



NAVIGATING DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATIONS

A Guide for African Comms Professionals

Table of Contents

CONTENTS

01.

Overview of the Guide

02.

Breaking Down the Development Communications Role

03.

Key Skills to Master

04.

Insights from the Executives

05.

Transitioning into Development Communications

06.

Advice from Senior Professionals

07.

Tools and Resources

OVERVIEW OF THE GUIDE

01

The world of communications is vast and ever-changing. Within this vast landscape is the special field of development communications which comes with its own unique set of rules and challenges.

Working on development projects as a communications professional can be highly fulfilling but it can also be equally frustrating if you don't have the right skills and knowledge to successfully navigate the field and its peculiarities.

This is why we have created the **Navigating Development Communications Guide**. Through this Guide you will gain practical insights and tips from practitioners who have decades of experience in the field which you can easily apply in your career. We have also included resources that will be beneficial to you as you navigate your journey through the field.

We hope that you will gain many light bulb moments from this Guide and you feel better equipped to add value to your organisation as a communicator in the development sector.



CONTRIBUTORS



George Mbithi
Communications Director,
Palladium



Osayi Alile
CEO, ACT Foundation



Euloge Ishimwe
Head of Communications,
IFRC - Africa Region



Julie Waiganjo
Head, Program Communications,
Human Capital Development,
Mastercard Foundation



Prudence Masako
Country Director, CARE
International Tanzania



Dayo Ibitoye
Communications Specialist,
United Nations Development
Programme (UNDP)



Sophia Kudjordji
Chief Corporate Comms Officer,
Jospong Group of Companies



Titilope Oguntuga
Head, Sustainable Development
and Corporate Brand, Lafarge



Wendy Muperi
Communications Officer,
Irish Refugee Council



Tinashe Rufurwadzo
Global Communications Manager,
Prevention Access Campaign,
U=U



Rose Thuo
Director, Communications
and Marketing, WWF



Paul Mayende
Comms & Advocacy Manager,
Habitat for Humanity, Uganda



Whitney Mwangi
Founder, The Story Book Africa;
Health Policy Advocacy Specialist,
African Union Commission



Vivian Mugarisi
Communications Specialist



Joseline Kiogora
Communication and Outreach
Specialist, GAIINS



Kenneth Jura
Communications Coordinator,
Voice (Oxfam Novib and Hivos)



Antoinette Gyan
Communications Consultant

BREAKING DOWN THE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATIONS ROLE

02

1. The Uniqueness of Development Communications

According to the World Bank, “development communications is the integration of strategic communication in development projects.” The focus of development projects is often on social/ behaviour change and the use of strategic communication can have a significant impact on the success or failure of these projects.

Development communications therefore “strives for behaviour change not just information dissemination, education, or awareness-raising” and it requires “getting information out to particular audiences, listening to their feedback, and responding appropriately.”

It is important to understand the uniqueness of development communications because this has an impact on the results you will be required to deliver. It also means that the language and terminology used in development communications is quite different from that used in corporate communications for example.

Here are the key things to know about development communications:

Development communications goes beyond simply disseminating information or raising public awareness. It aims to bring about behavioural and social change to address developmental issues, whether social, economic, or political concerns. Other forms of communication primarily focus on information dissemination. **Dayo Ibitoye**

While corporate communications focuses on building an organisation's brand, development communications is primarily concerned with advancing social and economic development. It takes into consideration the needs of a community or society. **Joseline Kiogora**

Development comms should bring social change.

The focus should be on understanding the root causes, gaps and challenges with the aim of coming up with context specific interventions that will benefit the intended client. **Vivian Mugarisi**



Development comms uses messages and metrics to cause change and communicate impact.

It calls for skills with data and using that data to show how change is being achieved.

It is the desire for this change and its impact that are at the core of the communications process.

Paul Mayende

Development communications is different from other areas of communications in three major areas:

1. The focus is more on the society than the organisation.
2. It highlights mostly non-financial impact and contributions of an organisation in the society and;
3. It projects pragmatic ways of solving societal problems through developmental programmes.

It is grassroots in nature and puts communities in focus, especially how an organisation's activities impact the quality of their lives. It also has the power to influence policy and support advocacy unlike the other areas of communications. **Titilope Oguntuga**

One key feature that sets development communications apart is its focus on supporting resource mobilisation efforts. Rather than simply selling products, development communications 'sells ideas' through advocacy and thought leadership initiatives.

Another notable aspect of development communications is its tendency to operate on lower budgets, which often requires utilising organic processes to pitch ideas to the media instead of relying on paid PR agencies. This approach helps organisations in this field to effectively communicate their messages even with limited resources.

Finally, organisations involved in development communications must also communicate back to their donors through what is known as 'donor communications'.

This helps to demonstrate how funding is being used and attract further support for their initiatives. **Euloge Ishimwe**



The objectives and outcomes development communications seek are different. In the development sector, the aim is to motivate and deliver change around specific challenges faced by identified groups or communities.

Development communications is about promoting human rights, social justice and social impact – making the sector more value laden.

The duty of care to, safeguarding and participation of affected communities is central. **Wendy Muperi**



2. What is expected from Development Communicators

Now that you understand the uniqueness of the development communications field, you need to know what development and non-profit organisations expect from you as a communications professional who works in this field.

These are the key things to note:

What is expected includes, but is not limited to, Public Relations, Social Media Management, and making content for the organisation's website. It also includes making products that show the work that was done so that the organisation can be held accountable, documenting stories of how the work impacted people, and helping to get resources together.

To increase the organisation's brand awareness, you can create materials and attend events, and as a development communicator, you can use your own personal brand as a springboard for your influence. **Tinashe Rufurwadzo**

Some key expectations would be to increase visibility for the organisation, develop materials such as press releases, newsletters, compile reports including annual reports, develop content, manage social media and campaigns.

Others include conducting basic monitoring and evaluation of communications activities.

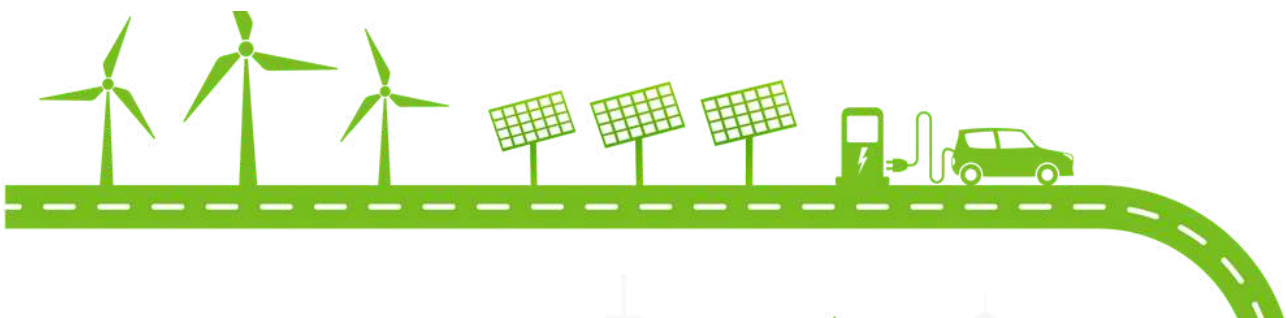
Vivian Mugarisi

Sometimes, comms teams are only expected to create awareness, disseminate information and educate communities. With the right resources and time, the comms team can have the capacity to change perceptions and behaviours.

This goes beyond press releases and report writing. It calls for well planned creative campaigns and stakeholder engagements. **Sophia Kudjordji**

Strategic thinking is expected. You need to have a clear understanding of your audiences. This requires an understanding of where they are and what the best channels to reach them are.

You also need to have the ability to break down complex material into easy-to-understand communication products. There is an expectation for communications to be part of the big picture leadership - rising above the storm and therefore being more strategic. **George Mbithi**

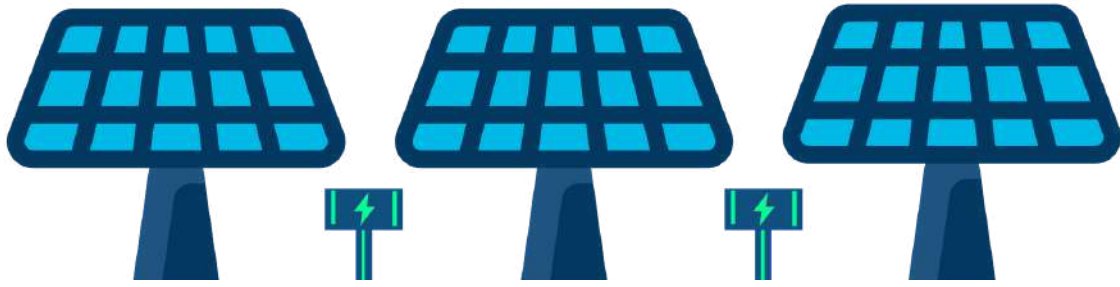


A development communications specialist should be able to use different communication tools and strategies to advance the organisation's mission and goals. You must be able to use storytelling to communicate the impact and outcomes of the organisation's work.

In addition, you need to be skilled in other communications strategies, such as advocacy, behaviour change communication, and social marketing to influence public opinion and policy, promote behaviour change, and increase support for the organisation's mission and goals. **Dayo Ibitoye**

The communications work in a development organisation is not that straightforward. It requires communications professionals to adjust to a variety of situations and scenarios at any given time.

For example, practitioners must be dynamic enough to relate with field participants in a project. They should be able to advocate at local and national levels and represent the organisation at high level meetings with partners including government and donors. The foremost requirement would, therefore, be dynamism. **Antoinette Gyan**



Development organisations and foundation owners have high expectations from their comms teams. The main expectation is for the comms team to help position their respective organisations as key players in their fields. Due to limited resources in many non-profits, the comms team is often expected to be innovative, versatile, and achieve more with less.

The expectations from comms teams can be broad, given that communications is often misunderstood. As a result, a team of two or three members may be expected to handle external communications, internal communications, digital communications, media relations, community engagement, copy-editing, and other tasks as needed.

Generally speaking, development organisations and foundation owners rely on their comms teams to help them effectively communicate their message, raise awareness, and drive positive change. **Euloge Ishimwe**

In most cases, development organisations and foundation owners are passionate about change as an outcome. The primary role of the communications team is, therefore, to translate this vision into daily communications activities.

Depending on the organisation and the context, it could look like this:

- Defining the best way to translate the organisational vision into development communications objectives through a communications strategy.

- Building the capacity of the team to carry forward the development communications objectives in the absence of the communications team. For example, developing an elevator pitch for the management team and running rehearsal sessions with them. **Whitney Mwangi**

I think one characteristic that has become increasingly valuable is the ability to take very complex technical concepts, ideas, research, or programmes and translate them into accessible language for lay audiences.

Additionally, it is becoming more important to quantify the impact of communications work to demonstrate its effectiveness. It's not enough to check activity boxes; you should be able to show how the communications work tangibly contributed to specific outcomes. So, thinking about measurement is essential.

Finally, I believe that it is important to be multi-skilled, especially in the non-profit world, because resource-strapped organisations need to get more value out of smaller teams. **Julie Waiganjo**

Development organisations expect their comms team to have the speed, up to date innovative knowledge of the comms sector whilst being grounded in the language of the industry. **Rose Thuo**

Organisations like mine expect me to drive the social change and impact process. The information gathered, how it is curated and shared should be geared towards sharing the change that is happening.

In achieving this, the ethical value of the message from the comms teams has to be authentic, especially regarding the way people participating in the development process are presented. Are the children, for instance, protected while taking images? Are the adults presented in a dignified way?

The change and impact have to be evidence-based so the comms team should be able to translate the evidence, some of it from data, to tell the story in a simple way. The other is that the comms team are expected to be 'all rounders' - fantastic with data visualization, better with photography, great at video production and terrific with graphic design. You are your own reporter, photographer, videographer, editor and designer. **Paul Mayende**



3. Delivering results on the job

To succeed in your role as a development communicator, you have to deliver the expected results and outcomes. While corporate organisations focus on profits and Return on Investment (ROI), development organisations consider different metrics that are related to the community, cause and donors.

Here are some of the things our Contributors have done to deliver results in their roles:

Firstly, I developed a communications strategy anchored on hope-based communications strategies whereby whenever I issue any communications piece, the information puts the rightsholder or the community members at the centre.

Secondly, the expected results were that the organisation I work for is not a saviour but an enabler in ensuring the community's members believe in their potential to improve.

Thirdly is the use of language and how the same empowers or disempowers. Language plays a critical role in communication. For example, a term such as a project's beneficiary ceases to be about the project's end goal. Still, it brings out the concept of cost-benefit analysis, where one party had to suffer a loss for the other to benefit. **Kenneth Jura**

I keep myself up-to-date with the latest industry trends, tools, new technologies and best practices.

I also set clear goals and priorities for any project I am expected to deliver on and I make sure they are SMART goals.

Finally, collaboration and relationship building is very essential, especially in the international development field. I strive to work collaboratively with colleagues across the globe. **Dayo Ibitoye**

I believe the first thing is always to understand where the organisation is and what it intends to achieve by reading relevant documents and tapping into the thoughts of management or the existing teams. I scan the environment and once I am clear on that, it becomes easier to define objectives and come up with a realistic and actionable plan to deliver on what is expected.

It is also crucial to make sure my colleagues understand what and how I intend to work towards the expected results and have their buy-in from an early stage. This is easier said than done and normally, it is a very iterative process.

In terms of content, storytelling and visuals are my go-to. They humanise issues and statistics, create empathy and inspire action. I also try to keep abreast with developments in the field, new technologies and how the issues are evolving to inform decisions on processes and plans.

I have learnt that collaborating and networking are essential. The development sector shouldn't be about competition. We should grow and win together so I always try to amplify and engage with what other organisations in the sector are doing. In most cases, we all feed into each other anyway as there is so much intersectionality in issues of development. **Wendy Muperi**

I have put in the time to sit, listen and ask the programme staff questions.

What is the problem statement, the intervention(s) and the expected outcome?

This knowledge and their base research enrich my comms strategy so that they complement and sometimes reinforce the intervention.

Rose Thuo



The development sector is an evolving space that requires continuous learning. It is also a wide field with various specialisations. Therefore, leveraging educational resources such as journals and magazines to expand my knowledge base is important.

Also, as a member of a global organisation, networking with other professionals in countries with more advanced exposure to development work empowers my team with the resources to share and possibly replicate best practices. Knowledge-sharing sessions such as webinars and trainings for myself and my colleagues within the space add immense value. **Titilope Oguntuga**

I have introduced innovative ways of pitching stories to the media by offering story ideas to newsrooms. As a result, my team and I have been able to grow our Twitter following exponentially.

Furthermore, I have increased the size of the comms team and led capacity-building efforts to ensure that we are better equipped to handle the demands of our organisation. One of my most significant achievements was managing emergency communications during Cyclone Idai, which hit Mozambique, Malawi, and Zimbabwe in March 2019. Despite the devastating impact of the disaster, my team's efforts to tell the story of Cyclone Idai were expeditious and very successful, resulting in an unprecedented level of media coverage for our organisation and encouraging humanitarian response.

In the first week of the outbreak, my organisation dominated the media space, helping to mobilise resources and bring life saving help to affected people. All in all, I have been able to deliver the results expected by my organisation by leveraging my skills and experience in communications, being innovative, and ensuring that my team is equipped to handle the challenges of our work.

By focusing on strategic communications, capacity-building, and effective emergency communications, I have helped my organisation to raise awareness, mobilise resources, and make a meaningful impact in our field. **Euloge Ishimwe**

It is important that as a communicator, I look at the figures because once I am unable to understand them, then I can hardly communicate the change or impact. Appreciating this makes my work easier.

Benchmarking what other organisations are doing and how best they relate to what I do has also been helpful. This opens opportunities for continued learning. **Paul Mayende**



Learning for me is key. You keep learning from those who have been with the organisation longer. You also need to learn from those out there who are doing well in various areas and ask for their assistance to improve your product. Asking for clarifications or help when I don't understand has also worked for me.

Staying up to date with what is going on within your organisation is important. This will help you to align your efforts with the needs of your organisation at that particular moment. **Vivian Mugarisi**

In order to bring attention to the problems facing the people I serve, I've had to organise media tours and travel to outlying regions where change has been implemented, so that the stories can be covered and the impact can be witnessed and documented by those who share my vision.

I've also innovated by providing podcast channels as a confidential forum where influential but vulnerable individuals can openly discuss their views on driving and depicting development in their own words.

I also leveraged the practice of submitting abstracts to regional and international conferences in order to speak either to the success of development issues or the necessity of focusing on a development issue. **Tinashe Rufurwadzo**

I take the time to understand the organisation and project goals. What does the board or donor really want? What does the organisation's leadership want? When I have this understanding, I come up with a comms strategy that aligns with these needs.

I also ensure that I'm not doing this alone. I consult widely and I integrate team ideas and insights. This way, the buy-in is easier. I also turn the programme and project teams into communication point persons. They're the ones doing the work so I make them understand that if we do not talk about it, it did not happen. And, communicating their work shows pride in their efforts. **George Mbithi**

One thing I always try to do is to have a solid understanding of the organisation's core business and the landscape facing that 'business' environment.

So, if you work for an organisation in the education sector, for example, you need to make it your business to understand the issues in that sector, the work your organisation is doing and what makes it unique or impactful, how the programmes your organisation is running actually work and where the risks, challenges, and opportunities lie.

This helps to bridge the gap between the 'technical' work that's being done and the lay audiences that need to understand it in a simple way. It's also helpful for identifying storytelling, thought leadership or risk-mitigation opportunities that would otherwise be missed. **Julie Waiganjo**

Talk with the management and the internal team to understand the gaps you have been hired to fill. In this way, you can acquire information that will help you to move strategically and innovate relevantly.

Secondly, conduct regular check-ins to ensure that you are efficiently implementing what was communicated and are still in touch with the development communications needs and the expectations of the team and management

Lastly, monitor and evaluate the results produced from the communication tools and approaches in use, and then capitalise on the most rewarding platforms or approaches. **Whitney Mwangi**



4. Overcoming Challenges

As with any area of communications, working as a development communicator has its own challenges. From limited budgets to being understaffed, these challenges may make your work in the development sector even more difficult. The good news is that the typical challenges you will encounter can be overcome.

Here are the things you need to know to handle the typical challenges you may face:

The key challenge development communicators face is to convince the C-suite to invest more in comms and see it as a strategic function. As a result, comms teams are often overstretched and they are expected to perform magic, especially whenever there is a reputational risk or crisis. Some of the successes my team and I achieved made more senior leaders realise the importance of investing in communications.

In addition, another way to overcome the challenge of convincing the C-suite to invest more in comms is to demonstrate the Return on Investment (ROI) of communication activities. This involves measuring the impact of communication efforts on the organisation's goals, such as increasing brand awareness, influencing public opinion, and driving engagement. By presenting clear and tangible evidence of the impact of communication activities, development communicators can make a stronger case for the importance of investing in communications and securing greater resources for their teams.

Building relationships with key decision-makers within the organisation and regularly communicating the value of comms can help to establish the function as a strategic partner within the organisation.

Finally, the way you carry yourself as a comms specialist, your passion, your confidence, your internal advocacy, your professionalism - all these send a message to internal stakeholders that comms is a function to be taken seriously and to be invested in. **Euloge Ishimwe**

Overcoming the challenge of conveying information effectively to a diverse audience with varying literacy levels, cultural backgrounds, and language proficiency requires careful consideration of the target audience, use of clear and concise language, and the use of visuals and other multimedia tools to aid understanding.

It is important for development communicators to engage the audience in two-way communication, listen to feedback and adjust communications strategies accordingly. Additionally, conducting a communications audit from time to time will help. **Joseline Kiogora**

One of the major challenges of development communicators is being seen just like other communicators and hence, not being resourced well to undertake more impactful projects. Our work seems too slow to management because of its strategic nature.

I have been able to overcome this by building partnerships with relevant institutions like GIZ, the German development agency, and Ghana Plastic Action programme who support some of our community outreach and behavioural change projects. **Sophia Kudjordji**

A key challenge is under-resourcing. I try to pivot on the low hanging fruits and do them well. Sometimes, I just have to build a backable case and be relentless on projects that I believe need to go through.

Furthermore, many people don't truly understand what communications as a function is about. Moreso, with communications being a support function, there is an added layer of difficulty working with literally everyone in the organisation. I have tried to use the opportunity to hone my people management skills. When needed, I have honest and respectful conversations with colleagues when I feel like my role or communication outputs are being misunderstood. Always remember Rome was not built in a day and not every battle is worth fighting.

Also, there is an assumption that you should know everything. The solution for me is being honest about what I know and can't do. I often ask for help or I take the time to figure it out. **Wendy Muperi**

Going everywhere but nowhere in particular - this challenge is sometimes self-inflicted when we do not draw the line between our expertise and strengths, but instead, chase all communications needs on the table.

Development communications is a wide field of work: storytelling, writing, editing, filming, photography, diplomatic negotiations, etc. We cannot be experts in all fields. There comes a time when we must choose what to capitalise on.

Sometimes, this challenge is imposed by circumstances. At the beginning of my career, I did not have the luxury of deciding what communications roles to play because I had to do everything to test out where I fit in. Eventually, I had to draw the line to establish authority and specialisation in what I am good at and interested in.

Understanding our level of expertise and where we want to go as communications experts is essential. In this way, we can advance gradually as we learn and progressively drop off the roles we do not wish to specialise in. **Whitney Mwangi**



The biggest challenge is getting a management team that values comms and places it at the leadership role it deserves. The majority of bosses will typically see the development communications team as people who will post on social media and maybe help write stories. Getting a Project/Company Director or leader who understands the value of comms is not easy.

What I do when I join at the lower level the company is offering is that I show my worth/value during my probation period. I also try to elevate the role during interviews, just to send a message to the company that I am joining at a leadership and influential position despite the job description they have put together. **George Mbithi**



5. Positioning for Success

It is very likely that one of your goals as a professional is to succeed in your desired field and find satisfaction in doing work that leaves you feeling fulfilled. Being in the development sector gives you the opportunity to contribute to projects that will transform lives and communities. However, you must be deliberate about ensuring you succeed in your role and do work that you will always be proud of.

These are the things to take note of to position for success within the field:

Be humble enough to learn even beyond your qualifications. You also need to be culturally alert. It is not all about intelligence, it is about respecting cultures and aligning with what your community finds acceptable. Be open for compromises in a professional way to get community buy-ins. **Sophia Kudjordji**

Young people must demonstrate a passion and desire to drive communications within the workplace.

They must come up with innovative ideas on how to tell participant stories, and how to relate with donors in a way that will bring in/attract more resources. **Antoinette Gyan**



Some recommended attributes for success are - attention to detail (miscommunication can come with very dire consequences for the organisation).

There is a thin line between greenwashing/bluewashing and projecting the true narrative. It is better to be modest than to be exaggerated as greenwashing has its own consequences. **Titilope Oguntuga**

To succeed in the field of development communications, focus on building a strong foundation of knowledge by reading industry publications, attending conferences, and taking online courses.

It's important to be a team player and collaborate effectively with colleagues, while also being culturally sensitive and aware of cultural differences when working with people from different backgrounds. Staying up-to-date with technology and experimenting with new tools and platforms is also crucial. Also, developing strong communication skills by improving writing, public speaking, and interpersonal communication is essential.

In addition to these, focus on demonstrating professionalism in your work, delivering quality work in a timely manner, and being reliable. By doing so, you will build a reputation as someone who can be trusted to deliver results.

Furthermore, make strategic allies by developing excellent interpersonal skills. This includes being bold and confident without appearing haughty and being able to communicate effectively with people from different backgrounds. By building strong relationships with colleagues and stakeholders, you can further your career and achieve success in the field of development communications. **Euloge Ishimwe**



Expose yourself to environments that will help you to gain insights into your “why” – for example, why development communications and not Public Relations? Why humanitarian agencies and not sexual reproductive health rights advocacy organisations? This exposure can come through networking events, mentoring sessions, conferences, internships, fellowships etc.

Once you are comfortable with your why, seek to understand the needs of the organisation and how you can come in to meet the needs in a strategic and resourceful way that will uplift the organisation and your professional, mental and spiritual well-being. **Whitney Mwangi**

Learn as much as you can about the sector and role. A good place to start is to look at what those you admire in the sector are talking about.

Look at their LinkedIn profiles, and research trends and the particular skills organisations are looking for in job adverts.

It is impossible to keep up with everything but do keep up with as much as you can. Read books and listen to podcasts, join professional bodies in your field, attend conferences and do not miss an opportunity to share your voice or contribute an article if you can.

Find yourself a good mentor or mentors. Many will be too busy to keep their promises but be reasonably insistent and make the most of the time you get.

Getting advice from someone who has been there is always invaluable, and some will even be gracious enough to open doors for you.

Lastly, don't be afraid to fail. Just do your best to minimise the chances of failing and keep reaching for more. **Wendy Muperi**

Trust the process of growth and monitor for programmatic changes that arise from contextual challenges. **Kenneth Jura**

Make it a habit to learn something new every day, and find a mentor who can guide your development in the challenging but rewarding field of development communications.

At the age of 22, I began working as a development communications practitioner with the responsibility of leading communications and advocacy for a local Non-Governmental Organisation that specialised in development work for children, adolescents, and young people living with HIV.

I am eternally grateful to everyone who has helped me to develop professionally in this field. **Tinashe Rufurwadzo**

KEY SKILLS TO MASTER

03

To be a professional who constantly adds value, you must be committed to lifelong learning. The same applies to the world of development communications. We love how our Contributor, Rose Thuo, puts it:

"To work in development comms, it's a learning process and nothing is final. Keep listening. Keep asking questions. Learn the NGO lingo and take courses outside of office work to know what donors fund."

The Top Four Skills Required



crisis-management research writing
data-analysis
reporting storytelling digital-media
content-creation social-media listening
strategy-development
interpersonal-skills monitoring-evaluation
graphic-design media-relations website-management
presentation collaboration photography
video-production
crosscultural-communication

I believe the art of storytelling is very essential. Beyond showing organisational impact, it is useful when presenting, mobilising, or making a case for whatever you need to make a case for.

Other skills to learn are social media skills and etiquette, digital marketing, proficiency in Microsoft Office and Teams as well as basic graphic designing.

Remember, we are working in the development sector and development is a continuous process. We are the people responsible for taking it forward and we cannot do so unless we are actively and consistently looking for opportunities to learn more and be more efficient.

You don't need to be super at every skill but just try to know something.

Wendy Muperi



The key skills for me are:

1. Listening keenly to the said (and unsaid) before you decide how to proceed.
2. Clear articulation (verbal or written) to establish mutual understanding.
3. Paying attention to details for meticulous execution.
4. Early preparation to save time and improve efficiency.
5. Teamwork and partnership to share roles and strengthen the outcome. **Whitney Mwangi**

To effectively communicate about initiatives for social change and sustainable development, a communicator in the field of development must possess these essential skills:

Writing and Editing. It's important to have the skill to write persuasively and coherently. In order to make complicated information and statistics understandable to a variety of audiences, development communicators must be able to write clearly and succinctly. To make sure that your work is precise, readable, and error-free, you should also be able to edit and proofread it.

Storytelling through Pictures. To deliver compelling stories, communicators need to be adept at leveraging visual media. This covers video production, photography, and graphic design. You need to be skilled at producing visually appealing content that effectively conveys difficult concepts.

Social Media. Social media is an essential tool for development communicators. You should be adept at using various social media platforms to promote social change, build awareness, and engage with audiences. **Joseline Kiogora**

INSIGHTS FROM THE EXECUTIVES

04

So far, you've read valuable insights from the communicators who work in leading development and non-profit organisations. We are now bringing you the perspective of the Executive Directors of non-profit organisations to give you a different perspective on how you should approach your role as a development communicator.

The comms team ensures that our work is known and is well communicated to the public and also within the organisation. They are also responsible for making sure that we use approved organisation branding, donor and communications guidelines.

It is the responsibility of the team to review all the communications materials which includes program reports, abstracts etc., to make sure they are well branded and have the organisation's, country's and donor's approved language.

As a result, it is essential for comms professionals in the sector to have blended skills which may include graphics design, photography, and writing skills. It will also be important to have a good language command to communicate better.

Ensuring the comms activities are appropriately measured is also essential. For example, we use the responses to our content, likes on our social media posts and followers to know how well our message resonates. We also do baselines surveys, mid-reviews and end-of-project surveys to understand and measure the impact of the communications department.

Young communicators who want to thrive in this role need to be self starters and they must embrace continuous learning, be innovative and creative. **Prudence Masako, Country Director - CARE International Tanzania**

Due to the nature of the kind of work we do in the development sector, I expect our comms person to have an understanding of the sector and our organisation as a whole.

I believe it is also important to have a heart for development work. If you're selling issues on maternal/ women's health for example, there must be something in your heart that resonates with these issues. Whether or not you have passion for the work you do will show in the content you send out and how you talk about your organisation.

With the right passion and understanding, it becomes easier to know what to look out for when developing your messages, what kind of content to send out and how to measure the impact of your activities. It also becomes easier to develop the right strategies and solutions to solve issues that need to be addressed.

In addition, it is important to come with your A-game. Don't downplay the work we do in the development sector or assume that it requires less effort than working in the corporate sector. Give it your very best and leverage all the tools available to you as a professional.

You also need to understand the vision of the person who runs the organisation. Listen, pay attention and avoid making assumptions. Your role is to help the organisation to get to its desired destination. While you may have technical skills in communications, please remember that you don't know it all. Being willing to learn and adapt will help you a great deal.

Think long term about the kind of legacy you want to leave behind in your organisation and take steps that align with that legacy. Avoid leaving the team stranded or having to start from scratch as a result of your absence. You can do this by diligently documenting the work you do and making sure a proper handover is done.

Finally, working in the development sector is not a desk job; it is a field job. You have to be on the field to see how things work. When you go to the field, you will understand a lot more. **Osayi Alile, Chief Executive Officer, ACT Foundation**

TRANSITIONING INTO DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATIONS

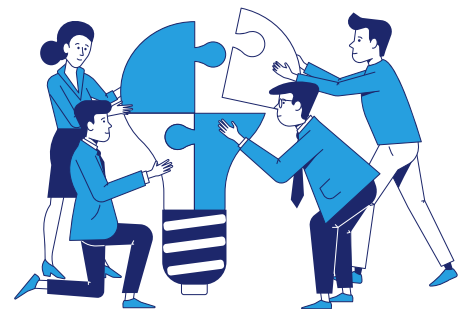
05

If you have a heart for social impact and you are exploring how to transition into development communications, these tips will help you:

Development is not about making money; it's about making a difference in people's lives. Likewise, development communications is not about talking about statistics; there's a real person behind every number. **Tinashe Rufurwadzo**

Communication starts from the rightsholder (the community member the programme is intended to support) and ends with them.

The communications professional is simply a conveyor belt to harness the programme results for growth in subsequent communications. **Kenneth Jura**



While the basics may be the same i.e., knowing your audience, learning the language, the channels etc., development communications tends to be more value-laden, and morality-driven.

This makes it imperative to remember it's not just about ticking the box or for optics or winning at whatever cost but it is more about doing the right thing. At the centre are vulnerable or marginalised people to whom you have a duty of care.

Moreover, unlike the corporate sector, development communications is about working in challenging and fast-paced situations with limited resources. This demands a higher level of agility, resourcefulness, efficiency and creativity to adapt communications strategies and outputs to keep up with evolving situations. **Wendy Muperi**

For those who have been in typical corporate communications roles, transitioning will require a complete shift. Development communications for instance does not rely on many press releases to the media but rather, curated content that the media can develop into features and documentaries.

When the transition from corporate communications happens at a supervisory level, it will be important to realise that in development communications, the Supervisor, Specialist or Manager may not have other 'hands' down the lane to do the work. So, preparing the mind to include going to the field and doing interviews is key. **Paul Mayende**



Give yourself time to understand your environment and adjust accordingly. Empathy is key and you need to be committed to learning. **Vivian Mugarisi**

Understanding the development sector: It is important to get familiar with the development sector, its stakeholders, and key issues. This includes getting a better understanding of development policies, organisations, and interventions.

Creating communications strategies: Development communications is all about conveying complex messages to a diverse audience. You need to have a clear understanding of the audience, the message, and the best strategy to communicate the message.

Writing skills: Writing is a primary tool for communication in the development sector. You need to be a good writer who is skilled in developing reports, proposals, and writing materials that are clear, concise, and compelling.

Cultural sensitivity: You must be aware of cultural differences and communication styles. The ability to work across cultures is critical to building relationships and achieving communications goals. **Joseline Kiogora**

Understand socio-cultural contexts and know that development communications deals with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds.

It is good to be able to understand these contexts in the communities you will be working in. You also need to understand human interest storytelling.

Dayo Ibitoye



Get acquainted with the space you are entering. Understand the issues, the jargon, and the way of thinking. Remember, it's ultimately all about impact, which is a very different motive from profit. **Julie Waiganjo**

When we take our time to understand our “why” and which organisation can be the best channel through which our skills and identity are fully utilised, we maximise the chance of longevity and growth in the development sector.

Most people I meet want to make the transition into the development field as their way to join the UN or for the prestige (travel and big salaries) associated with this field. While this is a totally acceptable ambition, this transition could catapult you into becoming a globally trained communications strategist or a frustrated individual, struggling emotionally, spiritually depleted and mentally drained.

Communication in the development world can be exciting and adventurous, depending on the organisation you're joining and the environment you are posted to. **Whitney Mwangi**

Research, and be abreast with digitalization. Interpersonal communication is key as there is a lot of dialoguing involved. Be culturally intelligent not to offend people's sensibilities. Learn to be conversational, and work on your negotiation skills. **Sophia Kudjordji**

ADVICE FROM SENIOR PROFESSIONALS

06

By now, we hope you feel more confident in your ability to thrive as a communicator working in the development sector. We asked our Contributors for their final advice to you as you navigate your journey in development communications and this is what they had to say:

An open mind is an advantage. Innovation is important to keep engaging your stakeholders. This can be reflected in style, tone, voice and frequency. There are so many digital opportunities that can be leveraged and adopted.

Put your target audience in context always and know what captivates their attention, and then build on it.

Testimonials give more credibility to the developmental projects which in turn translates to value for the organisation. Be prepared for the unpalatable as well, especially for large organisations with huge environmental and social footprints. **Titilope Oguntuga**



Being a complete communicator with varied skills will set you apart.

Skills such as editing and basic data analysis come in handy. Such skills will establish the communicator in terms of the information being shared.

This is what has led me to have presentations beyond the borders of my duty station through developing abstracts.

Paul Mayende

To understand the role well and its impact on the community, I'd like you to please seek professional advice from senior colleagues in the development communications space. Don't be afraid of making mistakes in implementing specific communications strategies.

Kenneth Jura

Networking is powerful. It is good when my work and personal brand can speak for themselves but even better when a trustworthy person can second that enough to put in a word. The development field is somewhat tiny – people tend to know each other so the word spreads. **Whitney Mwangi**



On 15 September 2022, I celebrated my 20th anniversary since joining the workforce. Throughout the years, I have held various positions, including Communications Assistant, Journalism lecturer, Video Editor, Television Station Manager, Head of Communications for Africa and the Middle East, and Global Communications Advisor.

In the weeks leading up to this milestone, I took some time to reflect on my career path. After careful contemplation, I concluded that four factors shape a person's career path: attitude, interpersonal relationships and communication, performance, and organisational politics.

To make it easy to remember, I have grouped the lessons I have learned into four categories, or "four Ps": Personality, Partnerships, Performance, and Politics. In my opinion, these factors are essential in shaping one's career.

In a more concrete way, I would say that to succeed in your career you need to enhance your personal brand, but also gain trust from peers and superiors. To achieve this, it's important to strive for excellence, reliability, and quality in your work. Additionally, building good relationships with colleagues is crucial. **Euloge Ishimwe**

If you are looking for great perks, the development sector isn't the place to look. If you are a humanitarian at heart, someone who thrives when helping others and has a strong desire to contribute towards a healthier and fairer world, then this is the place for you.

Remember your wellbeing matters. It is easy to get sucked in way too deep into the challenges and it can be really draining. Maintain a healthy balance, pick up or nurture your hobby (not the proverbial I love researching that we write under hobbies on our CVs). I mean something removed from your everyday work to take your mind off things, even for a bit. **Wendy Muperi**

Effective development comms requires a clear understanding of the audience and their needs, and clear messaging that aligns with the organisation's goals and values. It's also crucial to use a variety of communication channels to reach your audience effectively.

Finally, measuring the impact of your communication efforts through data analysis and feedback can help you to improve your messaging and outreach. **Joseline Kiogora**

It's always good to approach new opportunities with learning lenses so that you can absorb as much as you can.

Asking those already in the field, and following other organisations in the same industry to see how they are approaching their work is also important. Above all, it is critical to read. **Vivian Mugarisi**

In order to be effective at development communications, you need to have a genuine interest in the subject. Each time the going gets tough, just know that there is someone whose life is waiting to be transformed by you. That has been the most motivating factor in my journey.

Because sharing experiences and influencing others is foundational to development communications, I remember a time when I had to go to a cyclone-ravaged area to help distribute food and other necessities. I had to tell myself, "You got this!" **Tinashe Rufurwadzo**

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

07

Social Media/ Design

- [Canva](#)
- [Picktochart](#)
- [Planable](#)
- [Hootsuite](#)
- [CDC Social Media Guide](#)

Writing/ Editing

- [Grammarly](#)
- [Grammar Girl](#)

Knowledge Building

- [Development Communications Course](#)
- [Devex](#)
- [Agora C4D Online Course](#)
- [Nonprofit Marketing Guide](#)
- [Journal for Development Communications](#)
- [SAGE Journals](#)
- [ResearchGate](#)

Communities

- [The Comms Avenue](#)
- [The Communication Initiative Network](#)
- [The Channels Network – Social Impact Communications](#)
- [OECD Development Communication Network](#)

Data Analysis

- [MS Excel](#)
- [Airtable](#)
- [ClicData](#)

Others

- [Asana \(Project Management\)](#)
- [First 100 Days of your New Nonprofit Marketing Job \(e-Book\)](#)
- [Free Tools to Maximize the Success of Your Paid Media Campaigns \(Article\)](#)

GET TRAINED TO BE A RESULT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATOR

Through our Development Communications course which begins on Saturday 3rd June, you will be better positioned to deliver measurable results in your role as a development communicator.

Course Overview

This course will explore the foundation of development communications with a goal to teach you how to strategically communicate for impact and effectively manage stakeholders in order to achieve your desired objectives. You will also learn how to apply the principles of behaviour change to create impactful campaigns.

Duration: Six weeks.



Topics Covered

- Strategy Development and Planning.
- Storytelling for Impact.
- Communications for Behaviour Change.
- Stakeholder Engagement.
- Budgeting, Evaluation and Reporting.

At the end of the course, participants will receive templates and resources for implementation.

Course Fee

N250,000/ \$400



You can enrol for the course [here](#) and take advantage of a special 15% discount when you enrol using the code **TCACIADC** before Monday 22nd May. *Please note that all classes are virtual.*



ABOUT THE COMMS AVENUE

The Comms Avenue is a capacity-building and networking platform for communications professionals across Africa and beyond.

We currently have over 1200 communications professionals from 20 African countries in our mission-driven community.

Our Vision - To raise and uphold the standard for Comms talent in Africa and build a strong community of communicators who are empowered to contribute to positive change in various industries, across Africa and globally.

Our Mission - To equip communications professionals across the African continent with the skills, knowledge and opportunities to achieve measurable results in their role as communicators.

We put together programmes, webinars, knowledge exchange and networking events that allow our community members to Learn, Collaborate and Connect with senior communications professionals and peers across the African continent and beyond.

We also produce practical resources and learning materials to help communications professionals to perform better on the job.

You can partner with us to achieve our mission to impact over 10,000 communications professionals across Africa through our programs and events. Find out more [**here**](#).



**HAVE QUESTIONS
ABOUT THIS GUIDE?
CONTACT US!**



www.thecommsavenue.com



letstalk@thecommsavenue.com



The Comms Avenue