion:**

Q: How do you bridge the gap between people’s current information flood (fake news, populisms) and this new communication approach? Is data literacy enough?

A: It remains a very difficult issue to tackle. In the FSO there are currently 3 tasks: data production, data management (in charge of building the national data system) and data science. They are working with Microsoft to improve the answers that people and machines get when searching online or through machine learning techniques. This advocacy with tech companies is becoming increasingly more important.

Q: Do you still believe in traditional events as a communication tool? How do you make them more innovative?

A: Yes, they are still a useful communication tool, so long as they are targeted. There is a typology of events which work best for each situation (virtual [short events, geographically dispersed participants], hybrid [to allow for short-term participation from some users], in-person [to foster interpersonal relationships and networking]). 3 dimensions of sustainability: CO<sup>2</sup> reduction, social and economic dimension.

Q: What do you think about the Cape Town global action plan and the plans to revamp it and making it a communication tool?

A: It was really important, essentially to bring the whole HLG-PCCB onto the same page. However, there was a chapter about the needs of data and statistics (funding needs), which didn't survive and, therefore, decreased the impact of this action plan. The Bern Network was created to overcome this setback. A revamping of the document should have a longer statistical dimension, but also a shorter more effective one to be presented to the policy-making side.

The importance of continuous improvement was highlighted. Benjamin underlined the importance of the "international roadshow" to raise awareness and profit from the experience of key international partners (UK, Ireland, Poland and Albania). The IMAODBC (International Marketing and Output Data Base Conference 2023) was highlighted as a relevant event for exchange of experiences at an international level. The next Conference will be in Porto in 2024.

ZA Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment highlighted the Citizen's Environmental Awareness index, which concluded:

- Level of environmental literacy is very low (youngsters far better)
- Lack of climate change literacy (e.g. identifying coal as renewable energy)

The survey was aimed at finding the most trusted source for environmental information. The good news is that government is still a major source for most. TV is the main source, followed by radio. So environmental actors are trying to explore new subtle ways to get data across and promote environmental literacy (e.g. embedded in soap operas' scripts). Another approach is training and journalist education, by pointing out the main sources of reliable information.

Benjamin stressed the issue of how to properly train the media, since they are very interested in the information, but are quite often driven by sensationalist principles. A good practice from the UK was shared: launching the press releases at 7 am to get more media engagement in the morning news.

Benjamin highlighted the publication [Pulse of Progress: the State of Global SDG Data in 2023](#) and suggested another topic for a future fortnight: AI use in communication.

## **AOB**

The group was informed that the presentation foreseen for the [UNECE Expert Meeting on Dissemination and Communication of Statistics 2023](#) (Lisbon, 11-13 October, 2023) will reflect and highlight the innovative practices of the group, zooming in on the Fortnights' initiative.

The next Fortnight will be held by mid-November (16<sup>th</sup>) and focus on SDG Training, to be kickstarted by Kevin McCormack (former CSO-IE expert and currently working at UNSD).

The participants were encouraged to kick-start a future Fortnight on social media, to be scheduled in due course.

Lastly, the participants were informed that a social Fortnight will be organised closer to Christmas to further promote this networking initiative.

### **Links**

[please insert your link for a noteworthy national practice]