



Ministry for Foreign
Affairs of Finland

Evaluation on development communications in the context of MFA



Communications are a central function of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Finland, and the Department for Communications (VIE) has the responsibility for all external and internal communications. The Unit for Communications on Sustainable Development and Trade (VIE-30) works on communications related to the Ministry's development policy, development cooperation, external economic relations, and Team Finland.

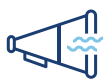
The evaluation focused on the effectiveness of MFA development communications in reaching the Finnish public and making development issues visible in Finnish digital and social media. It also assessed MFA's efficiency in formulating communication messages and collaborating with other actors and partners such as civil society organisations (CSO).

The context of development communications is continuously evolving: the policies

guiding government and MFA communication change, government communication has its own particularities, the media landscape is shifting, and the polarised public discussion affects public opinion on development cooperation.

The evaluation used various methods: media analysis, case studies, desk review, online surveys, interviews and focus group discussions.

The evaluation concluded that:



The MFA has taken important steps toward strategic communication but not enough to achieve its objectives in development communications;



Communications have reached the public to some extent, but visibility is low among those who don't actively follow and search for information or understand the professional jargon;



The MFA has only occasionally influenced public discussion but physical meetings with targeted audiences have been effective. There is rarely discussion or

debate on the MFA website, Twitter, Instagram or Facebook accounts. There are few spokespersons, and this influences MFA's capacity to engage in public discussion;



MFA has high capacity for planning the communications, producing content and acting as spokespersons, but the internal synergies have not been fully used;



Because of the MFA's overall management arrangements and demands for the development communication unit from all across the ministry, VIE-30 is not able to prioritise and deprioritise its work and therefore it is not as efficient or effective as it could be;



The Development Academy for journalists is an important instrument and creates media networks and maintains contacts with journalists – this could better used;



CSOs and other stakeholders are significant actors in development communication and global education in Finland, and there are many possibilities for cooperation and coordination with them;



There are many lessons that could be learned from development communications in peer countries (Denmark and Sweden) and Finnish CSOs.

The evaluation recommends to the MFA the following:

- MFA's leadership should provide strong support to strengthen the communications function;
- Supported by the MFA's leadership, VIE-30 should reduce its workload by prioritising and focusing on the strategic communication. No new functions should be added to the unit without significantly increasing resources and reorganising the work at department level. Options for reorganisation are listed in the main evaluation report
- VIE-30 should make more detailed strategic and operational plans with priorities, key messages, target groups, monitoring and systematic learning, and resources including outsourcing of services with sufficiently long contracts.

- This should entail the whole communication department of the MFA defining its strategic objectives and priorities;
- In developing the operational plan, VIE-30 should clarify the roles and responsibilities both within the unit and in relation to other MFA departments, also defining priority themes and key messages for each department;
- VIE-30 should consolidate development communication materials through an umbrella approach: concepts and a databank calibrated for different audiences. Increase plain language and concrete cases in the content;
- VIE should select, coach, and train a group of spokespersons among MFA staff and support other staff with training. The MFA top leadership should show example as spokespersons and find ways to incentivise and motivate

- others for public communication. The ministry should be present in new discussion arenas, that already have large audiences and invest more resources to create qualitatively high-standard dialogue;
- MFA should continue the Development Academy and use the network of journalists it forms. VIE-30 should tailor its communication contents, link contents to the news agenda, and propose MFA experts for interviews and presentations.
- MFA should collaborate and cooperate more with other actors, such as CSOs, private sector organisations, companies, and researchers. MFA should continue and increase the support to global education. and VIE should strengthen the contact with peer countries to share the best practices.