Key insights from the WASH sector about communicating with external audiences

Communications in the WASH sector involves a complex array of objectives and audiences, ranging between governments, peer organizations, multilateral institutions, academia and donors. To better understand the WASH sector's communications experience, successes, and lessons learned, Water.org commissioned a study to interview individuals working in WASH sector communications. The key takeaways are presented here in the hopes of advancing dialogue within the sector.

WASH Sector Needs

The WASH sector needs communications specialists.

The WASH sector needs to prioritize funding and resources for communications.

WASH organizations need to integrate communications across their organizations.

The WASH sector needs strong organizational strategies to inform communications strategies.

The WASH sector needs to constantly adapt to global communications trends.

The WASH sector needs to learn how to tell its story in a way that is responsive, relatable, and still technically accurate.

The WASH sector needs to find a way to assess the effectiveness of communications.

Communication Materials

- Creating a suite of materials on the same topic helps target multiple audiences.
- Communication materials must be high-quality and tailored to their target audience.
- Short, quick, engaging, innovative communication materials are the future (e.g., phone videos).
- Shorter documents will more likely be read.
- Academic papers are most appropriate for the academic community.

Communication Channels

- In-person communication is important, if not the most important for meaningful engagement.
- Digital channels are effective, but it is important to recognize their limitations.
- Social media requires a strategy to be effective.
- Webinars and forums need to be well facilitated and moderated to be effective.
- Mainstream media is becoming more complicated.

Messaging Guidelines

- Adapt messages. It's about the audience, not you.
- Simple, clear and consistent.
- Be honest, share failures.
- Be relevant, but don't over-use jargon.
- Avoid inappropriate messages, this can damage your reputation.

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