

Communication Strategy for the Environment Programme

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Introduction

Environment Programme (EnvPro) is a non-governmental environmental organization established in 2015 in Montenegro committed to nature conservation and human well-being. The organization was started by a group of professionals determined to bring about constructive environmental and socio-economic transformations within Montenegro and the broader region.

The organization blends global scientific findings with local knowledge to elevate sustainable development, seeking out and applying practical, locally suitable models. By doing so, EnvPro not only responds to immediate environmental concerns but also addresses the underlying need for sustainable living and resource use.

Another cornerstone of EnvPro's approach is capacity building. The organization brings to life innovative solutions that benefit local communities and surrounding ecosystems. This also extends to setting high professional standards requiring stakeholder participation, recognizing that meaningful change comes from a collective effort.

The organization is involved in a wide array of activities. These include the critical analysis and adjustment of institutional frameworks to support sustainable development policies, as well as socio-economic analyses to ensure that planning and decision-making processes are fair, robust, and realistic in their long-term vision. Biodiversity conservation programs are a particular focus of the organization, as is the encouragement of sectors that can contribute positively to biodiversity and sustainable development, like eco-tourism and sustainable agriculture. In those areas, the organization is committed to practical solutions and strategic development of the mentioned sectors. In the organization's long-term vision, these solutions should be set within defined operational systems and management structures, particularly in the context of nature protection, tourism, and rural development.

Any long-term success in nature conservation is impossible without the active involvement of different stakeholders. That is why EnvPro extends its capacity-building efforts to local communities, non-governmental organizations, and institutions, ensuring they have the necessary tools to adopt and benefit from sustainable practices. The organization emphasizes making its programs and projects inclusive, specifically targeting youth and vulnerable groups, while making sure to ensure a fair gender balance.

In its strategic communication and collaborations, EnvPro maintains a policy of open engagement with other NGOs, research institutions, and governmental bodies both within Montenegro and internationally. This openness is based on its belief in collective action and shared knowledge as factors crucial to advancing its nature conservation goals and ensuring a sustainable future for all.

The need for an organizational communication strategy originates from EnvPro's ambitious goals and the complex conservation and socio-economic challenges it aims to address. Achieving these objectives requires a communication strategy to ensure that stakeholders, local communities, and broader audiences are informed, engaged, and motivated to be a part of EnvPro's initiatives. The different activities and projects EnvPro is implementing require a nuanced communication strategy that effectively articulates and promotes the organization's work.

Communication Objectives

1. Enhanced Awareness

Increase overall awareness of the organization itself, its mission, vision, and goals, as well as the importance and plausibility of nature conservation and sustainable development in Montenegro and wider.

2. Community Engagement

Continue working on increasing and strengthening community engagement and collaboration through different networks, initiatives, and projects. Encourage volunteerism and active participation from local communities through events, in-kind engagement, sub-granting schemes and citizen science actions.

3. Education and Empowerment

Expand gender and youth-sensitive educational initiatives to empower the public with knowledge and tools to contribute to nature conservation and sustainable development initiatives.

4. Policy Influence

Engage more directly in policy and advocacy to influence relevant policies, laws and regulations. Collaborate with other stakeholders to ensure a unified voice on critical conservation issues. Provide evidence-based and practical advanced solutions to the problems and enable needed good governance and open policy framework.

5. Strategic Partnerships

Strengthen existing and establish new partnerships with other conservation NGOs, government bodies, international organizations, and the private sector to increase EnvPro's impact.

6. Media Presence

Increase media presence locally and nationally to gain more visibility and support for your initiatives. Establish EnvPro as a relevant opinion maker and source of information on environmental topics, even if they go outside of existing projects. Utilize appropriate media channels to communicate key messages and to showcase success stories and impacts.

Target Audiences

1. Local Communities and Residents

Characteristics: diverse demographic backgrounds, direct relationship with the local environment, varying degrees of awareness about environmental issues, and diverse socio-economic status.

Behaviors: daily activities directly impact local ecosystems, reliance on regional resources, and communal decision-making processes.

Preferences: direct, tangible benefits from participation, localized communication (using familiar channels, language, and references), visible improvements in their quality of life, and respect for local customs and traditions.

Importance: they are directly impacted by environmental changes and hold significant influence in implementing sustainable practices and conservation activities. They have a vested interest in improving their quality of life and their immediate surroundings.

Engagement Strategy: conduct community meetings, workshops, and participatory events that educate on sustainable practices, highlight the direct benefits of nature conservation, and solicit feedback and involvement in relevant initiatives, bringing together local and scientific knowledge.

2. Youth and Educational Institutions

Characteristics: tech-savvy, open to new ideas, responsive to digital campaigns, future-oriented, and often more aware of global environmental issues.

Behaviors: active on social media, responsive to trends, willing to participate in activities that promote skill development or social interaction and interested in activism.

Preferences: modern, interactive, and digital forms of communication, opportunities for active participation, educational content that is relevant and future-oriented, and peer-to-peer sharing opportunities.

Importance: young people are the future stewards of nature, while educational institutions serve as powerful vehicles for advocacy, knowledge dissemination, and societal change.

Engagement Strategy: develop educational programs, school/university events, and digital campaigns that promote environmental awareness, active participation in conservation efforts, career opportunities in sustainability, and empowerment of youth.

3. Government Agencies and Policy Makers

Characteristics: driven by public interest, bureaucratic, responsive to data and detailed reports, and mindful of economic implications.

Behaviors: decision-making based on public opinion, data, and internal policy considerations; adherence to formal communication channels; and preference for established procedures.

Preferences: formal and professional engagement, clear and concise presentation of data, emphasis on the socio-economic benefits of proposals, and opportunities for public-private partnerships.

Importance: they have the authority to enact policies that directly impact nature conservation efforts and sustainable development. They also provide necessary endorsements, funding, and resources for large-scale projects.

Engagement Strategy: regular briefings, reports, and policy recommendation documents should be presented to these stakeholders. Organizing roundtable discussions and forums in partnership with governmental bodies ensures alignment of goals, transparency, and the mobilization of support for key initiatives, sensitizing public administration to the importance of civil society's engagement in planning and decision-making.

4. Non-Governmental Organizations and International Environmental Organizations

Characteristics: mission-driven, focused on specific environmental or social issues, collaborative, and research-oriented.

Behaviors: engage in advocacy, conduct research, seek partnerships for greater impact, and heavily involved in grant writing and fundraising.

Preferences: opportunities for collaboration, data-driven discussions, platforms for shared advocacy, and transparent communication.

Importance: these organizations can offer support, collaboration, and share valuable research and methodologies. They extend the reach of EnvPro's initiatives to a broader audience and potential international funders.

Engagement Strategy: active participation in global environmental forums, conferences, and workshops, as well as collaborative research and field projects. Regular communication through newsletters and publications. Joint press releases can highlight shared successes and opportunities, and create alliances and networking.

5. Media (including journalists, broadcasters, and online content creators)

Characteristics: fast-paced, seeking topical and current content, driven by audience interest and engagement, operating on tight deadlines, and having a broad reach that can influence various demographic groups. The media landscape is diverse, encompassing traditional forms like TV and newspapers, and digital platforms such as blogs, podcasts, and social media channels.

Behaviors: prioritize stories that resonate with their audience, often looking for narratives that evoke emotion or depict conflict, a resolution, or transformation. They appreciate exclusivity, are responsive to trends, and are influenced by viewer/readership analytics. They rely on credible sources and are always looking for authoritative voices and compelling stories.

Preferences: clear, concise, and compelling narratives that are readily accessible and shareable. They prefer content that has a fresh angle or fills an information gap, with high-quality visuals and quotes from credible sources. Timely responses to inquiries, press releases, or news items, and access to leading figures for interviews or comments are also crucial.

Importance: they can magnify EnvPro's mission, projects, and successes to a broader audience that the organization can achieve alone, raising public awareness and understanding. They can influence public perception and opinions, facilitating a supportive environment for policy change or reinforcement. Media coverage adds a layer of credibility to the organization's efforts, which is critical for donor trust and community engagement.

Engagement Strategy: identify and cultivate relationships with journalists who cover environmental topics. Personal relationships enable better understanding and more nuanced storytelling about the organization's work. Customize content by media platform and prepare team members to handle media interactions through media training and workshops. Maintain an online repository of high-quality images, videos, and project details that media representatives can easily access for background material or visuals. Organize press conferences and other similar events. Provide exclusive access to project sites, research findings, or expert interviews to select journalists/outlets, creating capacities for professional journalism on social-ecological transformations.

Key Messages

Key messages for the organization should connect to the main objectives of the organization (outlined also in the Communication Objectives outlined in this document) and cater to target audiences identified by the organization. The groups of messages provided below should serve as guidance when thinking about what and how to communicate. They should be adapted to specific communication needs and audiences, and connect to specific projects or topics of interest, such as nature-based solutions, protected areas, climate change, youth engagement, etc.

Overall, the messages should emphasize our connection to nature and the benefits nature provides to individuals and communities. They should reflect the core values of the organization and dedication to providing relevant and science-based information. The tone should be informative and educational, focused on delivering facts about relevant issues and highlighting the organization's efforts to address them. It should be proactive, as the organization itself, focusing on positive impact and providing solutions. That way, EnvPro can position itself as a relevant interlocutor and opinion maker, providing necessary and knowledgeable commentary on relevant environmental topics, outlined in the organization's strategy.

1. Enhanced Awareness: We are all connected

Messages relating to increasing general awareness of the importance of nature conservation should emphasize the collective responsibility of preserving nature and biodiversity. They should educate the public on the significance of different actions toward achieving environmental sustainability and supporting nature conservation goals. While some messaging will include addressing the existing issues and challenges, it is good to utilize powerful emotions like awe and pride, highlighting the different natural values of Montenegro, its diverse flora and fauna, and their place in maintaining ecological balance and our own sense of belonging. In specific communities, emphasize the strong local connection to the natural landscape. Highlighting stories and initiatives that preserve and enhance the local natural heritage can resonate deeply with the community and instill a sense of local pride.

- “Even the smallest action counts towards preserving our natural treasures.”
- “Preserving nature is our shared responsibility and a way of ensuring a sustainable future for new generations.”
- “Nature connects us all. We all have our role, whether we are as complex as humans, or as simple as algae.”
- “Stay connected, stay informed.”
- “We are a part of nature. Everything we have, consume, and enjoy comes from nature.”

2. Community Engagement: Communities are at the heart of conservation

At the heart of successful conservation efforts lie local communities that make it possible. It is necessary to continue highlighting the importance of local communities for nature conservation and their active participation. By emphasizing the role communities play, the organization promotes a sense of community ownership and

pride in contributing to the successful implementation of different conservation projects. Also, developing strong local narratives around environmental successes and challenges will resonate with the community and will be more likely to be shared organically.

- “Engaged local communities are key to ensuring the long-term sustainability of conservation efforts.”
- “Together, we are creating a lasting impact. Let your voice be heard when making important decisions regarding your environment.”
- “Communities must be included in decision-making and have opportunities to influence it.”
- “If communities are not responsive, knowledgeable, supportive, and coherent, efforts must be made to enable their adequate participation.”

3. Education: Knowledge empowers

If we are striving to foster a culture of environmental stewardship, we need to invest in education. EnvPro is committed to providing educational resources and programs that empower individuals, researchers, organizations, and communities, enabling them to make informed decisions that can contribute to nature conservation. It also creates opportunities for partnering with schools and educational institutions, protected area managers, universities, institutes, to collaborate on educational projects and activities.

- “Education is the cornerstone of environmental stewardship.”
- “We aim to empower our communities with knowledge to make informed decisions and act sustainably.”
- “Increasing knowledge is the first step towards encouraging more sustainable behavior.”

4. Policy Influence: Informed policy is effective policy

When addressing policy and decision makers, the organization should advocate for informed and effective environmental policies, as they are crucial for the long-term sustainability of conservation efforts. Policy makers in different level (municipal to national) should invite relevant stakeholders to collaborate with EnvPro as an organization that can provide relevant information grounded in science, research, and experience, helping policymakers to develop and implement effective policies.

Communication Channels and Content Strategy

The organization’s communications should leverage various digital and traditional channels to reach and engage with its target audiences. The selection of these channels is guided by the need to maximize the reach and impact of communication, tailor messaging to specific groups, and utilize available resources efficiently.

1. Digital Channels

- **Facebook:** primarily used for community engagement, news updates, and event announcements. Its broad demographic reach makes it ideal for targeting a more general audience. Facebook is still by far the most popular social network in Montenegro and people use it to find information.
- **Instagram:** focuses on visual storytelling through captivating photos and engaging short videos. It's ideal for showcasing EnvPro's activities and engaging with a younger audience. Within the younger population, it is becoming more and more popular.
- **YouTube:** primarily used for uploading video content and resharing through other digital platforms, as the organization does not engage with this social network.
- **LinkedIn:** targets professionals and policymakers. It's ideal for networking, sharing policy- and project-related content, and promoting advocacy efforts. It could prove to be the most interesting social media platform for EnvPro to explore and engage more with. It is also one of the fastest-growing platforms with tremendous potential for engaging relevant stakeholders.
- **Website:** it serves as a central hub for information, including detailed articles, reports, and resources. It provides relevant information and allows people to discover the work done by the organization. There is a potential to develop more blog-like content, engaging readers with the latest environmental topics or expert insights.
- **New emerging platforms:** social media landscape is constantly changing. It is necessary to monitor new developments in different online platforms and evaluate whether they could be useful for EnvPro to reach its objectives. However, be mindful not to overextend to different platforms, as this could have a significant impact on your internal resources and would not necessarily bring expected benefits.

2. Traditional Channels

- **Print media:** crucial for reaching more mature audiences who prefer traditional news sources. Potential for collaborating with select journalists and magazines for feature articles on specific topics of interest, further strengthening the organization's position as a relevant opinion-maker on environmental issues in the country. News outlets like Vijesti, Pobjeda, and Dan are popular and recognized as relevant sources of information.
- **Television and radio:** engage more with TV and radio for interviews and discussions. The organization has a lot to offer in terms of relevant, current knowledge and position relating to specific environmental topics. By engaging more with these channels, the organization's key messages can reach a wider audience, especially if we keep in mind that television is still seen as one of the most relevant and trustworthy communication channels. It is also a channel that decision makers notice. The most popular television channels are Vijesti and RTCG, while in specific communities (Ulcinj) Teuta TV is also often cited as a channel that people follow.
- **Community, scientific, decision making, and public events:** hosting and participating in local, national, EU, and global events, workshops, seminars, and

conferences fosters direct engagement and builds relationships, strengthening the position and relevance of the organization.

- **Word of mouth:** is one of the most trusted information sources that can significantly increase the reach and impact of EnvPro's communication and conservation activities. As a way of disseminating information, it is more personal and persuasive than other traditional media channels. To successfully use this channel, it is necessary to identify and engage with local influencers and community leaders who can act as "ambassadors for EnvPro".
- **Communication products:** these include publications, reports, leaflets. Traditional communication products can reach target audiences, in particular professionals, other NGOs, decision makers, and local communities. These can be combined with guerilla marketing techniques to inspire action in specific audience segments when used wisely.

It is necessary to integrate messaging across channels. For instance, social media platforms can promote website content, and highlight recent media appearances or upcoming events. Furthermore, trying to encourage user-generated content (such as sharing photos or videos) can increase community involvement and widen EnvPro's reach.

It would be beneficial to create a comprehensive social media strategy, to ensure consistency and planning of the organization's social media content, as it is currently active on all the above-mentioned platforms, with mixed results. The content for social media platforms should focus on visually engaging material, whether in the form of infographics, stunning photos, or short, engaging videos (up to 2 minutes). This has the potential to increase engagement and bring new audiences to the organization's social media profiles.

The organization's website is well-organized and informative. However, there is a potential to start a series of more detailed website articles or blog posts that would provide new insight into specific topics (like endemic species, problems facing nature conservation, climate change, nature-based solutions, etc.) or projects that the organization is implementing. These can then be shared through LinkedIn or Facebook to drive more traffic to the website.

To position the organization as a relevant opinion-maker on environmental topics in the country, the organization should start reacting to relevant environmental news or events, within their field of expertise, making the experts associated with the organization interesting as potential sources for the media. In the process, this would increase the public recognition of the organization and its credibility.

Overcoming Challenges

While the organization overall is seen as successful in what it does, several areas for improvement have been identified by stakeholders through a questionnaire designed to gain their insight into the organization's communications.

1. Limited Internal Capacities

The organization currently does not have a dedicated communications staff. To implement this strategy and strengthen communications, consider as first step hiring a part-time or full-time communications specialist with expertise in digital media and public relations. Temporarily, this could be mitigated by providing existing staff with additional training in basic communication skills, social media management, and content creation. Another option could be to engage volunteers or interns who can assist with specific tasks like social media management, content creation, or event organization. However, in the long term, employing a dedicated communication specialist would be recommended.

2. Active Participation in Public Debates

The stakeholders feel that EnvPro needs to take on a more active role in relevant public discussions and debates on environmental issues, as the organization can provide expertise and knowledge on many issues. To ensure consistency and expertise, identify and train team members who can represent the organization in public forums, interviews, and discussions. Regularly monitor for relevant news and debates and respond promptly with EnvPro's perspective or contributions. Actively seek opportunities for the organization's representatives to speak at conferences, workshops, and community meetings.

3. Creating Engaging Content

The stakeholders emphasized the need for more engaging, high-quality content, especially videos and photos. Based on previously created content, whenever EnvPro created such content, the audience responded. Continue partnering with local photographers, videographers, and artists to create compelling visual content. Launch campaigns to encourage followers to share their own content related to nature conservation that can be featured on EnvPro's channels.

4. Resource Allocation and Management

As resources for communication activities are limited, it is necessary to manage and allocate them efficiently, whether it is time, budget, or internal capacities. Develop a clear, long-term plan for resource allocation, prioritizing activities that can have the greatest impact. Ensure a dedicated budget for communication activities that will include advertising (boosting), content creation, media engagement (working with trusted media and journalists), and event hosting. Implement tools and practices for effective time management, ensuring focus on high-impact activities.

5. Adapt and Experiment

Digital communication technologies and trends are constantly evolving. While the organization doesn't need to follow all trends or new developments, encouraging a culture of continuous learning and adaptation among staff will be beneficial for successful communication. Regularly review and assess existing and new communication tools and platforms. Feel free to start something new (such as exploring ways in which art can inform science or policy work, or reach new audiences), and don't hesitate to close existing platforms if they are underperforming or are taking too much of limited resources. Experiment with new formats and channels like podcasts or emerging social media platforms, depending on capacities and interests within the team.

6. Measuring Impact

Key to successful communication is the effective measuring of the impact your communication activities have. Define and track key performance indicators such as engagement rates, website traffic, and media coverage. Establish mechanisms for receiving feedback from stakeholders to inform strategy adjustments. When possible, supplement these findings with quantitative and qualitative research through stakeholder questionnaires or interviews. These can help you to pinpoint specific issues, understand how you are perceived, and how successful and relevant are your communications.

Monitoring and Evaluation

1. Establish Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Set specific KPIs that measure relevant indicators according to communication channel and audience. These can be engagement rate, follower growth or post reach for social media platforms, page views for the website, and number and quality of media mentions.

2. Utilize Analytics Tools

There are several free analytics tools that you can use to follow the KPIs. Tools like Google Analytics provide website tracking while each social media platform has specific analytics in place that enable you to follow reach and engagement. Furthermore, a simple and free way to track online media mentions is Google Alerts. It is a straightforward and effective way of monitoring mentions of the organization, its projects, or any other relevant keywords across the web. It provides real-time or periodic email notifications whenever the keywords you've set up are mentioned online. This can be useful for tracking media mentions, blog posts, forum discussions, or other online publications. It is highly customizable and user-friendly, requiring only a Google account. To set it up, simply go to [Google Alerts](#), enter the keywords you want to monitor, and configure the settings to your preference.

3. **Regular Reporting and Reviews**
Establish a schedule for regular reviews and create a standardized reporting format that includes KPI performance, insights gained, and recommendations for adjustments. Identify staff responsible for preparing the reviews.
4. **Collect Feedback**
Conduct surveys among relevant stakeholders to gather feedback on your communication efforts. This also includes community feedback, which can be collected during community events or through online platforms such as Google Forms. This can be done also for different target groups, decision makers, partnering organizations, NGOs, etc. Collaborations with universities (e.g. thesis, student group work) can be one way of realizing empirical research.
5. **Strategy Adjustment**
Use the insights gained from KPIs and collected feedback to make informed decisions on strategy adjustments. Don't hesitate to experiment with new approaches but test them on a small scale before full implementation.
6. **Review Resource Allocation**
Regularly review how communication resources (time, budget, staff capacities) are being allocated and how effective they are. Evaluate the return on investment of different communication activities to optimize resource allocation.

Conclusion

The Communication Strategy outlines a dynamic approach to elevate the organization's communication efforts to strengthen its conservation work. Each objective outlined in the strategy resonates with different target audiences ranging from local communities to government agencies, ensuring a broad outreach corresponding to EnvPro's goals and overall mission.

Central to this strategy is the notion that effective communication can help shape public perception and drive tangible conservation results. By using different communication channels and implementing a flexible content strategy, the organization can reach audiences where they are most receptive. In alignment with the organization's overall commitments, the strategy puts a strong emphasis on monitoring and evaluation with a commitment to data-driven decision-making, ensuring that the strategy remains responsive to changing dynamics to achieve its goals.

The organization must remain agile, adapting its communications in response to gathered data and feedback. By regularly reviewing and adjusting the strategy, it will be more effective and ensure EnvPro remains relevant in the public domain, being recognized as an important opinion maker on environmental issues.

Appendix: Communication Highlights for the Ulcinj Municipality

As part of the Building LBBUEC Resilience project, a socio-economic and communication questionnaire was conducted in Ulcinj Municipality, with a total of 94 respondents in 13 administrative zones of the municipality. Based on their answers, the following conclusions can be drawn that are highly relevant to how to communicate with that specific community:

1. **Emphasize local connection to nature**
The strong local connection to the natural landscape, particularly the sea, was evident from the questionnaire. This suggests that communication actions should emphasize this bond. Highlighting stories and initiatives that contribute to the preservation of the local environment can resonate deeply with the Ulcinj community.
2. **Environmental education**
Based on the answers to the questionnaire, there is a need for environmental educational content, especially one that would clearly explain concepts of sustainable development and showcase how it can benefit the local community. This could then build broader support and understanding for EnvPro's initiatives in the area.
3. **Address specific rural and urban challenges**
The questionnaire has identified several concrete challenges that people perceive in their community, namely emigration and lack of infrastructure, illegal construction, and access to public services. While EnvPro cannot address all of these issues, the ones that are connected to its work should be addressed when communicating with the local community. This can increase the relevance of communications and its impact on different segments of the population.
4. **Balance economic and environmental interests**
It is evident from the questionnaire that the community relies heavily on tourism and agriculture, which are also perceived as environmental threats. Communications should focus on sustainable practices in these sectors to demonstrate that economic interests and nature conservation can coexist.
5. **Utilize preferred information channels**
The preference for receiving information through television (Vijesti, Teuta, RTCG), the internet (Facebook), and word of mouth suggests these channels should be used for communication. A high level of trust in the media indicates that collaborations with trusted media could provide communication successes and impact in the community.
6. **Encourage community participation**
The respondents have shown a great interest in being involved in decision-making process and have stated their preference for spreading information through events and in-person interactions, EnvPro should continue with participatory approaches. This could include different surveys, social media engagement, or local events that allow for direct community involvement.

7. Leverage nostalgia

Many respondents reminisced about a better, greener past where natural resources were more preserved. While this should be used with care when communicating, using feelings of nostalgia could help specific messages to connect more deeply with specific segments of the population (people older than 40).

8. Highlight environmental changes

Respondents are aware of decreasing agricultural production, forest cover, fish stocks, and water availability. EnvPro's communication can focus on how its projects and initiatives aim to reverse these negative trends and protect local resources.

In conclusion, the communications with the Ulcinj local community should be community-centric, emphasizing the local connection to nature, educating on environmental topics, addressing specific urban and rural challenges, and encouraging community participation.