Introduction to public awareness and education: Concepts, communication strategies and messaging techniques

Erie Tamale

Programme Officer, CBD Secretariat

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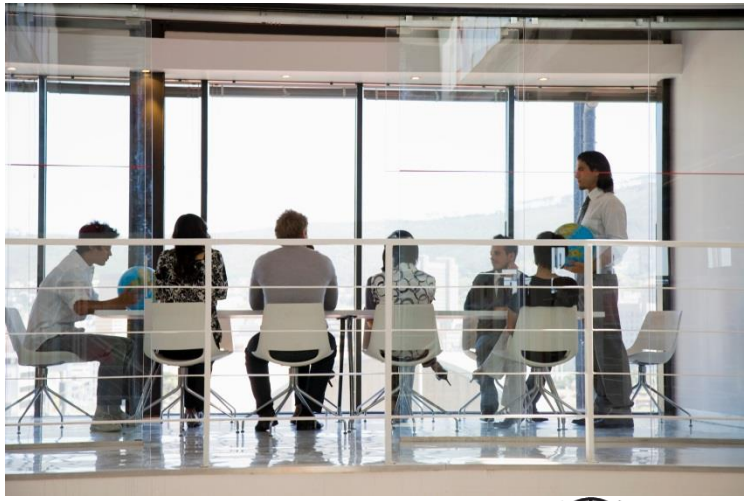
Presentation Outline

- Purpose and scope of the presentation
- Key concepts
- Means of raising public awareness
- Rationale for proactive planning of communications
- Basic elements of a communication plan
- Messaging techniques: Developing and packaging clear and compelling messages
- Considerations in choosing communication channels

Purpose and scope the presentation

- Purpose:
  - Discuss the what, why and how of public awareness, education and communication
  - Learn skills of how to inform, educate, communicate and engender support and action
  - Learn from each other's experience… good and bad



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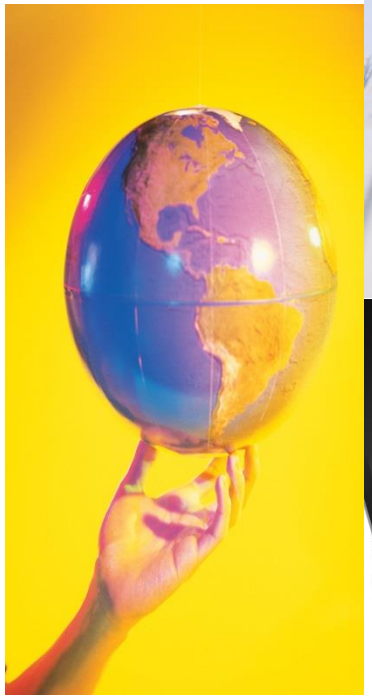
Purpose and scope the presentation

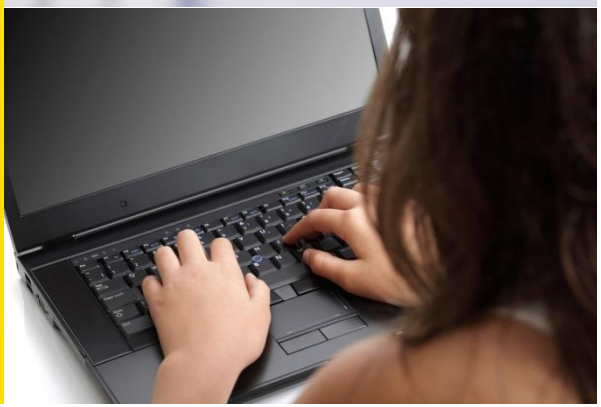
- 5-day workshop will not turn you into a professional public educator, communicator or extension worker

- Scope: cover basic knowledge/skills in awareness-raising and education, communications, outreach

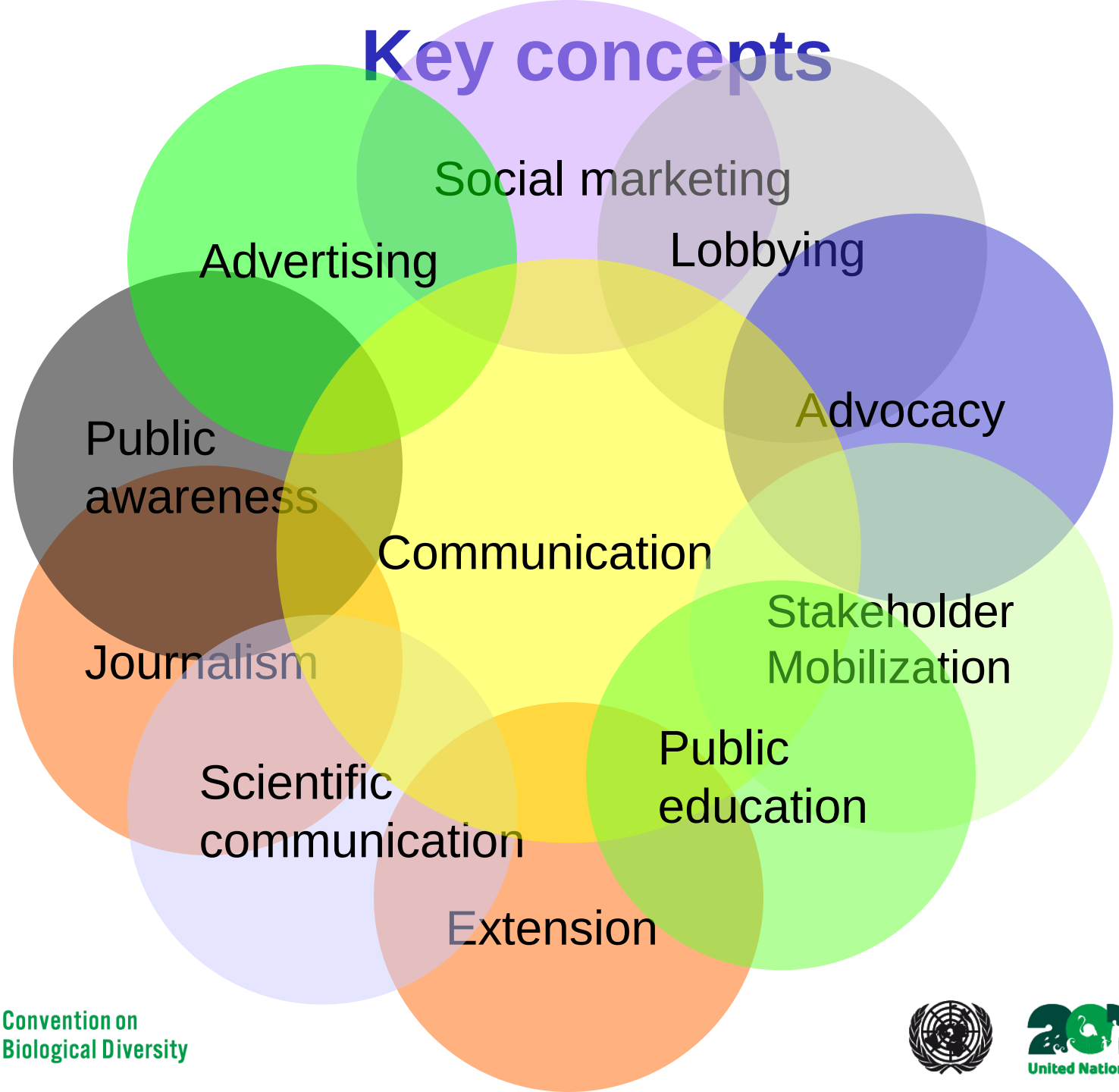
Key concepts

- Public awareness
- Public (adult) education
- Public communication
- Public relations
- Outreach
- Extension
- Social marketing





Key concepts



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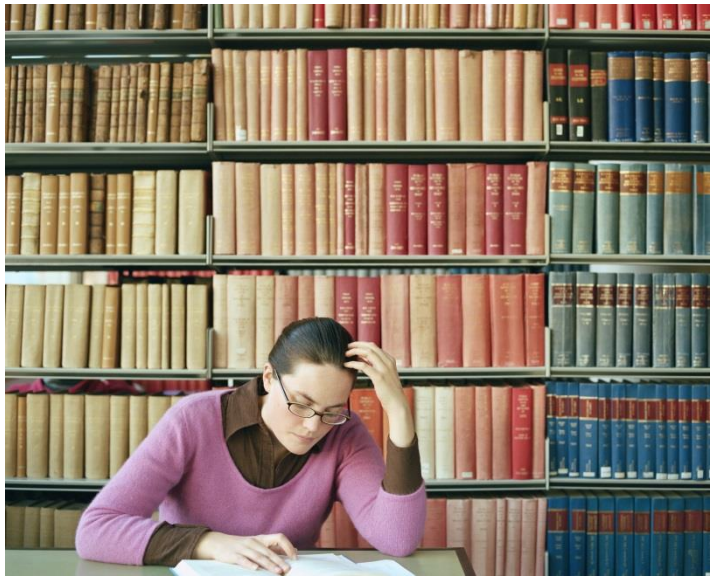
Key concepts

- Public awareness = informing, sensitizing, drawing attention to,
  - e.g. through seminars, awareness materials (posters, flyers)
- Public education = imparting knowledge, know how
  e.g. though workshops, educational materials
  More interactive, 2-way communication; structured; clearly-defined learning objectives



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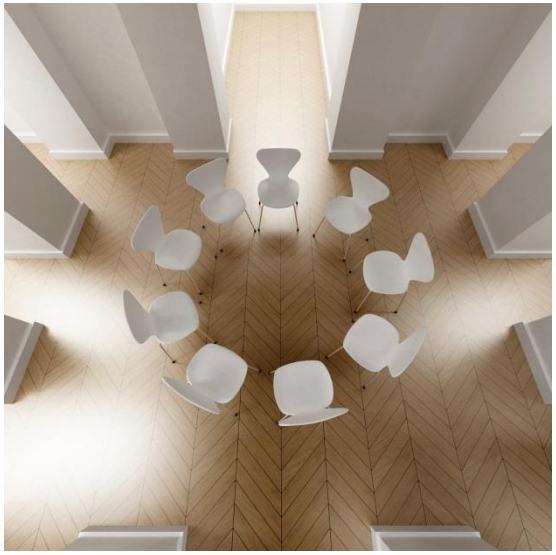
Key concepts

- Outreach: two-way communication designed to reach-out to, build relationships, inspire the public to support biosafety
- Communication: Process of delivering and receiving messages or other information through various media
- Extension: Sustained interaction with specific audiences to transfer technical knowledge or skills



Means of awareness-raising

- Seminars
- Workshops/conferences
- Awareness materials (flyers, posters, videos, etc)
- Exhibitions
- Public awareness events
  - Visitors' days
  - Field days

Means of awareness-raising

- International day (IBD, WED, etc)
- Media (newspapers, radio, TV)

- Websites and other internet-based tools (e.g. webinars)
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, blogs)
- Dedicated campaigns on specific issues

Seminars and Conferences

- Discussions with stakeholders on specific themes
  - Develop common understanding
  - Develop strategy or plan action
  - Improve interaction
  - Ensure participation in decision-making
  - Facilitate identification of problems
- Hold a conference to transmit org's achievements to selected audience or deliver general info about the org
- Invite questions and discussion from audience

Exhibitions

- Present and demonstrate the work/outputs of your organizations to mixed audience in various ways
- Allow interaction with public
- Inform and get instant feedback
- Different types of exhibitions: international, national and local exhibitions

Exhibitions

- National exhibitions, e.g. at agricultural shows
  - Create general public awareness
  - Attract government and public support
  - Providing info on org and its activities
  - Promote networking
  - Identify new clients/beneficiaries and potential partners

Visitors' / Field days

- Get people to come where you work: Office, laboratory, field experiments, etc.
- Deliver specific messages to meet the interests of your audience
- Decide how to present message: Wall-mounted exhibits, posters, PowerPoint presentations, audio-visuals/computer displays, practical demonstrations, field tours
- Provide comfortable environment;
  - space for face-to-face interaction
  - Seats for longer discussions

Social media

- Powerful/effective means of communication (esp. with young generation)
- Good way to engage/maintain relationships with the public
- Use various tools to deliver targeted messages: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Blogs
- Agree in your team what tools are to be used

Social media

- Note: Can be demanding, require dedication
  - Keep engaged, be innovative, keep it up-to-date;
  - Follow-up on messages/requests; Check on your contacts
  - Feed your blog posts
  - Engage prominent personalities

Proactive Communication Planning

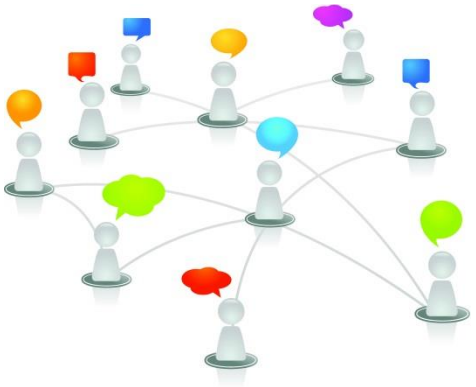
Means thinking and planning AHEAD to:

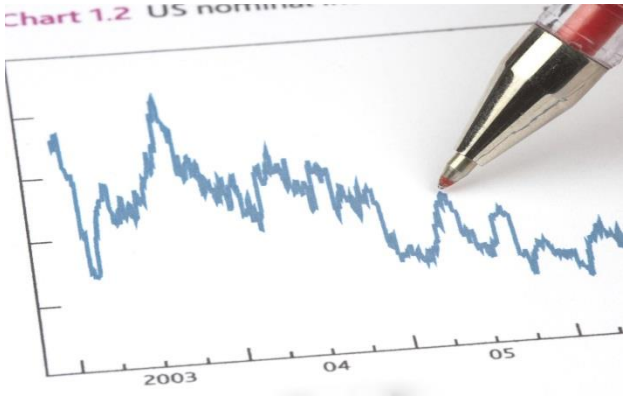
- Provide strategic direction for communications work
- Avoid being over-run by events; ready to deal with the unexpected
- Increase efficiency of your awareness-raising, communication and outreach activities

Proactive Communication Planning

Means thinking and planning AHEAD to:

- Facilitate proper coordination within the agency
- Maintain a good control of your internal and external audiences (scientists and the public)
- Set up procedures to cope with challenges
- Forecast and mobilise the necessary resources





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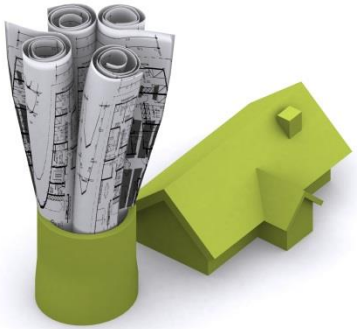
Why a Communication Strategy/Plan?

- A communication plan serves as a roadmap to guide the communication efforts of an organisation

- It is a living working document; updated periodically as circumstances and audience needs change



Why a Communication Strategy/Plan?

- Planned communication enables an organisation notify target audiences about its activities (services) to improve their response, acceptance or support.

- A communications plan may also be needed to guide public relations efforts in the event of crises associated with LMOs; for timely communication of information and protection of the org's reputation

Elements of a Communication Strategy

A communication plan typically covers the 6 “W”s:

- Who – the target audiences
- What – the key messages to be articulated
- When – timing, it will specify the appropriate time of delivery for each message
- Why – the desired outcomes
- How – the communication vehicle (how the message will be delivered)
- By whom – the sender (who will deliver the information and how he/she is chosen)

Elements of a Communication Strategy

Common core elements of communication plans:

- **Situational analysis (context)**: setting the scene; research/ document key background information on the situation/issues being communicated about and the organization
- **Goals and objectives**: Outline what do you want to achieve;
  - major outcomes the communications plan is meant to accomplish
  - visionary, rather than specific

Elements of a Communication Strategy

- **Target Audiences**: Identify people (or entities) to whom the key messages must be communicated in order to reach the goals and objectives
  - primary and secondary audiences and their characteristics (age, level of education, societal status, beliefs, personal and professional interests, etc.)
  - how you will manage their needs/expectations
- Knowing who you are trying to reach helps solidify and tailor your message

Elements of a Communication Strategy

- **Key messages**: Develop key succinct points or statements the org would like to get across to its audiences.

Elements of a Communication Strategy

- **Tactics (Communication channels)**: Specify how will you implement your plan – methods to be used to communicate to the different target audiences;
  - Decide what tactics to use for each audience (email to employees, a press release, an op-ed in a local paper or a village/town meeting);
  - Spell out the details of what you will do under different situations (to-do list)

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Elements of a Communication Strategy

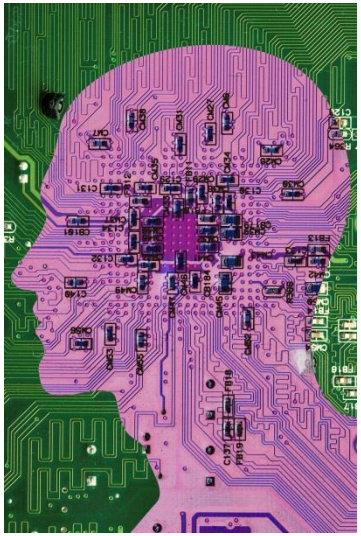
- **Action Plan**:
  - Determine how long it will take to carry out your ideas (total amount of time, phases)
  - Assign tasks (tactics) to specific staff and give each task a deadline
  - Determine the budget – how much it will cost

Elements of a Communication Strategy

- **Monitoring and evaluation**: Develop a framework to be used to assess if the set goals and objectives were reached; if you've been successful
  - How to collect feedback from target audiences

Messaging strategies/techniques

- The challenge of communicators is "*getting inside the head of the audience*" to know their information needs and how they process information
- After analysing your audience, designing and packaging your messages accordingly



Messaging strategies/techniques

- Standard rules:
  - Keep it simple and short (KISS) but interesting
  - Avoid clutter (unnecessary words, meaningless jargon)
  - Summarise your story in three sentences: Problem, Solution, Results

Problem → Solution → Results

Preparing effective messages

Nine Cs of an effective messaging:

- Concise: As few words as possible, but no fewer
- Clear: Your grandparents can understand it
- Compelling: Explains the problem
- Credible: Explains how you solved the problem
- Conceptual: Not unnecessary detail
- Concrete: Specific and tangible
- Customized: Addresses audience's interests
- Consistent: Same basic message
- Conversational: aims to engage the audience

Preparing effective stories

- Relate the message to something the reader can understand; use analogies/metaphors
- Use human interest – link the story to issues that affect local persons, communities, environment
- Paint a picture

Preparing effective stories

- Start with a specific example, then generalize
- Think of an interesting angle on your topic; Work out how to say it in an interesting way
- Be benefits-oriented (try to talk less about what you do and more about how it impacts others and how)

Preparing effective stories

- Present just one message at a time
- If you have two messages, save one for a later announcement
- State the key element of your message up front
- Avoid passives, complex grammar

Preparing effective stories

- Avoid scientific or technical jargon (If you must use jargon, also explain it in simple language)

- Any numbers used must be clear, understandable

- Make sure all staff will present the message the same way

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Preparing effective stories

- Avoid clutter: cut every word that adds no value; e.g. To my personal advantage= To my advantage
- Turn long sentences into short ones: “At the present time we are experiencing some precipitation” = "Currently it’s raining“
- Turn passive sentences into active sentences e.g. The trees were being fallen from by leaves

Preparing effective stories

- Keep acronyms, slang and other hard to understand terminology out of your main messages
- The elevator pitch: Imagine you are in a lift with your Prime Minister. What would you tell him about your biosafety work or project? What is the most important thing to say? You have 2 minutes

Preparing effective stories

- Keep sentences short – 17 words or less
- Keep paragraphs short - 1 main idea per paragraph
- Link paragraphs together with proper transitions;
- Put the paragraphs in a logical order (Use boldface run-in heads to focus each paragraph; delete them later)
- Use diagrams or photos (a photo is worth 1000 words)

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Messaging: In summary

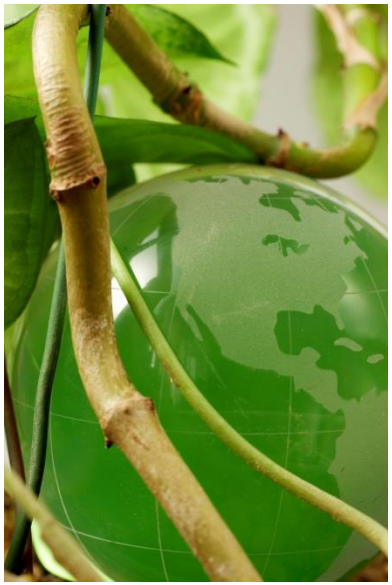
- **Be clear** (be simple but informative and persuasive, never confusing)
- **Be consistent** (Pay close attention to details like colour scheme, imagery, writing tone, paper stock and interactive functionality)
- **Be compelling** (Every element is crafted to get the end result you want)
- **Use of graphics** (Graphics can tell a story, create mood and feelings for a product while getting and retaining attention. Design includes layout, photographs, illustrations, paper, colour, ink and type styles.

Choosing communication channels

- Be creative in the way you choose comm. channels.
- Consider channels that have a multiplier effect like websites and newsletters
- Think of channels where your audience will find the information that you are producing.

Choosing communication channels

- Think outside your own box, beyond scientific channels such as peer-reviewed scientific journals,
- Some channels, e.g. internet may not be an appropriate channel for reaching rural practitioners
- Local radio stations, newspapers or video documentaries might be an option



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Ask the following questions

- What are the defining features of your target audience (common information needs or activity habits)?
- Which communication channels reach your target audience?
- Which channels do they prefer, and which one do they access?
- Does your target group have any culturally unique communication channels?

Conclusion

- “The science behind LMOs is highly technical; it is not necessary for members of the public to have in-depth knowledge about the science to form opinions on the social and ethical implications” (Hails and Kinderlerer, 2003)

Conclusion

- By allowing the public to know about biosafety and regulatory measures in place, you will be able to generate public confidence and support
- Need to be proactive and forward-looking in communicating biosafety

Conclusion

- Consistent, disciplined execution of the comm. plan is essential to deliver on the set goals
- It is important to deliver consistent messages and content across a range of communication channels
- All communications need to be aligned with your organization's overall communication objectives
- Communications need to be properly targeted for maximum relevance and impact

For Further Information Contact:

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

413 Saint Jacques Street, Suite 800
Montreal, QC, H2Y 1N9, Canada
Tel: +1 514 288 2220
Fax: + 1 514 288 6588
Email: secretariat@cbd.int
Protocol URL: http://bch.cbd.int/protocol

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