

## **Conversations Exploring 'Sustainable Development' and the Role of Media**

### Overview:

"Engaging the public in sustainable development: Media strategies and best practices"

30 May, 2012, Church Center at the United Nations, New York

Hosted by the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations in New York

and

World Council of Peoples for the United Nations (WCPUN)

### Background:

The series aims to facilitate collaborations and exchanges of ideas, experiences and best practices among people of diverse disciplines, recognizing that "sustainable development" requires the engagement of people at all levels, and that media and communications is informing our understanding and behavior in that respect.

The pilot conversation "Visioning Rio +20" held on 16 December, 2011, <http://wcpun.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/16-dec-conversation-overview.pdf> emphasized the importance of engaging people beyond the communities of experts, policymakers, and activists working on sustainable development. To that end, WCPUN in partnership with the consultancy LCAconseil.net and the business school ESGCI in Paris (Ecole Supérieure de Gestion et Commerce International) involved marketing and communications students in a project to develop new media strategies around sustainable development, based on qualitative analysis of focus groups in Beijing, Casablanca, Kinshasa, Paris and San Diego. The students were invited to participate in another installation of the conversation series and present their findings in New York on 30 May, 2012.

How do we engage the public, sustain engagement? What are we asking people to do?

On 30 May, 2012, an open meeting was convened with participants representing NGOs, member states, academic and cultural institutions, arts, sciences, media and communications. Moderated by Shamina de Gonzaga (WCPUN) and Wendy Bromley Bodden (IVOH), the conversation featured opening remarks by the French Ambassador for the Environment, Jean-Pierre Thébault; and input from Documentary Filmmaker, "One Water" and Professor of Cinema and Interactive Media at the University of Miami School of Communication, Sanjeev Chatterjee; Consultant, LCAConseil.net, and Professor of Innovation and Communication, research associate at the University of San Diego, Dr. Marcel Saucet; and marketing and communications students at ESGCI, Pauline Boukhecha, Brice Fleuri, Davina Lukenga, Laurent Pauc.

"Have you used the opportunity presented by the UN social media campaign around the Rio +20 Summit?" Ambassador Jean-Pierre Thébault asked. If we are not taking advantage of the opportunities made available for civic participation, we're not helping things move forward. He shared challenges of the intergovernmental negotiations around sustainable development and the Summit and emphasized that the recognition of the active role of civil society representatives, rather than an observatory role, was a priority objective for France in the Rio +20 process. Noting that civil society can impact policy via mass mobilization lobbying on the Internet, especially in larger and more developed countries, he cautioned that such efforts must happen before policymakers convene. He questioned whether civil society considers this issue pressing.

Sanjeev Chatterjee observed that many students and youth include "Be the change you want to see in the world" in their email signatures. This points to a clear intent to participate and have an impact. However, there is a distinction between a one off action, such as donating to a charitable cause, and behavioral change and sustained engagement. Based on his experience, non-verbal visual storytelling is a powerful vehicle for overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers, as illustrated by video clips from his upcoming film, "On Cities" and his "One Water" project [www.onewater.org/movie](http://www.onewater.org/movie). Ongoing engagement is critical and one of the biggest challenges. Completion of a media project is actually just the launch pad for engagement.

Dr. Marcel Saucet, and students Pauline Boukhecha, Brice Fleuri, Davina Lukenga, Laurent Pauc shared their findings. Highlights included:

- The use of "new media" is uneven across regions of the world
- Guerrilla, viral, stealth and ambush marketing are most suitable for cause-related marketing, as they are low-budget, high impact strategies
- Tapping the interdependence of media strategies and tools is critical for the success of a campaign
- Of the 100 people aged 15-30 interviewed in Beijing, Casablanca, Kinshasa, Paris and San Diego, water, followed by pollution, were considered the most critical sustainable development related issues; 80% wanted more information about the issues and were interested in getting involved
- The concept of a campaign for sustainable development to be launched on 22 December 2012 (the day after the predicted "end of the world") followed by a series of awareness-raising actions in major cities was suggested based on the notion that "It's not the end of the world...but the world is in danger...."
- Full report available at <http://wcpun.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/new-media-and-sustainable-development-esgci-lca.pdf>

The conversation was opened up to the room. Highlights, conclusions and recommendations included:

- References to successful outreach efforts, such as 350.org, "a global movement to solve the climate crisis," <http://350.org/>; the anti-smoking campaigns leading to legislation reducing smoking around the world; "Create A Plastic-Bag Free World," an initiative led by several diverse organizations aimed at reducing the use of single-use plastic bags [www.publicproject.prattgradcomd.com](http://www.publicproject.prattgradcomd.com); the film "Gasland," exposing the dangers of hydraulic fracturing, [www.gaslandthemovie.com](http://www.gaslandthemovie.com)
- One-on-one conversations are often effective and necessary for transforming people's relationship or commitment to a sustainable development related issue
- There is generational divide: many current campaigns are created by people "who don't get it: they are legacy people," it's useful for campaigns to be youth generated
- Start local; be clear on the desired outcome, what you want people to do once they are exposed to particular media; have a timeframe; be mindful of incentives, why people volunteer
- There are accessible and affordable strategies to increase online presence and popularity, such as purchasing "likes" on social media
- Recognized standards of sustainability can be better celebrated and supported

Additional questions / points raised:

- How do we get meaningful traction? Students are thinking in terms of scare tactics - do we need to shock people into engagement, or are there other approaches?
- How do you sustain engagement, so that it is widely practiced on an individual level?

- How are concepts applied at the national level? States themselves often agree to commitments, but don't follow through. '
- Civil society is missing the connection with policymakers, how to foster that connection?
- How do you create something sustainable in our environment of fast changing models, technical support?

NEXT STEPS:

Various participants expressed the wish for more time to exchange ideas and best practices and the formation of a collaborative, possibly virtual space, or working group. We are exploring the interest in forming such a group, as well as existing initiatives that could be partnered with....

The event was sponsored by WCPUN as part of a series of cross-disciplinary conversations exploring collaborative intersections between media and sustainable development, co-produced and facilitated by Wendy Bromley Bodden and Shamina de Gonzaga, with convening partner organizations: World Council of Peoples for the United Nations ([www.wcpun.org](http://www.wcpun.org)); what moves you? ([www.whatmovesyou.net](http://www.whatmovesyou.net)); Images and Voices of Hope ([www.ivoh.org](http://www.ivoh.org)).