OIOS

Office of Internal Oversight Services

INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2024/089

Audit of management of the campaigns and country operations subprogramme in the Department of Global Communications

The subprogramme adequately prepared its workplan but improvements were needed to further enhance its efficient implementation, including addressing the challenges arising from the dual reporting structure for United Nations information centres

26 December 2024
Assignment No. AN-2023-580-01

Audit of management of the campaigns and country operations subprogramme in the Department of Global Communications

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of management of the campaigns and country operations subprogramme in the Department of Global Communications (DGC), which is implemented by the Campaigns and Country Operations Division (CCOD). The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and internal control processes in the management of the campaigns and country operations subprogramme. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2022 to 30 June 2024. Based on activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risk areas which included: (a) work planning and implementation; (b) monitoring and reporting on campaigns; and (c) administrative and resource management.

CCOD prepared detailed annual workplans at the service and section levels and contributed to the management of relevant risks in the DGC risk register. However, the audit observed areas requiring improvements to enhance further efficiency, notably in the operationalization of strategic communications templates, which lacked clear procedures for implementation leading to inconsistent application across teams. Additionally, the dual reporting structure for United Nations information centres (UNICs) to DGC and the Development Coordination Office (DCO) posed challenges, with divergences between local and global communications priorities affecting work plan implementation and staff well-being. Also, key performance indicators needed to be strengthened for more effective monitoring of the impact of campaigns.

OIOS made four recommendations. To address issues identified in the audit, DGC needed to:

- Operationalize the strategic communications template, including guidelines on its use, any training required and monitoring;

- Develop, in collaboration with DCO, modalities to guide the working relationship between resident coordinators and UNICs, including prioritization of UNICs' activities and arrangements for effective performance management of heads of UNICs in compliance with the administrative instruction on performance management;

- Review vacant CCOD positions and prioritize those that need to be filled based on operational exigencies and within the limitations imposed by the financial situation of the Organization; and

- Ensure that all staff undertake the required mandatory training within set timelines.

DGC accepted the recommendations. Actions required to close the recommendations are indicated in Annex I.

CONTENTS

Audit of management of the campaigns and country operations subprogramme in the Department of Global Communications

I.   BACKGROUND

1.   The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of management of the campaigns and country operations subprogramme in the Department of Global Communications (DGC), which is implemented by the Campaigns and Country Operations Division (CCOD or the Division).

2.   CCOD develops and implements strategies and campaigns to effectively communicate United Nations messages on priority issues. The Division also manages the Department's global network of over 59 field offices, which play a key role in supporting the Department's efforts at the country level. CCOD consists of two services: the Communications Campaign Service (CCS) and the Information Centres Service (ICS).

3.   CCS implements annual communications priorities by developing targeted strategies and communications campaigns, reaching out to global audiences via its digital platforms (social media and websites), media engagement and strategic partnerships, e.g., with online influencers and civil society organizations, and through the Department's United Nations information centres (UNICs). CCS comprises six sections, namely the Peace and Security, Human Rights, Sustainable Development, Climate, Africa and Social Media Sections, and a Digital Campaigns Unit.

4.   ICS, through its three headquarters sections, namely Centres Operations, Programme Support, and Information Management Sections, provides the link between DGC at headquarters and its 59 field offices – 47 United Nations information centres (UNICs), eight information components of United Nations Offices, three information services in Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, and one regional information centre (Brussels). ICS works with the field offices, providing them with programmatic guidance and direction as well as administrative and staff management and oversight.

5.   As of June 2024, it had 365 posts, 332 of which were occupied and 33 vacant. The overall budget for the Division was $42, $41, and $42 million for 2022, 2023, and 2024, respectively. The Division is led by a Director at the D2 position (currently unencumbered at that level since October 2021) and two Deputy Directors, who head CCS and ICS, respectively. They rotate the functions of the Director on a quarterly basis.

6.   CCOD operations are supported by the Centres Information Management System (CIMS), which is used to compile and analyze UNICs' activities, section workplans, output statistics (e.g., social media posts, publications, etc.), and details of partners. Implementation of programme activities is also monitored in the Strategic Management Application in Umoja.

7.   Comments provided by DGC are incorporated in italics.

II.   AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

8.   The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and internal control processes in the management of the campaigns and country operations subprogramme.

9.   This audit was included in the 2023 risk-based audit work plan of OIOS due to the strategic and operational risks relating to public support for the work and issues of the United Nations.

10.   OIOS conducted this audit from June to October 2024. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2022 to 30 June 2024. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risks areas in the campaigns and country operations, which included: (a) work planning and implementation; and (b) human resources management.

11.   The audit methodology included: (a) interview with key personnel, (b) review of relevant documentation, (c) analytical review of human resources data held in Umoja, (d) sample testing of 10 campaigns.

12.   The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

III.   AUDIT RESULTS

A.   Work planning and implementation

Work planning process at the service and section levels was adequate

13.   The annual work planning process in DGC was guided by the Strategic Communications and Crisis Cell in the office of the Under-Secretary-General (USG), DGC, based on relevant General Assembly resolutions, annual communications priorities of the Secretary-General, the proposed programme budget and the USG's compact with the Secretary-General. OIOS review of CCOD workplans for 2022 to 2024 indicated that they were mostly prepared using a standard format comprising: (a) an overview of staffing in the service or section, (b) description of specific goals, (c) listing of related actions, success criteria and the responsible focal points. Work plans for individual UNICs also included their various activities correlated with the priority themes, target audience, required resources and measure of results. They were uploaded and monitored in CIMS.

14.   After the approval of the DGC programme plan, the designated officer in the Office of the Director of CCOD enters the plan in Umoja SMA. ICS provided quarterly monitoring data on their performance measures and deliverables, which were uploaded in SMA. CCS and ICS held regular meetings to review implementation of the work plans.

CCOD made efforts to manage communications and campaign risks

15.   DGC comprehensive risk register, last updated in September 2022 and reviewed annually, identified significant risks to its operations, such as public perception and reputation, and issues related to partners, affiliates, and donors. It emphasized the importance of managing stakeholder information needs and maintaining transparent communication. To address these risks, the register outlined several mitigating controls relevant to CCOD, including the global communications strategy, annual communications priorities, grid planning tools,[1] training of staff in United Nations field offices, staff engagement survey action plan and CIMS. CCOD was taking action to implement these controls in its activities.

---

[1] The grid planning tools are used to map and track significant events for each year, allowing for strategic planning, coordination, and collaboration between DGC, several departments and stakeholders.

Absence of procedures for operationalizing the communications strategy template led to its inconsistent use

16.   The first United Nations global communications strategy, approved by the Secretary-General in 2020, outlined a comprehensive approach to enhancing United Nations communication efforts globally. The strategy aimed to enhance coherence and consistency in United Nations communications and to maximize their impact in supporting United Nations teams and partners to lead the narrative, achieve results, and mobilize key audiences to care and take action on global issues.

17.   In line with the global communications strategy, DGC developed a strategic communications template for use on campaigns and for United Nations offices around the world to develop their own communications strategies. The template required outlining for each campaign, the communications approach consisting of the three W's of communicating for a cause (What?, Why care? and What now?) and the seven steps in strategic communications (comprising the key objectives and challenges, audience, message, desired actions, mediums to be used, distribution platforms and various categories of impact[2]).

18.   However, the audit did not see evidence that the template was operationalized, including issuance of related guidance, training and monitoring to ensure its consistent use. As a result, there were differences in the application of the template in the planning, execution and documentation of campaigns across the sections. While there were some good examples of its use for the Summit of the Future and climate communications strategies, the template was not consistently used in the eight other campaigns OIOS reviewed. DGC explained that it was in the process of updating the template and will further clarify its applicability.

19.   Inconsistent application of the communications strategy template could result in differing standards and results in the implementation of campaigns impacting the coherence of the Organization's communication efforts.

> **(1)   DGC should develop and implement a plan to operationalize the strategic communications template, including guidelines on its use, any training required and monitoring.**
>
> *DGC accepted recommendation 1.*

Need for consistent inclusion and improved definition of key performance indicators in campaign strategies

20.   OIOS reviewed strategy documents of 10 campaigns carried out during the period under review and noted that key performance indicators (KPIs) were not defined in all campaign strategies. For example, no KPIs were defined for the awareness-raising campaign to raise the profile of peace and security issues, and the indigenous peoples hate speech and genocide prevention campaigns. Where KPIs were defined, they did not have all the attributes of a SMART[3] KPI as they did not include the baselines, where applicable, and targets and timeframes for achieving the targets. For example, the climate communications campaign defined and consistently tracked trends on several KPIs, but without previously determining the baselines, targets and timelines, it was difficult to assess the extent to which the objectives of the campaign had been achieved and whether additional actions were needed to achieve those objectives. DGC could enhance the development of KPIs when it operationalizes the updated communications strategy template as discussed above and monitors its use.

---

[2] These included measuring the reach, interim outcomes, and long-term outcomes/organizational impact of campaigns.
[3] SMART KPIs are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound.

<u>Need to establish modalities with the Development Coordination Office that further clarifies the relationship with UNICs</u>

21.   UNICs play a crucial role in advancing the United Nations' objectives, by serving as the primary communication link between the United Nations and local populations. Their strategic locations enable them to address local issues effectively, fostering a more informed and interconnected global community.

22.   As part of the 2018 United Nations reforms and General Assembly resolution 72/279, which significantly restructured the United Nations development system, UNICs were integrated into United Nations resident coordinator offices (RCO) and heads of UNICs were required to report directly to the resident coordinators (RCs). This shift aimed to improve coordination, coherence and cost savings with the integration of United Nations' communication efforts at the country level and ensure that they were aligned with broader United Nations strategies and priorities, thus enhancing United Nations' effectiveness in supporting the sustainable development goals.

23.   Consequently, RCs in their respective countries became the first reporting officers of heads of UNICs, and the ICS Deputy Director, the second reporting officer. This created a dual reporting structure for UNICs that presented several challenges for the heads of UNICs, DGC and RCs (who are staff members of the Development Coordination Office (DCO), which remained unaddressed:

(a) There were differing focus between RCs' local priorities and the global priorities of UNICs, as the RCs focused on country-specific sustainable development goals, while the UNIC heads of country offices focused on giving local context to global goals. Discussions with a sample of offices showed that experiences were different but there was a common thread of frustration expressed due to the dual reporting lines, with potential conflicts of interest and priorities. Coordination and communication between the two entities, with clear guidelines and robust collaboration, were therefore essential to ensure alignment.

(b) Additionally, a review of the comments in the 2023 DGC survey on mental health and well-being showed that the lack of clarity in workplan prioritization was affecting CCOD field staff in adverse ways. DGC management explained that the survey was being repeated and a new survey had been re-circulated as the response rate of 30 per cent to the original survey was considered low. A consultant was also being recruited to review the concerns expressed by staff and the criticality of the issues raised that needed to be urgently addressed.

(c) Furthermore, the administrative instruction on the performance management and development system (ST/AI/2021/4) states that the second reporting officer should normally be the first reporting officer's supervisor or equivalent. An analysis of RCs in countries where UNICs were present showed that 22 of them were at the D2 level and 5 at Assistant Secretary-General level. The first reporting officers in these instances were more senior to the UNICs' heads of offices' second reporting officer in DGC, who is at the D1 level. This difference in hierarchy could potentially impact performance of the role envisaged for the second reporting officer in the administrative instruction. Also, 12 directors and heads of UNICs with responsibility for more than one country were reporting to the RCs in the countries in which they were located, although the RCs did not have full visibility of significant portions of the scope of work of the UNICs.

> **(2)   DGC should, in collaboration with DCO, develop modalities to guide the working relationship between resident coordinators and United Nations information centres (UNICs) and ensure the performance management of directors and heads of UNICs is conducted effectively and in compliance with the administrative instruction on performance management.**
>
> *DGC accepted recommendation 2.*

Multilingualism was mainstreamed

24.   CCOD implemented procedures to mainstream the United Nations' cross-cutting principle of multilingualism across its programme of work mainly through the work of UNICs, which were working in 153 local languages, in addition to the 6 official languages of the United Nations to promote public understanding on United Nations priority issues. UNICs managed flagship and other social media accounts, campaigns and multilingual websites established for this purpose.

B.   Human resources management

Need for review and action to fill vacant posts

25.   As of June 2024, 36 positions were vacant, showing a 9.8 per cent vacancy rate against a budgeted vacancy rate of 7.7 per cent as per the management dashboard. Ten positions were filled temporarily, leaving 26 unencumbered, as analyzed in Table 1.

Table 1: Length of vacancies in CCOD as of June 2024

Staff grade	Number of months			
	0 to 6	7 to 12	13 to 18	Over 18
P4 - P5	2	-	-	1
P1 - P3	1	2	3	-
National Officer	-	3	1	-
G7	-	-	-	-
G3 - G6	3	3	4	3
Total	**6**	**8**	**8**	**4**

26.   In addition to administrative delays, positions remained vacant due to hiring restrictions because of the liquidity constraints in the Secretariat. These vacancies impacted on the Division's ability to meet its objectives and caused added workload on other staff. They also risked posts getting abolished, as was the case in three instances when the Division lost posts due to long-term vacancies.

27.   While all positions cannot be filled immediately given the liquidity constraints, there was a need for strategic decision-making regarding which posts are essential to fill within the financial ceiling provided by the Controller.

> **(3)   DGC should review vacant positions in the Campaigns and Country Offices Division and prioritize those that need to be filled based on operational exigencies and within the limitations imposed by the financial situation of the Organization.**
>
> *DGC accepted recommendation 3.*

28.   Training is a crucial component of ICS management and success as identified in the 2020 global communications strategy. It included webinars on a DGC SharePoint portal, on-the-job learning, and various internal training sessions offered by DGC staff virtually for their colleagues.

29.   A hands-on training component is available for UNICs field staff, allowing them to dedicate two to five hours per week during office hours to work with another unit, section, or UNIC, for one to three months, while continuing their regular duties. This arrangement, agreed upon by the staff members and receiving managers, fosters on-the-job learning, skills acquisition, networking, and exposure to new environments. A summary of the training statistics for the period of the audit is shown in table 2 below.

Table 2: Summary of ICS UNIC training statistics for the period of January 2022 – June 2024

	2022	2023	2024
Number of training sessions	35	36	17
Average number of participants	108	94	95
Highest number of participants	240	248	256

30.   Considering that CCOD had a staff complement of about 297, excluding vacant positions, the average attendance at these webinars over the period was 33 per cent of staff. CCOD agreed that to further encourage staff to avail themselves of the opportunities provided within the Department for self-improvement.

Mandatory training compliance needed improvement

31.   Staff members are required to complete nine mandatory training programmes stipulated in the Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/2018/4. As of 17 July 2024, only 22 per cent of ICS and 27 per cent of CCS staff had completed the mandatory training.

Table 3: Mandatory training compliance as of July 2024

Enrollment status	ICS	CCS
Completed	22%	27%
Incomplete	40%	69%
Not Enrolled	3%	4%

32.   While staff had been requested to complete the training courses, the low completion status indicated that there is a need for more effective measures. Failure to complete mandatory training could affect the ability of staff to fulfill their duties and responsibilities effectively and efficiently and uphold the values of the United Nations.

(4)   DGC should develop and implement an action plan to ensure that all staff undertake the required mandatory training within set timelines.   *DGC accepted recommendation 4.*

Gender parity was within range

33.   The Secretary-General launched the system-wide strategy on gender parity in September 2017, which aims to achieve gender parity across the United Nations system by 2028. As of June 2024, CCOD

was actively monitoring its gender balance, with 52 per cent female representation among professional staff and 58 per cent for general service and national officer categories.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

34.   OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the management and staff of DGC for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

<div align="right">
Internal Audit Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services
</div>

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of management of the campaigns and country operations subprogramme in the Department of Global Communications

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical[4]/ Important[5]	C/ O[6]	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date[7]
1	DGC should develop and implement a plan to operationalize the strategic communications template, including guidelines on its use, any training required and monitoring.	Important	O	Receipt of the plan to operationalize the strategic communications template including guidelines on its use, any training required and monitoring activities.	31 March 2026
2	DGC should, in collaboration with DCO, develop modalities to guide the working relationship between resident coordinators and United Nations information centres (UNICs) and ensure the performance management of directors and heads of UNICs is conducted effectively and in compliance with the administrative instruction on performance management.	Important	O	Receipt of the modalities developed by DGC in collaboration with DCO to guide the working relationship between resident coordinators and UNICs for the effective performance management of directors and heads of UNICs.	31 March 2026
3	DGC should review vacant positions in the Campaigns and Country Offices Division and prioritize those that need to be filled based on operational exigencies and within the limitations imposed by the financial situation of the Organization.	Important	O	Receipt of the action plan to fill vacant positions in CCOD.	31 December 2025
4	DGC should develop and implement an action plan to ensure that all staff undertake the required mandatory training within set timelines.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that all CCOD staff have undertaken the required mandatory training.	31 March 2026

---

[4] Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

[5] Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

[6] Please note the value C denotes closed recommendations whereas O refers to open recommendations.

[7] Date provided by DGC in response to recommendations.

APPENDIX I

Management Response

TO:	Mr. Byung-Kun Min, Director	DATE:	20 December 2024
A:	Internal Audit Division, OIOS	REFERENCE:	OIOS-2024-02276
		CLASSIFICATION:	Confidential

THROUGH:
S/C DE:

melissa fleming

FROM: Melissa Fleming, Under-Secretary-General
DE: for Global Communications, DGC

SUBJECT: **Draft report on an audit of management of the campaigns and country operations**
OBJET: **subprogramme in the Department of Global Communications (Assignment No. AN-2023-580-01)**

1. With regards to your memorandum dated 9 December 2024, transmitting the draft report on the audit of management of the campaigns and country operations subprogramme of the Department of Global Communications, please find attached the completed Appendix I with DGC's comments.

2. DGC is grateful for OIOS's work on this review.

3. Thank you.

cc: F. Ndiaye
    T. Weyer
    J. Tisovszky
    N. Braun

Management Response

Audit of management of the campaigns and country operations subprogramme in the Department of Global Communications

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical[1]/ Important[2]	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	DGC should develop and implement a plan to operationalize the strategic communications template, including guidelines on its use, any training required and monitoring.	Important	Yes	Deputy Directors/Chief CCS and ICS/CCOD/DGC and OUSG	2025/2026 e-performance cycle	
2	DGC should, in collaboration with DCO, develop modalities to guide the working relationship between resident coordinators and United Nations information centres (UNICs) and ensure the performance management of directors and heads of UNICs is conducted effectively and in compliance with the administrative instruction on performance management	Important	Yes	Deputy Director/Chief ICS/CCOD/DGC And Executive Officer DGC	2025/2026 e-performance cycle	
3	DGC should review vacant positions in the Campaigns and Country Offices Division and prioritize those that need to be filled based on operational exigencies and within the limitations imposed by the financial situation of the Organization.	Important	Yes	Deputy Directors/Chief CCS and ICS/CCOD/DGC And Executive Officer DGC	2025	
4	DGC should develop and implement an action plan to ensure that all staff undertake the required mandatory training within set timelines.	Important	Yes	Deputy Directors/Chief CCS and ICS/CCOD/DGC	2025/2026 e-performance cycle	

---

[1] Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

[2] Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.