



United Nations University

Global Communications Strategy 2020-2024



UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY

United Nations University Global Communications Strategy 2020-2024

Prepared by the UNU Office of Communications, Tokyo

I. Introduction

In January 2020, the United Nations University (UNU) enters its second strategy period under current Rector David M. Malone. The *UNU Strategic Plan 2020–2024* builds on the success of the previous strategy, aiming to “[add] value to the key debates and policy initiatives concerning peace, development, and sustainability.”

As defined during UNU’s 2019 rebranding effort, the overarching vision of UNU is “to generate knowledge with diverse global stakeholders to equip people with the evidence needed to create a secure, equitable, and sustainable future for all.”

To achieve this vision, UNU’s work between 2020–2024 will be guided by four overarching objectives:

1. Pursue policy-relevant programming
2. Invest in a dynamic, innovative, and diverse institutional culture
3. Strengthen collaboration, communications, and visibility
4. Strive for financial sustainability across UNU’s architecture

Effective communications is vital to UNU’s success in these efforts. The UNU Global Communications Strategy 2020–2024 aims to capitalise on the success of the previous strategy period (2018–2019). It redoubles efforts to improve UNU’s brand, online presence, and media footprint, and increases emphasis on achieving policy impact and fostering strategic partnerships to amplify UNU’s limited communications resources.

II. Goals and Objectives

Based on a review of the *UNU 2020–2024 Strategic Plan* and a comprehensive situation analysis (evaluating strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), UNU communicators will support UNU’s mission by focusing efforts on the following overarching goal:

To shape, package, and deliver UNU’s products and expertise to maximise impact, effect positive change, and drive further demand for UNU’s work.

To achieve this overarching goal, UNU communications will focus on the following four objectives in the 2020–2024 period.

OBJECTIVE #1: Improve UNU’s Brand and Online Presence

A strong brand is vital to securing the trust and respect of target publics externally, and to ensure alignment internally. UNU lacks a unified brand identity, resulting in inconsistent interpretations of what the University does, how it is different from other organisations, and why its work matters. The current configuration of UNU’s global web presence (30+ disparate sites) contributes to this lack of clarity by fragmenting our work and splitting our identity and online footprint.

In December 2018, the UNU Council endorsed a decision by UNU Directors to define UNU’s brand as part of a process to revitalise the University’s online presence. Led by the Office of Communications in Tokyo with the active support of stakeholders across the UNU system, this project is now underway and will be implemented within this strategy.

Target Activity:

- Complete the UNU Web Platform Development Project, delivering:
 - a visual identity/brand guidelines document for core online and offline instances

- a single web platform, meeting UNU's core functionalities and requirements, and housing all institute's main websites with a similar look, feel, and user experience
- content governance guidelines including user roles, universal terminology, editorial style and voice, asset rules, workflows, and documentation
- a roadmap to improve future iterations of the platform

OBJECTIVE #2: Increase UNU's Research Uptake – and Resulting Policy Impact – Through Innovative, Targeted, and Tailored Communications Campaigns

To ensure that UNU's knowledge products reach the right people, at the right time, to inspire the desired action, UNU communications will continue to collaborate on communication campaigns that begin at the design stage of UNU activities.

As stated in the UNU Strategic Plan 2020–2024: *"Nowhere is [UNU's] thought leadership more sought out than in the context of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development."* As such, these efforts will centre around highlighting UNU's work on the Sustainable Development Goals.

Target Activities:

- Develop UNU-wide products, including events, publications, newsletters, videos, etc.
- Improve, expand, and iterate the Sustainable Development Explorer campaign to spotlight UNU's work on the SDGs
- Create compelling knowledge-translation products including videos, podcasts, infographics, digital publications, chat bots, interactive graphics, etc.
- Capitalise on anniversaries to showcase UNU's work: UN's 75th, UNU's 45th, etc.

OBJECTIVE #3: Boost UNU's Profile by Securing Regular Media Coverage

Traditional and social media are still the best broadcasting channel available to reach large and diverse audiences. UNU communications will continue to focus on garnering media coverage, through both traditional outlets and social media platforms, to help raise UNU's profile as a global thought leader and trusted knowledge partner. This includes injecting UNU expertise into ongoing debates and timely issues, while also generating coverage around UNU's latest research and activities.

Target Activities:

- Support in the drafting and placement of op-eds by UNU experts in the media
- Conduct global media campaigns to publicise major research findings
- Engage social media influencers in actively promoting UNU's content
- Pursue strategic partnerships with media to secure more coverage (e.g., The Conversation, Devex, etc.)
- Build on and increase collaboration with UN communications hubs in New York and Geneva, as well as Brussels, Nairobi, Vienna, etc.
- Increase media outreach in languages other than English

OBJECTIVE #4: Strengthen UNU's Strategic Partnerships and Stakeholder Networks

Though ambitious, UNU's communications team and resources are limited. As such, large-scale success depends on the creation and activation of strategic partnerships and stakeholder networks. UNU communications will continue to refine and expand its current networks.

Target Activities:

- Pursue mutually beneficial partnerships (e.g., with online educational platforms, think tanks, other UN agencies, influencers, NGOs, media, etc.)
- Jointly apply for communications-related grants and funding
- Establish and maintain relationships with influencers (individuals and organisations)
- Design UNU student ambassador programmes to involve UNU students and alumni in the broader communications effort
- Build targeted contact lists based on interest, and channel relevant UNU content to interested publics

III. Target Publics

While the term “audiences” is more widely recognised, UNU uses the term “publics” to reflect its commitment to two-way communications, and to the “dynamic interaction” mandated in the UNU Charter. UNU’s stakeholders are not an audience to preach to — they are publics who are actively engaged in a dialogue about UNU’s work.

As defined during the University’s 2019 rebranding effort, UNU has 10 primary publics for its products and services. Target publics vary by institute, campaign, and desired outcome, but all communications efforts aim to deliver on UNU’s unique value propositions as outlined by the publics below:

UN System: UNU is a trusted thought leader, preferred partner, and connected convener situated within the UN system. From this unique vantage point, we provide independent, evidence-based, and policy-relevant research products to advance the UN system’s overall vision and diverse missions.

Donors: UNU’s academic excellence, global networks, and convening power make us a trusted and valuable knowledge partner. The depth and breadth of our expertise, combined with our ability to connect – knowledge to action, research to practice, and academia to policymakers – help support local and global donor priorities.

Policymakers: UNU is a knowledge partner for change, connecting diverse groups of international stakeholders to develop evidence-based policy recommendations that inform decision-making and guide policy processes for tangible results.

Students: UNU provides unique educational opportunities by providing direct access to the UN system, policymakers, and the broader multilateral process. This access, combined with solid academic instruction, equips tomorrow’s decision-makers with the foundations needed to help solve global issues.

Alumni: UNU supports our alumni by providing them continued access to UNU, the wider UN system, and each other.

Civil Society: UNU is a collaborative and innovative partner, co-creating solutions to address global problems by exchanging knowledge, sharing high-quality data and evidence-based reports, and interfacing with policymakers and the UN system.

Academics and Researchers: UNU’s global network and access to the UN system give academics a unique opportunity to co-create research and generate knowledge with decision-makers to help find solutions to the world’s most pressing problems.

Governments: UNU’s diversity, depth of expertise, and thought leadership provide governments with access to the UN system and to academia, helping them operationalise efforts to solve pressing problems and achieve their development goals.

Media: UNU’s high-quality, evidence-based research makes us a trusted resource, providing credible and independent data and information, with a one-stop network of experts who can offer timely commentary on current issues.

Partners: UNU is a trusted partner, providing independent and evidence-based research results, value-added analysis, education, and capacity building support. We collaborate to build solutions, disseminate knowledge, and connect with policymakers to drive positive transformations.

IV. Messaging

Effective messaging guides publics through the influence process: first by creating awareness about a specific issue, then by gaining acceptance of the importance of the issue, and finally by spurring action.

To reach the right public(s) and drive the desired result, UNU must have clear, consistent, and actionable messages tailored to each public. Based on the objectives outlined in this strategy, UNU's communications messaging will:

- Clearly communicate the value, quality, and impact of UNU's work
- Demonstrate the relevance of UNU's work as it relates to each specific public
- Highlight the human side of UNU's work
- Use clear language to simplify complex issues
- Be professional, but avoid technical jargon
- Use words that create interest and spur engagement
- Have a clear call to action driving the public to complete a desired action
- Be inclusive, using "we", "you", and "us" to engage publics in a personal conversation
- Reflect gender balance and use gender-inclusive language and imagery
- Ensure persons with disabilities are reflected in language and imagery

V. Implementation

This strategy provides the overarching framework to align communications work across the UNU system over the next five years. Each institute, as well as the Office of Communications in Tokyo, is responsible for creating its own annual work programme to elaborate how they will contribute to the identified objectives.

UNU's ability to achieve the four external objectives outlined above depends on its internal capacity, culture, and collaborative spirit. To strengthen these foundational elements, UNU communications will also focus on the following four internal objectives:

1. **Improve cross-institute communication efforts:** by regularly engaging to implement the strategy, collaborate on ideas, report successes, and support each other
2. **Solidify the role of communications as a strategic partner:** by ensuring that communications begins at the concept phase, and that communicators are proactively engaged by colleagues at the start of research programmes
3. **Improve communications capacity:** by budgeting time and resources for professional development and maintaining training resources for staff
4. **Improve the ability to measure the impacts of communications efforts:** by regularly measuring, analysing, reporting on, and improving our communications metrics, both qualitatively and quantitatively

VI. Monitoring and Evaluation

The success of any strategy depends on sound monitoring and measurement practices. In addition to output-related metrics collected for each objective, the Office of Communications will gather the following overarching metrics from institutes, collate and assimilate the data, and report biannually to the UNU Council.

Metric Type	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
Reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media coverage/impressions • Social media followership • UNU web property visits • UNU expert op-eds published • Campaigns conducted

Metric Type	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media engagement • Key influencers engaged • UNU web property return visits • Publication downloads and views • Event attendance
Policy Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy uptake narratives
Brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website user survey • General stakeholder survey

VII. Conclusion

The UNU Global Communications Strategy 2020–2024 aims to overcome UNU’s (internal and external) communications challenges, realise the maximum benefit of the UNU system’s combined communications resources, and assist the organisation in achieving its mission.

The creation and ultimate implementation of this strategy would not be possible without the active participation of – and feedback from – the UNU Rector’s Office, institute Directors, and communication focal points at UNU institutes.

About United Nations University

For the past four decades, UNU has been a go-to think tank for impartial research on the pressing global problems of human survival, development, and welfare. With more than 400 researchers in 13 countries, UNU’s work spans the full breadth of the 17 SDGs, generating knowledge to inform policy and effect positive global change. For more information, visit www.unu.edu.