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Programme questions: evaluation

Triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations in the programme evaluation of the former Department of Public Information (now the Department of Global Communications)

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The present report, prepared by the Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), is submitted in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session to establish triennial reviews of the implementation of decisions taken by the Committee on the basis of in-depth evaluation studies ([A/37/38 \(Supp\)](#), para. 362). The present triennial review determined the extent to which the four recommendations emanating from the 2019 programme evaluation of the former Department of Public Information ([E/AC.51/2019/2](#)), now the Department of Global Communications, were implemented.

The evaluation examined the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of key outputs of the Department, given the changing media and communications environment, in building support for the work and ideals of the United Nations. At its fifty-ninth session, the Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse the recommendations contained in the OIOS evaluation report. Based on the review of a considerable amount of information provided by the Department and interviews with selected staff members, the present triennial review determined that all four recommendations had been satisfactorily implemented.

Recommendation 1 addressed the need for the Department to invest in high-level, sustained and forward-looking strategic thinking and prioritization. In response to this recommendation, the Department: (a) set up a dedicated Department-wide strategic function in the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Global

* The dates for the substantive session are tentative.

** [E/AC.51/2022/1](#).



Communications (2021); (b) elaborated the global communications strategy for the United Nations to enhance the coherence and consistency of communications across different contexts and maximize the impact of storytelling; and (c) introduced the communication grids as a key tool to strengthen regular links with the strategic communications function of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and other key partners. On the basis of the evidence gathered, this recommendation was considered implemented.

Recommendation 2 addressed the need for the Department to maximize efficiencies and reduce structural constraints. In response, the Department: (a) eliminated gaps and overlaps by refocusing staff resources towards impactful communications priorities in line with the new strategy and annual priorities; (b) promoted intradivisional and intradepartmental collaboration on thematic areas and increased collaboration with the United Nations information centres; (c) strengthened the integration of its field offices into the strategic communications work at Headquarters; (d) strengthened the capacity of its field staff and cooperated closely with the Development Coordination Office; and (e) implemented an integrated “lab” approach to increase the use of the United Nations information centres for Department-wide functions, including integration into content development and audience analysis at an early stage. This recommendation was considered implemented.

Recommendation 3 focused on the need for the Department to create more modern and engaging content to reach greater numbers. In response, the Department: (a) created an insights team in the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications, which contributed to ensuring an audience-centred approach (instead of conducting a one-off audience needs assessment, as recommended in the evaluation); (b) developed internal branding guidelines to ensure that messaging and content were instantly recognizable through coherent branding and a cohesive look and feel within and across channels and products; and (c) reviewed the structure of multimedia content teams and associated platforms, with a view to creating new synergies and strengthening multilingualism. This recommendation was considered implemented.

Recommendation 4 addressed the need for the Department to strengthen its partnerships, amplify messages and inject new ideas, networks, audiences and financial resources into its work. In response, the Department: (a) developed a Department-wide partnerships strategy with a holistic and integrated approach; and (b) established a Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Committee (2019) to reduce barriers for partnerships. This recommendation was considered implemented.

I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-ninth session, in 2019, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report prepared by the Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the programme evaluation of the Department of Public Information (now the Department of Global Communications) (E/AC.51/2019/2).
2. The Committee expressed appreciation and high regard for the important work of the Department. Members of the Committee expressed appreciation for the OIOS report, including the recommendations, and supported the balanced analysis of the work of the Department. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse the recommendations contained in paragraphs 70 to 73 of the OIOS evaluation report (see A/74/16, para. 573).
3. The present report is a triennial review of the status of implementation of the four recommendations contained in the report. The review also assessed the extent to which implementation of the recommendations contributed to programme changes.
4. The methodology for the triennial review included:
 - (a) Review and analysis of the biennial progress reports on the status of recommendations, which are monitored through the OIOS recommendations database;
 - (b) Analysis of relevant information, documents and reports obtained from the Department on various topics related to the recommendations;
 - (c) Interviews with a purposive sample of six senior managers and programme staff members.
5. The present report incorporates comments received from the Department during the drafting process. A final draft was shared with the Department for its comments, which are reproduced in the annex to the report. OIOS expresses its appreciation to the Department for the cooperation it extended in the preparation of the report.

II. Results

6. In its evaluation of the Department of Public Information, OIOS made four recommendations, namely that the Department: (a) invest in high-level, sustained and forward-looking strategic thinking and prioritization; (b) maximize efficiencies and reduce structural constraints; (c) create more modern and engaging content to reach greater numbers; and (d) further strengthen its partnerships to amplify messages and inject new ideas, networks, audiences and financial resources into its work. All four recommendations were considered fully implemented at the time of the triennial review, and there was some evidence of concrete positive outcomes resulting therefrom. The status of implementation of each of the four recommendations is described below.

Recommendation 1

Invest in high-level, sustained and forward-looking strategic thinking and prioritization

7. Recommendation 1 reads as follows:

The Department should invest in high-level, sustained and forward-looking strategic thinking and prioritization. Towards that end, the Department should:

- (a) Form a dedicated Department-wide strategic function in the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications;
- (b) Review and improve its annual communications guidance with a clearly articulated strategy and focus on priority messages and implementation;
- (c) Advocate with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General for inclusion in an appropriate decision-making body, such as the Executive Committee, and for regular linkages with the strategic communications function of that Office.

Indicators of achievement: terms of reference for strategic function; revised communications guidance template

8. In response to this recommendation, the Department developed a strategic communications planning, coordination and collaboration function, as outlined in the programme budget for 2022 (see [A/76/6 \(Sect. 28\)](#), annex III), including the proposed establishment of a post of Senior Public Information Officer in the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications. Among other things, the function would enable the Department to effectively forecast priority global issues and identify opportunities; ensure that the Department's programmes and activities are aligned with thematic priorities; improve coordination and amplify the dissemination of key messages; and mitigate risks through the identification of potential crises.

9. In 2019, the function was piloted and the strategic planning tools (see para. 11 below for details on the grid planning system) were put into use. This provided a Department-wide strategic function and supported the delivery of the global communications strategy for the United Nations (see para. 14 below) through planning and coordination activities to maximize the impact of United Nations communications. The function included overseeing crisis communications and reputation management, which are operational necessities for the delivery of the mandate of the Department. The new function has resulted in the setting of common coordinated communications priorities and the deconflicting of communication opportunities.

10. It was confirmed through interviews and a review of documentation that the function continues to be strategic, for both the Department and the United Nations system, and that it has contributed to the strengthening of strategic thinking and prioritization. For example, it allowed the Department to (a) identify communications opportunities, which are presented to the Secretary-General on a weekly basis and subsequently planned and executed (e.g. commemorating 5 million coronavirus disease (COVID-19) deaths); (b) forecast priority communications moments on a weekly, monthly and annual basis; and (c) develop the annual United Nations communications priorities and manage the forecasting system.

11. In 2019, the Department published the communications priorities and developed a new strategic planning tool for United Nations communicators known as the grid planning system, or the grids. Under the grids planning system, significant events and opportunities are mapped across different time periods. The grids have become a key tool to strengthen regular links with the strategic communications function of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and other key partners. The grids have informed the Department's weekly media insights and monitoring report presented to the Secretary-General and shared with senior officials and United Nations

communicators.¹ A new meeting of United Nations global planning focal points was established as a mechanism for discussing forward planning and the impact of communications with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. The meeting was held every other week with the following agenda: (a) reporting of crisis cells; (b) impact of communications; (c) forward-looking planning (under this item, the Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications and the head of the strategic communications planning team present the grids for the coming week); and (d) ad hoc discussions of senior-level officials.²

12. In addition, the weekly media insights and monitoring report provided to the Secretary-General provides a review of the communications impact of the main grid items. Insights from these reports inform the Department's approach to maximizing the impact of future communications moments. The insights have included: (a) the power of the Secretary-General's voice to elevate key issues at the right moment; (b) the need to produce content in advance in relevant languages; and (c) the difference in the impact of communications when the United Nations system deconflicts major messages, allowing space for all entities to make major announcements that land in the media. The Department continued to discuss and gain insights throughout the year at the weekly grids meeting.

13. The grids have also been used across the Department to inform the work of its campaigns and outreach teams, as well as content produced by the Department, including for UN News, the United Nations website, social media and the United Nations information centres.³ The importance of the grids and their use is demonstrated by:

(a) Their daily influence on the content produced by the United Nations social media platforms and the landing page of the United Nations website;

(b) Their use in the new annual prioritization exercise, in which the Department invites all United Nations entities to submit their communications priorities for the year ahead. Fifty-three entities responded for 2022, submitting over 500 items for inclusion in the grids;

(c) The weekly presentation to the Secretary-General by the Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications, which facilitates decisions on when it would be best to use the Secretary-General's voice and on which priority issues.

14. In 2020, with the aim of enhancing the coherence and consistency of communications across different contexts and maximizing the impact of storytelling,

¹ The grids were disseminated to all staff of the Department of Global Communications, speechwriters in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, United Nations information centres, regional coordinator offices, peace operations and communications focal points within the Secretariat and planning focal points across the United Nations system.

² The speechwriters in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General get an overview of all upcoming announcements or high-level activities as well as a review of weekly media monitoring and insights reports. This has a direct impact on improving planning with respect to statements by the Secretary-General (e.g. on misinformation and vaccine equity), major moments (e.g. the speech by the Secretary-General on the state of the planet) and major policy releases by the Secretary-General. It also enables top-level input into the Department's planning process.

³ The United Nations system needs to communicate on many different issues, and the grids are both a coordination and a prioritization mechanism used to maximize the impact of communications. The annual forecast grid released in January sets a clear direction for the year ahead and is based on inputs received from the Department and across the United Nations system. The grids setting out the communications priorities for each day of the year are then released on weekly and monthly bases.

the Department elaborated the global communications strategy for the United Nations and the accompanying guide and template.

15. The strategy and the template were shared with all the staff of the Department and the wider United Nations Communications Group in January 2020 and March 2020, respectively. In December 2020, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Committee on Information, adopted a resolution in which it welcomed the strategy (see resolution 75/101 B, sect. II, para. 14). The strategy was made available online in English in June 2021 and in the other five official United Nations languages in December 2021. The Department continued its effort to raise awareness by sharing the documents with all of its 59 field offices, as well as resident coordinators and their communications staff in 131 locations, ensuring the dissemination of these documents to the full global communications network covering all States Members of the United Nations.

16. Despite the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic posed to the implementation of the strategy, which had been developed before the outbreak, it has proven to be a success and has responded to the needs of the Department's audience. There has been continued use and uptake of the strategy to guide an audience-focused communications approach. To facilitate its use, the accompanying template provided practical guidance in creating specific communications strategies.⁴ It was used, for example, in the development of the Department's climate action strategy and Africa Section strategy, and the Secretary-General's Common Agenda communications strategy. The approach contained in the strategy has also guided internal communications led by the Department, such as the Secretary-General's initiative to prevent and address racism and racial discrimination in the United Nations.

17. Furthermore, there is evidence that these documents have been used by other entities. For example, according to an internal survey in January and February 2021, awareness of the strategy among resident coordinators working with United Nations information centres was high, with over 80 per cent of resident coordinators noting that their respective United Nations country teams used the strategy as an approach to communications work in the country. The Department has contributed to the promotion of its use by providing support and guidance to other entities on how to use the templates and tools to develop their own communication strategies.⁵

18. The COVID-19 pandemic represented both a derailing factor – taking up much of the Department's resources – and a catalyst for a major increase in emphasis on communications. Within this framework, the Department continued to focus on the dissemination and reinforcement of the strategy at the global and country levels, including through the United Nations Communications Group mechanism. The strategy continued to guide the Department's approach to tackling present and future challenges, such as those identified in the 2022 communications priorities, as called for in the recommendation.

19. This recommendation has been implemented.

⁴ It was designed to help structure United Nations communications activities at all levels: global, country and issue-specific campaigns and activities.

⁵ For example, the Department provided support to:

- (a) The Resident Coordinator Office in China in May 2021 through a two-day workshop;
- (b) All peace operations in June 2021 through a meeting with all heads of unit;
- (c) The United Nations System Staff College in October 2021 to develop a course on strategic communication related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (all speakers were from the Department). A second round is foreseen for April 2022;
- (d) The Development Coordination Office to incorporate the global communications strategy and approach in internal guidance documents on communications and advocacy issued in December 2021 to all resident coordinators and United Nations country teams.

Recommendation 2
Maximize efficiencies and reduce structural constraints

20. Recommendation 2 reads as follows:

In order to fulfil its mandates under resource constraints, maximize efficiencies and reduce structural constraints, the Department should:

- (a) Eliminate gaps and overlaps in the Headquarters structure to ensure that staff resources are allocated to prioritized and impactful work;
- (b) Enhance collaboration between teams with potential synergies, such as language teams and video teams;
- (c) Determine the best placement for strategic functions;
- (d) Realign or reassign functions which may be better distributed in field locations;
- (e) Ensure the use of United Nations information centres for Department-wide functions, including integration into content development and audience analysis, and identify ways to improve interlinkages between the United Nations information centres.

Indicators of achievement: assessments of the Headquarters and United Nations information centres' structure and related recommendations

21. This recommendation was addressed in the framework of a reform process that was ongoing at the time of the evaluation. Since 2019, the new leadership has refocused staff resources towards impactful communications priorities in line with the new strategy and annual priorities. The forecast grids set the direction for the Department's work by focusing resources on specific issues, such as COVID-19, climate action and fighting inequality. The weekly media monitoring and insights reports show the impact of Department's strategic communications approach.

22. The reform contributed to the elimination of gaps and overlaps. For example, the News and Media Division took steps to integrate many of the reform recommendations by: (a) promoting intradivisional and intradepartmental collaboration on thematic areas ranging from climate action to ending racial discrimination; (b) sharing content across the Department; and (c) working more strategically with United Nations system bodies, both through the United Nations Communications Group and directly. Based on an internal assessment, a redeployment of the Social Media Section from the News and Media Division to the Strategic Communications Division was included in the proposed budget of the Department for 2022 (see [A/76/6 \(Sect. 28\)](#), para. 28.93 (b) and annex III). The move contributed to the full integration and effective use of flagship and other social media platforms in various United Nations campaigns on priority themes. There were

numerous examples of enhanced collaboration and efficiency in different areas, such as the Video Section, UN News and United Nations Web TV.⁶

23. The difficulties posed by the liquidity crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic slowed implementation of some of the reforms, especially as teams had to focus on daily priorities and keeping operations going, with some small teams being disproportionately affected. However, the News and Media Division found ways to collaborate and deliver on mandates. In particular, the redeployment of the Social Media Section contributed to an increase in collaboration with the United Nations information centres by consolidating and streamlining social media accounts and activities. As a result, engagement with local audiences became more effective through the production of optimized and more tailored social media campaign assets and messaging (see the analysis under recommendation 3).

24. In order to further strengthen the integration of the Department's field offices into the strategic communications work at United Nations Headquarters (from planning and country-level adaption to implementation and evaluation), the UN News teams shared a digest of curated content every fortnight. The digest included many examples of solutions-based journalism produced in nine languages, which was shared with United Nations information centres and field offices and across the Department. This allowed the offices to consider the creation of content based on storytelling in local languages. As a result, the information centres (59 field offices covering 139 countries) played a central role in the implementation of the global communications strategy by leading or actively engaging in United Nations communications groups in their countries. Where they were integrated, the information centres and the regional coordinator offices worked jointly to pursue global communications priorities and support the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. The information centres have also been instrumental in building and strengthening communities of practice at the regional and subregional levels and have created a communications network with a global reach.⁷

25. Support and guidance from Headquarters to this wide global communications network was provided on a regular basis – daily, weekly and monthly – jointly by the Department and the Development Coordination Office, with regular meetings between the two offices. To further enhance communication capacities through the network, the Department leveraged the expertise of the directors of the United

⁶ For example, the Director of the News and Media Division consulted with all language teams to come up with a system to allow for language versioning of video content. Synergies have improved greatly with United Nations information offices, which often provide support in versioning videos, especially when turnaround times are longer. The Video Section has also routinely worked with the information centres to produce campaign-related content. In 2021, this led to a large amount of content being produced with respect to climate action and combating racism and intolerance. UN News interviewed senior United Nations officials and others in the six official languages of the United Nations and in Hindi, Kiswahili and Portuguese, with United Nations country team support, yielding timely and moving stories and coverage. UN News expanded its network of media partners in Central Asia and the Baltic States, throughout East Africa and across different language diasporas, pursued deeper collaboration with United Nations information centres, augmented synergetic cooperation with Member States on social media and increased strategic joint efforts with resident coordinator offices to give users an intimate picture of how the United Nations is working at the country level (see [A/AC.198/2021/3](#), para. 50). With audience needs in mind, the United Nations Web TV team created playlists of videos, curated by thematic category and official language, to allow United Nations video content to be discovered more easily.

⁷ The existence of a network of communications teams across the globe and its contribution to the strengthening of the Department's field impact has been recognized, for example, in the report of the Secretary-General of 12 February 2021 entitled "Activities of the Department of Global Communications: news services" ([A/AC.198/2021/3](#)).

Nations information centres, regional public information officers and staff at Headquarters to provide specific support.⁸

26. In order to ensure that its field offices were equipped to effectively pursue the communications approach called for in the global communications strategy and to support the global resident coordinator system, the Department strengthened the capacity of its field staff, as follows:

(a) In 2021, an average of 112 communications staff engaged in 45 interactive webinars on key communications priorities, such as COVID-19 and Afghanistan, news and social media monitoring, key campaign messaging, content campaigns and the grids strategic calendars with communication priorities across the United Nations system;

(b) Throughout the year, training sessions were held on core communications skills, such as copywriting and storytelling, with an average of over 160 participants engaging in the 13 sessions organized by the Department;

(c) United Nations information centres have played an integral role within the United Nations country teams in developing crisis communications strategies. As with strategic communications support and advice, the directors of larger information centres and Headquarters staff provided critical crisis communications guidance to resident coordinators in countries such as in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Myanmar;

(d) Two crisis communication training sessions were provided to combined audiences of information centre and regional coordinator office communications staff and a dedicated hands-on session was given in 10 information centres in countries currently affected by crises.

27. The Department's capacity development efforts were supported by a knowledge-sharing platform established as a repository for up-to-date guidance from across the Department and the United Nations system to facilitate the sharing of best practices. Communications capacity in the field was also advanced through the coordination by directors of the Department and regional communications officers of regional communities of practice for United Nations information centres and resident coordinator office communications staff to strengthen cooperation, facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges, share communications tools and products, and enhance multilingualism.⁹ In all its capacity-development activities, the Department cooperated closely with the Development Coordination Office to ensure that their combined global network of communications officers received the necessary guidance and assets to enable them to maximize the impact of local communication efforts.

28. Lastly, the Department implemented an integrated "lab approach" to increase the use of United Nations information centres for Department-wide functions, including integration into content development and audience analysis at an early stage. The implementation of the lab approach helped to maximize the impact of the Department by drawing upon existing and new expertise, skills, languages and reach in such areas as strategic communications, content production, outreach and

⁸ For example, the Director of the United Nations Information Service in Vienna and the regional public information officer based in Istanbul teamed up with the United Nations information centre in Yerevan to provide the communications group in Armenia with an interactive presentation on the global communications strategy, including a hands-on exercise for adapting it to country level. Similar direct support on strategic communications planning was undertaken in Angola, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, China, Eswatini, Kazakhstan, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

⁹ The communities of practice include those in anglophone and francophone Africa, as well as those in Latin American, Caribbean and Arab States and in subregional groups in Europe and Central Asia.

evaluation. The aim was to mobilize the most effective and innovative strategies to deliver compelling and tailored messages to global and local audiences.

29. The lab approach ultimately ensured successful coordination and operationalization of multilingual campaigns and the ability to review, iterate and reshape campaign activities and products to constantly improve outputs. It was an issue-driven coordination mechanism that pulled together a network of dedicated communications teams, including at the country level. The purpose was to better plan, organize, implement and amplify the messages and work of the Organization by, for example:

(a) Tackling misinformation. The Verified campaign developed by the Department at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to fight misinformation and share stories of trust and solidarity, drew on skills and content from across the United Nations system and the United Nations information centres. It was adapted to resonate with specific audiences around the world in multiple languages, online and through traditional media, as well as through large-scale public outreach activities;

(b) Promoting climate science and action. The Department's Global Innovation Lab for Climate Finance, including specific advocacy campaign teams from Brazil, India and South Africa, was led by in-country United Nations experts who worked with local leaders to enlist the support of community-based influencers, such as scientists, activists and organizations. The localized approach helped to build lasting support for ambitious climate action by showcasing solutions and demonstrating that climate action does not come at a cost, but rather benefits the economy and the people;

(c) The Global Innovation Lab for Climate Finance also allowed the more efficient and direct approach of sharing key information products, including key messages and digital assets, which could be adapted for local audiences.

30. This recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 3

Create more modern and engaging content to reach greater numbers

31. Recommendation 3 reads as follows:

With its mandate to communicate to the general public about the work of the United Nations, the Department should create more modern and engaging content to reach greater numbers by:

- (a) Conducting a global audience needs assessment with detailed analysis of key audience groups, their needs and the content that resonates with them and integration of that analysis across the communications plans and products of the Department's units;
- (b) Ensuring coherent branding and a cohesive look and feel within and across channels and products so that messaging and content are instantly recognizable;
- (c) Optimizing its social media and web presence.

Indicators of achievement: audience analysis paper; brand analysis review

32. In response to the evaluation recommendation, an insights team was created in the Office of the Under-Secretary-General to: (a) track, research and analyse data on communications outcomes; (b) target audience results; and (c) support the measurement of the impact of communications activities, under the guidance of the Chief of the Evaluation and Communications Research Unit. The insights team

consisted of a Team Leader (P-3), an Associate Public Information Officer (P-2), a Data Scientist (Junior Professional Officer) and two General Service staff.

33. The team contributed to ensuring an audience-centred approach by drafting daily, weekly and monthly reports in support of the strategic planning process. The reports were based on the priorities set out in the grids and in priority communications campaigns and provided insights about the effectiveness of communications initiatives. The insights were and are continuously presented through regular briefings to various stakeholders, including the Secretary-General and other senior United Nations officials, members of the United Nations Communications Group and the Global Innovation Lab for Climate Finance and others. As a result, links within the Department have been strengthened, contributing to increased reach and impact (for example, through the ActNow and Verified campaigns).

34. The Department developed internal branding guidelines to ensure that messaging and content were instantly recognizable through coherent branding and a cohesive look and feel within and across channels and products. The Secretary-General and the Senior Management Committee endorsed the guidelines as presented by the Under-Secretary-General of the Department in March 2020. The guidelines have been shared widely for feedback and usage within the Department. In addition, a style guide was shared with the Office of Information and Communications Technology for compliance on all United Nations templates and widely shared with United Nations departments and offices when they developed their respective websites.

35. The guidelines and templates were used for various products such as letterheads, reports, policy briefs, PowerPoint templates, business cards and email signatures. They were crucial for ensuring that the United Nations visual identity was used correctly across assets to represent the Organization as one. The Development Coordination Office has highlighted the importance of the guidelines for coordinating in-country activities. During 2021, communications materials and assets were shared on the branding page of the United Nations intranet, iSeek, for offices to access. The assets were prepared in close cooperation with relevant offices and included a shorter version of the guidelines and some branding templates (such as those relating to the emblem, colours and fonts to be used in reports and in any information and communications materials). More extensive United Nations branding guidelines will be released in 2022.

36. Given the limited resources and capacity of the Department of Global Communications, the guidelines were available only in English, but various branding templates were provided in multiple languages.¹⁰ In addition, the Department made a basic style guide available online in English¹¹ with examples of the banner in all of the official languages of the United Nations, as well as examples of the use of the colour and branding elements.

37. In line with the new global communications strategy, the structure of multimedia content teams and associated platforms was reviewed with a view to creating new synergies and strengthening multilingualism. According to the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Department of Global Communications in the area of news services (A/AC.198/2021/3), the UN.org website was updated to incorporate the United Nations branding guidelines.

38. The Web Services Section of the Department worked with Graphic Design Unit to ensure that the branding elements could be used for the web while remaining

¹⁰ For example, the brand identity has been applied to all web content under the mandate of the Department of Global Communications in all languages: the UN.org home page and main, second-layer and third-layer pages, and key content such as campaign and conference sites.

¹¹ Available at: <https://www.un.org/styleguide>.

accessible to persons with disabilities.¹² Since 2018, about 70 compliance reports have been conducted by the Section prior to launching sites. In a forthcoming administrative instruction on website publishing, author entities will be requested to ensure that United Nations websites conform to the guidelines and standards for website branding that have been established by the Department.

39. In addition, the Department is currently working with the Office of Information and Communications Technology to strengthen the content management system behind UN.org and is ensuring that web branding is a key component of this exercise. UN News also updated its website branding in 2021 to align it with the UN.org domain as part of a reorganization of the home page content and design to optimize the information architecture and content hierarchy.

40. The main audience of United Nations messaging is believed to be interested in issue-based content. Accordingly, the integration of the Social Media Section into the Communications Campaign Service has contributed to strengthening the issue-focused content approach and leveraging social media as a core element of all communications strategies. Examples of the positive impact of social media integration into campaigns included the following:

(a) Ahead of the high-level meeting held on the twentieth anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the Department of Global Communications launched the joint #FightRacism multilingual campaign with Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, covering a range of racism-related issues and showcasing concrete actions to help fight racism.¹³ As a result, campaign posts were consistently among the most engaging across platforms and languages. More than 500,000 interactions resulted from 265 posts published across platforms in nine languages from 1 July to the end of November 2021;

(b) In the communications strategy of the twenty-sixth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in November 2021, social media was a core element of communications planning and implementation from the outset. A range of multilingual assets conveyed the agreed climate messaging, optimizing it for social media platforms. A key part of the strategy was the engagement of several high-profile influencers to amplify climate messaging on social media for younger audiences. As a result, content related to the Conference of the Parties was among the best-performing United Nations social media content in 2021.

41. This recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 4 Strengthened partnerships

42. Recommendation 4 reads as follows:

The Department should further strengthen its partnerships to amplify messages and inject new ideas, networks, audiences and financial resources into its work by:

- (a) Developing an annual Department-wide partnerships strategy, with a holistic, integrated approach;
- (b) Reducing barriers for partnerships by creating a mechanism, a unit or a working group to manage contractual and other forms of partnership

¹² The Web Services Section oversees the validation of websites to be launched under the UN.org domain to ensure that they comply with established United Nations branding standards.

¹³ See <https://www.un.org/en/fight-racism>.

arrangements and act as a resource for the partnerships of the United Nations information centres.

Indicators of achievement: partnership strategy document; terms of reference for the partnerships unit or working group

43. In response to the recommendations, the Department of Global Communications developed a Department-wide partnerships strategy, with a holistic and integrated approach and relevant key performance indicators. The partnerships and resource mobilization strategy was endorsed by the Steering Committee of the Department in May 2019 and was shared with all Department staff. It has also been made available internally to Department staff worldwide through SharePoint sites and through the members of the Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Committee.

44. In the partnerships and resource mobilization strategy, the Department of Global Communications identified a variety of value propositions for potential partners, such as: (a) enhancing the value of corporate social responsibility; (b) reducing the use of resources through mutual content creation and sharing; (c) optimizing geographical reach through multilingual content; and (d) using certain types of branding to communicate about the support of partners for the United Nations (for example, Sustainable Development Goal branding without the United Nations emblem). It has been used continuously by staff throughout the Department, with the support of the Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Committee. The interviewees considered that it had contributed to improving partnership coordination and resource mobilization activities. Nevertheless, there have been little relevant data to track using the key performance indicators, as the indicators were based primarily on donor priorities, and fundraising has been stagnant during the pandemic.

45. The strategy contributed in particular to strengthening partnerships with top-tier partners through a shift in approach and the encouragement to pursue long-term, strategic relationships. The partnership with the communication agency, Purpose, for the implementation of the Verified campaign represents an excellent example of a strategic partnership around clear objectives for an extended period. Partnerships with the entertainment industry have also been strengthened through repeated collaboration with Sony, for example. Continuous engagement with the international football community over several years, including the Fédération Internationale de Football Association and the Union of European Football Associations, has led to solid partnerships and a global initiative that provided a space for football communities to commit to and take action on the Sustainable Development Goals. The “United Nations Football for the Goals” initiative provides a space for global football communities to commit to and take action on the Goals.

46. The strategy has also contributed to enhanced coordination among and across the divisions of the Department of Global Communications to avoid duplication. The Department has raised awareness among staff and improved the professional capacity of staff to engage in partnerships more systematically, with a strategic approach rather than through ad hoc arrangements. However, formal training has only been provided on some very specific topics, such as the use of influencers.

47. In the strategy, the Department of Global Communications foresaw the establishment of an experienced and specialized team for its operational implementation, with a focus on resource mobilization and donor relations. The team would consist of at least one Professional post at the P-5 level, two support staff and one Junior Professional Officer. However, there was no specific recruitment for the partnerships and resource mobilization activity as foreseen in the strategy. This was due in part to the hiring embargo that was recently lifted, as well as to the need to adapt existing resources to address the pandemic through measures such as combating misinformation and disseminating COVID-19 messaging and resources.

48. It was recognized that the strategy needed to be dynamic, adapting to new circumstances such as the pandemic and to the evolving needs of the Department of Global Communications and the Organization. Given the impact of the pandemic on efforts to mobilize resources for communications projects, the focus on partnerships increased. To further strengthen that area of work, a Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Committee was established in 2019. At its meetings, the Committee addressed changing needs and discussed next steps at the highest levels of the Department. The Committee members provided guidance to staff throughout the Department on efforts concerning partnerships and resource mobilization.¹⁴

49. The rules of procedure and composition of the Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Committee were conducive to effectively reducing barriers to partnerships¹⁵ and to strengthening partnerships.

50. Despite the challenges, partnerships with the private sector and relevant organizations have been strengthened and have contributed to promoting United Nations activities and languages in a cost-neutral manner. The collaboration with goodwill ambassadors and influencers has improved significantly in both qualitative and quantitative terms. The links with the creative industry have also been strengthened.

51. The Department of Global Communications has worked with the private sector and various institutions and organizations to promote the Sustainable Development Goals in multiple languages at no cost to the Organization. Activities to that end have included the following:

(a) The Department has partnered with Moscow State University, the Institute of Intercultural Management and Communication in Paris, Shanghai International Studies University and Italian universities for pro bono translations;

(b) On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the United Nations in Bonn, the city and the local transport provider, Stadtwerke Bonn, commissioned a special United Nations-branded streetcar, exposing German-speaking audiences and European visitors to United Nations activities and the Sustainable Development Goals;

(c) The Department worked with the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation to make 17 documentaries in Greek on each of the Sustainable Development Goals to encourage local audiences to take action;

(d) A game based on the Sustainable Development Goals for children and adults entitled “Go Goals” was produced through various collaborations across Europe in over 20 languages.

52. On assessing all of the above-mentioned elements, it was concluded that the recommendation had been implemented. While there were challenges and aspects of

¹⁴ The composition and terms of reference of the Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Committee were developed as part of the strategy. The Committee consists of eight members contributing approximately two hours per week and is led by a Chair appointed by the Board of Directors that rotates on a quarterly basis. It is composed of two representatives from each division, nominated by the Director of the division; one representative from the Executive Office; and one representative from the Office of the Under-Secretary-General. The Chair is responsible for providing the minutes of each meeting to the Directors and reporting regularly to the expanded Directors’ meeting. The first Committee meeting was held in July 2019.

¹⁵ For example, there is representation from the largest United Nations information centre as well as from the Strategic Communications Division, which oversees the work of the information centres. Issues that the information centres confront are regularly brought to the attention of the Committee for advice and guidance, such as ethical questions related to working with a media partner experiencing negative press or to expanding a partnership from Headquarters to the field.

the partnership strategy that had yet to be fully implemented owing to the pandemic, there had been progress on the strengthening of partnerships, and key mechanisms to support them were in place.

III. Conclusion

53. The recommendations of the OIOS evaluation were addressed within the framework of a reform process that was ongoing at the time of the evaluation. During the three intervening years, the Department of Global Communications has embarked on an ambitious process of organizational change and taken important steps to implement the four recommendations that led to the concrete positive changes and outcomes mentioned above.

54. The Department of Global Communications has invested in high-level, sustained and forward-looking strategic thinking and prioritization, maximizing efficiencies, reducing structural constraints, creating more modern and engaging content to reach greater numbers and strengthening its partnerships to amplify messages and inject new ideas, networks, audiences and financial resources into its work. All of those actions have been instrumental in reorienting the work of the Department and have contributed to helping the Department to better support the delivery of its mandate. Early indications of positive changes in the United Nations system that have already been identified include setting priorities, deconflicting communications opportunities, reaching greater numbers through cohesive branding and strengthening the partnerships of the Organization.

Annex*

Comments received from the Department of Global Communications

I write with regard to your memorandum dated 10 March 2022, transmitting the draft report on the above-mentioned triennial review.

I would like to express my sincere thanks for the work of your team on this review.

We appreciate the review's recognition of the many advances the Department of Global Communications has made over the past few years and their positive impact on the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of its work.

Thank you.

* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services sets out the full text of comments received from the Department of Global Communications. The practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution [64/263](#), following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.