

SPREP Communications Strategy

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Executive Summary

This strategy was developed for and by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). It presents ways and means for the organisation to optimise its internal and external communications to its audiences. The Strategy, once endorsed, is subject to minor refinements only.

Acronyms Used and Their Explanation

AMPO	Associate Media and Publications Officer
APFEJ	Asia Pacific Forum of Environmental Journalists
CROP	Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific
EPO	Editor and Publications Officer
IRC	Information Resource Centre
JAWS	Journalists Associations of [Western] Samoa
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PINA	Pacific Islands News Agency
PO	Professional Officer, Programme Officer
SPREP	[Secretariat of the] Pacific Regional Environment Programme
USP	University of the South Pacific

1. Introduction

The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) is a regional intergovernmental organisation that works with Pacific island countries and territories, to strengthen environmental management and ensure sustainable development.

SPREP aims to promote cooperation and generate dialogue around environmental issues in the region. The role of good communication in supporting this organisational objective is critical.

With the present document, SPREP has a clear communications framework to support its programmes, and enhance its service to its member countries and territories.

This Strategy is also to ensure that SPREP's communications effort is conducted in the most effective and professional manner in support of the Region's Action Plan (2005–2009) and the Secretariat's Strategic Programmes (2004–2013). These in turn provide the foundation of both SPREP's Vision and its Mandate:

1.1 SPREP's Vision

- That people of the Pacific islands are better able to plan, protect, manage and use their environment for sustainable development.

1.2 SPREP's Mandate

- To promote cooperation in the Pacific islands region and to provide assistance in order to protect and improve the environment; and to ensure sustainable development for present and future generations.

1.3 Aims of this Strategy

This communications strategy aims to build on, and improve SPREP's profile in the region as the pre-eminent environment organisation. This document serves to:

- Facilitate working effectively with member countries and regional partners;
- Benefit the communities which are the key to Pacific Island life;
- Secure current and future funding for continuing and expanding SPREP operations.
- Define SPREP's communications objectives, target audiences, tools and activities;
- Provide a foundation for longer-term plans to strengthen the SPREP brand throughout the region and internationally;
- Support internal communications processes by providing clear checklists and guidelines in its companion documents: an Annual Communication Action Plan (Part II); and Operational Instructions (Part III).

2. Why This Strategy?

SPREP is a relatively small organisation serving a large membership across a huge region. It is essential that its communications effort is managed in a coordinated and coherent way so that management, staff, member countries, donors, collaborating partners and stakeholders have a clear understanding of what has been, can, and cannot be delivered.

All agencies that are part of CROP (Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific) are operating in an environment in which information overload is common and there is competition for consultation and attention. It is thus critical for SPREP to demonstrate that it is highly professional and effective, able to deliver practical environmental benefits for its members and partners, and (most important of all) for the Pacific peoples.

2.1 Relationship with the Action Plan

SPREP's main guiding document is the Action Plan for Managing the Environment of the Pacific Islands Region.

The Secretariat has developed its Strategic Programmes, in order to implement the Action Plan, especially its priorities; and carry out its core functions through annual work programmes and ongoing projects.

The Action Plan identifies the members' priority environment focus areas as:

- Natural resource management (including reducing biodiversity loss);
- Pollution prevention (including solid-waste management);
- Climate change, climate variability and sea level rise.

and the cross-weaving issues for priority attention:

- Integrated policy, planning and partnerships;
- Environment monitoring and reporting;
- Multilateral environment agreements (MEAs) and processes;
- Human resource development and training;
- Public awareness and education;
- Knowledge management.

This communications strategy aims to support the Secretariat's Strategic Programmes. This strategy is work in progress and will require fine-tuning in consultation with management and staff and stakeholders, to ensure that it continues to remain relevant and meaningful for effective implementation.

2.2 External Communication Objectives

External objectives refer to how well the Secretariat communicates with its Members, partners, stakeholders and the general public. These include the need for SPREP to:

- Promote and disseminate relevant and high-value information and knowledge on the region's environment and the issues that affect it;
- Raise its own profile in the Pacific region and beyond, by conveying to its Members and the public what SPREP is, what it is doing, and achieving;
- Brand SPREP as having a unique expertise relative to other CROP agencies and the range of partners with whom the Secretariat works;
- Identify target audiences, messages and means to measure effectiveness.

Principles for implementing these are:

- Using layman's language rather than the technical language of academia and science, characterised by jargon with unnecessary and unexplained acronyms;
- Maintaining and keeping the SPREP website up to date;
- Providing a public entry point to SPREP's Information Resource Centre (IRC);
- Having an appropriate presence in the news media across the Pacific;
- Evaluating SPREP's communication activities.

2.3 Internal Communication Objectives

Internal communication objectives relate to how Secretariat staff communicate, co-ordinate and streamline their collective efforts to deliver and communicate their services externally. A clear consultation process between SPREP's communications staff and management should provide guidance on how communications staff can support SPREP's Action Plan and Strategic Programmes; determine communications priorities; and bring these to effect in an integrated way.

Monitoring and evaluation tools should help determine the overall effectiveness of SPREP's communications effort, measure the perception of SPREP among key stakeholders, and improve its ongoing performance. *Quantitative* measurement of items (number of articles, web hits etc.) is necessary and relatively easy; in addition, the *qualitative* effect that these communications activities have, needs to be gauged.

3. Scope

3.1 Target Audiences

It is vital to understand who SPREP is communicating with. SPREP's audiences are:

- National Focal Points of SPREP member countries and territories;
- Officials and staff of SPREP member countries and territories;
- Other policy/decision makers;
- Donor bodies and partner agencies.
- CROP agencies;
- Non-Government Organisations (NGOs);
- Private sector;
- Media representatives;
- School students/communities;
- The general public.

3.2 Key Messages: What is SPREP?

Every communications opportunity should deliver at least one of the following key messages:

- “SPREP is the pre-eminent environmental organisation in the Pacific supported by all Pacific nations and its other members;”
- “SPREP is the Pacific's leading body working with governments to strengthen environmental management and promote sustainable development;”
- “SPREP prime focus is on the priorities identified by the Region in its Action Plan: Waste and pollution; climate change and variability; and island biodiversity;”
- “SPREP has achieved the following key results in the last 12-month period [list them].”

3.3 Branding and Image

SPREP needs to strengthen the perception of itself as a truly professional organisation that can deliver high-quality environmental results for members and donor partners. Hence the Secretariat must strive to achieve high professional standards in all its communications activities with its staff and target audiences; and clearly identify these products as originating from SPREP.

Where possible, SPREP's name should always be given in full at first mention; and its logo and address details displayed and applied consistently as shown in the operational guidelines.

3.4 Language

SPREP has two official languages, English and French, and it is important that all key documents are made available in both languages. In addition, there is a wide range of languages in use throughout member countries; specific campaigns targeting a segment of the Pacific must consider the use of these languages, especially in radio campaigns which reputedly have the best penetration into communities.

3.5 Tools

By the term “Communication tools” we mean any tangible product that helps us achieve the Strategy’s objectives; they may be supplemented by various approaches. No communications technique by itself is effective: several may be needed as part of a comprehensive strategy to communicate with audiences.

Communication tools/products	Communication approaches
Media stories, articles, interviews	Face-to-face speaking (individual)
Brochures, factsheets, ‘Popular’ booklets	Presentations to small and large groups;
Posters, postcards, stickers	Seminars/workshops, Dialogue
Education kits	Capacity building (training/education)
Community projects	Advocacy
Newsletters (internal and external)	Awareness raising
Formal publication, reports	Social marketing
Correspondence	Community mobilization
Web site	Media management
Photographs library	Information dissemination
Press releases	Monitoring and evaluation
Press conferences	

Effective communications means using the right tool, product or approach to deliver the right message to the right people at the right time. Communications staff can assist in identifying the most appropriate tool or approach for the task at hand, and with achieving quality product.

4. Strategic Objectives

4.1 Role of Management

The Director, Deputy-Director, Corporate Services Manager and Programme Managers must provide leadership and guidance in the promotion of SPREP's corporate image in connection with their respective functions. It is the Deputy-Director's role to oversee the effective implementation of this communication strategy; and report to other members of the management team. To assist the Deputy-Director, managers need to include communications targets in their negotiations with staff during the planning and review of performance outputs and staff skills. This then provides the priorities for communications staff to focus on.

4.2 Integration into Annual Programmes

The development and monitoring of this strategy is a Corporate responsibility, yet communications need to be an integral component of each output of the SPREP Annual Work Programme. Development of communications plans in alignment with each Programme Area's plans for the following year ensures that key outputs are incorporated into the Annual Communications Plan (refer to the companion document: Part II), and are aligned with the objectives of the Corporate Communications Strategy.

Early consultation of Programme Officers (POs) with appropriate communications staff is essential to ensure quality communication and establish the extent of resources to be budgeted for. Examples include key events, milestones, outcomes of activities, and meetings or workshops of regional significance requiring communications support. Such plans should be part of POs' performance reviews.

4.3 Media Policy

News media are a very powerful tool in achieving an organisation's communications objective. Hence the SPREP communications strategy has as a high priority to achieve the following:

- A newsletter in printed or electronic form dealing with all key areas of SPREP;
- A high media profile and strong contacts with media representatives;
- Regular and co-ordinated releases to news media throughout the region;
- Monitoring of significant media throughout the region to capitalise on opportunities and review effectiveness;
- A media training programme leading to well-informed and media-aware staff;
- A comprehensive, up-to-date, attractive and effective website for communicating, in English and French, with the widest possible range of target audiences.

4.4 Media Officer

In order to achieve a consistent, quality-controlled and monitored profile, all releases to the news media should be through a single communications staff member when this can be done in a timely way.

It is necessary that not only regular media releases around all key areas of SPREP are produced, but also that these are followed up to see where run, follow up if ignored (i.e., find out why), provide contacts with advance warning of events, etc. In short: media contacts need to be cultivated.

While the emphasis has been and remains for now on print medium, there is huge potential for SPREP to make its presence felt in radio and TV as well. SPREP has received feedback from countries saying that radio is the most effective way to communicate with the whole Pacific region.

4.5 Spokesperson

In order to profile SPREP effectively, it will normally be the Director who speaks to media representatives. He may delegate that responsibility to Deputy-Director or Programme Manager and other senior staff. POs would be most likely to deal with the media directly when working in island locations or when representing SPREP at international conferences.

A PO must, where practicable, seek approval from his or her Manager to be interviewed for print, appear on air or on camera. The Media Officer should be provided with a comprehensive record of SPREP media activities.

If a crisis situation arises, any response will be embargoed until consensus is obtained from all relevant parties and an official response dispatched by the media unit.

1. Tools and Approaches

Specific communication tools and approaches of strategic importance and developed by SPREP are the following:

5.1 Factsheets

A series of factsheets about SPREP, its programmes and activities, and certain events of the annual calendar are available mostly in English and in French. Each factsheet should be reviewed at least once by the middle of each year and either updated or discarded. Updates should be distributed to Members, National Focal Points, other relevant contacts, and mounted on the SPREP website. It is a joint responsibility of Editor and Publications Officer (EPO) and PO to bring these up to date before each SPREP Meeting, and amend if events during the year require so.

5.2 Newsletters

A quarterly newsletter is to be produced for print, email and website distribution. This is a major role for the Associate Media and Publications Officer (AMPO) with EPO supervision. Management and all POs are encouraged to contribute.

5.3 Annual Report

The SPREP Annual Report is an important accountability document for the Director, and an opportunity to showcase SPREP's achievements. Material for the report must be collated as the year goes on. The EPO carries the responsibility for editing, layout and production of this report, with the Managers and POs providing materials to assist this publication. The SPREP meeting approves the report for publication, hence the it needs to be ready when the Working Papers in preparation for the conference are distributed (July).

5.4 SPREP Meeting Reports

As soon as practicable after the annual SPREP Meeting, a complete meeting report is to be produced in English and French. The EPO, in his capacity as Chief Rapporteur (assisted at the event by POs for reporting, and a report committee for approvals), edits and lays out the Report, subject to the Deputy-Director's approval. Distribution of the report will take place within 2 months after the SPREP Meeting.

5.5 Other Formal Publications

POs may organise or otherwise be involved with various conferences from which Proceedings or other relevant documents may arrive for publication. While the EPO can assist in editing and layout, or find appropriate contractors to that effect, the responsibility for production and funding lies with the programme from which it originated. The EPO, whose responsibilities are primarily Corporate, plays an advisory role only.

5.6 Website

Internet-based communication is the most cost-effective way SPREP can disseminate information. While there are technology and access challenges at present, it is clear that this will be a major focus over the next few years. SPREP's website should be fully operational, up-to-date, easy to use, bilingual (at least in part), attractive and pro-active. While the EPO is overall "webmaster", it is the responsibility of POs to maintain the web content relevant to their position; the effectiveness of this should be included in their performance review.

5.7 Education Resources

Behaviour change is critical to gaining community support for environmental responsibility. Education and communication are therefore recognised as critical components of community-based projects. SPREP continues to work with countries to develop relevant, fun and accessible education kits and materials that are aimed at schools and community learning activities. SPREP is working to reorient its education materials to integrate principles of education for sustainable development.

5.8 Promotional Materials

Promotional materials such as postcards, posters, brochures, and stickers can play an important part in supporting specific campaigns and raise awareness to specific or wide audiences. While ideas, design and production are very important, it is paramount that these products are delivered to the right audience at the right time. This requires significant planning and adequate resources. Release needs to be carefully planned and considerable allowance made for dealing with practical problems such as late delivery to SPREP, customs clearance if printed overseas, and arrival at national focal points for further distribution.

5.9 Awareness Days

Examples of Awareness days are World Wetlands Day and World Environment Day. Management should encourage all SPREP staff to focus on a number of these days throughout the year so that media opportunities can be created around them.

Similarly the key focus for SPREP each year can be reflected in a designated year of action, such as "2006 Year of the Sea Turtle". Clear prioritisation by management is required to ensure widespread organisational support of these years of action. A "topic team" should be responsible for coordinating a year of action, through consultation with the communications staff. It is important that the "topic team" consider the resources required to coordinate a regional campaign, and to ensure that adequate support (financial and human resources) are acquired prior to embarking upon these activities.

5.10 Media Training

SPREP can assist in media training on environmental matters for members' officers and journalists, for example in association with the University of the South Pacific (USP), with the Pacific Islands News Agency (PINA); with local Journalist Associations such as of [Western] Samoa - JAWS; and with Asia Pacific Forum of Environmental Journalists (APFEJ).

The Media Suite is available to assist Programme and Media staff in honing their skills by conducting, recording and analysing interviews. Each PO should be interviewed on a suitable topic at least once each year; this process would also provide material for the Annual Report also.

5.11 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation mechanism will help the Secretariat gauge the effectiveness of its communication strategy and activities. Various tools will be employed to measure these, such as:

1. Maintaining a public, organisation-wide calendar of media activities throughout the year;
2. Archiving of all media exposure items;
3. Executing a formal cost-benefit analysis of exposure;
4. A Rapid Profile Assessment in association with key media contacts;
5. A full questionnaire of SPREP's profile, perceived aspirations and perceived effectiveness among key contacts in member countries and territories.

In conclusion, the above items provide generic descriptions of tools and approaches in support of the SPREP Communication Strategy (Part I). How these are implemented is described in two companion documents: the Annual Communications Action Plan (Part II), and the Operational guidelines (Part III).

Updating the Annual Plan is clearly an activity that needs to be undertaken in association with the annual planning process. Once ratified, the strategy itself may be subject to further refinements, and the operational guidelines to further modification as required.