



Social and Behaviour Change Communication

Designing holistic and data-driven communications to enable change

What is Social and Behaviour Change Communication, and why is it important?

Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) seeks to apply tactics from marketing, social and community mobilization, mass media, entertainment, advocacy, interpersonal communication, social media and other communication approaches to support positive social and individual change. As part of a multi-pronged SBC strategy, these strategic communication tactics are critical tools to promote action and create an environment that supports it.

Social and Behaviour Change Communication 101

SBCC is one approach to social and behavioural change that many may feel needs no explanation. Most of us are familiar with marketing, communication and public information campaigns that attempt to raise awareness, advocate for change and influence public opinion. When part of a multi-pronged SBC strategy, strategic communications can also stimulate positive and measurable social and behaviour change. Whether it be interpersonal engagement, targeted advocacy or larger-scale mobilization, communication tactics should be informed by a solid foundation of data and community dialogue. Communication tactics like this are most effective when closely integrated with other SBC approaches.

Everybody responds to communication differently. You must consider all aspects of the geographic, social, and economic context when deciding your communication strategy. Demographics, literacy levels, digital access, media consumption, and trust will determine the combination of communication tactics you employ and how you segment them. The more evidence you have to work from, the more effective your strategic communication efforts will be.

Common steps for developing communication plans:

1. **Understand the programme and where communications can add value:** Collecting primary and secondary data and using participatory processes will help you develop a better understanding of the people, contexts and barriers that the SBCC strategy will address.
2. **Define your communication objectives:** What role can communication play in the SBC strategy? What do you want to achieve through communication? By identifying the goal of your communication efforts, you can design ways to measure their impact.
3. **Identify your audiences:** Having a deep understanding of who you are trying to reach will make your communications more effective. Communication tactics that consider the local context will be more targeted, appropriate and effective.
4. **Develop and test your key messages:** Develop clear and concise messaging that will resonate with your audience. By testing these messages with the intended audience, you can identify concrete ways to improve your messaging in the next iteration.
5. **Select your communication tactics and materials:** Your audience and your communication objectives should determine what communication channels you use. Consider how your audiences receive information, whose opinions they value, and what forms those valued

communications come in. Tactics can be broadly grouped into mass media, interpersonal, social and community channels. It is often necessary to combine tactics across these groups to increase their chances of success. Every tactic should be developed using a two-way process so that audiences can provide information and feedback and influence decisions.

6. **Finalize your strategy:** The communication arm of your work should support and reinforce your overall SBC strategy. A finalized strategy should include your message, how you will communicate it and measure its impact based on the context, objectives, and target audiences. Your strategy should always include how to measure the impact of your communications.
7. **Measure your results:** Your communication objectives should be measurable and linked to your programme and social and behavioural results. Consider intermediate measures, to allow regular adjustments and introduction of new strategic phases based on the evidence you collect.

Social and behavioural objectives

We often consider communication as the primary way to raise awareness and share information. However, strategic communications can support SBC strategies in many more ways. It can encourage community engagement, influence social norms, support policy advocacy, promote service uptake, reach underserved populations, foster a media environment that resonates with downstream engagement, and much, much more. Consider a mix of SBC tactics that complement each other and support the social and behavioural objectives you are working towards.

The limits of Social and Behaviour Change Communication

On its own, SBCC is rarely enough to achieve social and behaviour change results. It is too often reduced to messaging, or used to share information and encourage policy compliance without addressing the structural and social barriers that stand in the way. Often, such communications have failed to meaningfully involve communities and users in the initial decision and design processes. But when programmes carefully consider the people they affect and the determinants of change, SBCC can be a powerful way to engage, inspire, and empower people to make healthier decisions. However, exhaustive research and community engagement don't always result in effective communication campaigns. Complex challenges such as preventing the sexual abuse of children and adolescents, child marriage and female genital mutilation all have deep roots. Even the most robust communication campaign cannot overpower deeply ingrained social norms and belief systems. Such norms are pervasive and are reflected in the legal system, job markets, and socialization processes. These colossal challenges can only be approached through holistic programmes. Communication efforts alone often fall short of addressing the underlying structural and social elements that allow these major challenges to continue.

Case studies and examples

- **SOUTH AFRICA** The Soul City TV series, which depicted community responses to GBV, [increased attention to and action against intimate partner violence](#).
- **VIET NAM** Combining nationwide mass media strategies with interpersonal counseling on infant and young child feeding led to increases in both Minimum Acceptable Diet and Minimum Dietary Diversity, resulting in [reductions in stunting](#).

- **INDIA** The Saloni Project used an ancient Indian communication method to build [compassion, self efficacy, emotional well being, peer and parental support](#) for adolescents.
- **BANGLADESH** Sustained behavioural change communication, coupled with cash transfers, led to [improvements in knowledge of infant and young child feeding amongst mothers](#).
- **INDIA** Providing face-to-face information to mothers about the DPT vaccine [increased measles immunisation rates by 22 percentage points and complete immunisation rates by 14 percentage points](#).
- **HONG KONG** A comprehensive package combining information about influenza risks and a vaccine subsidy scheme [increased childhood immunisation rates by 25%](#).
- **JAPAN** A participatory education approach delivered during late pregnancy and postpartum [improved both intentions to vaccinate and self-reported vaccination rates](#).
- **GLOBAL** Community-based behaviour change communication efforts have been shown to [reduce neonatal mortality across multiple developing countries](#).
- **SENEGAL** A peer-to-peer informational campaign conducted by returning migrants improved [knowledge on the risks of migration and reduced intentions to migrate irregularly](#)

Key principles

SBCC employs a variety of tools and methods to communicate with each target group and receive information, contributions and feedback in return. Effective SBCC relies on:

1. **Social and Behaviour Change Objectives.** The goal of SBCC is to change knowledge, attitudes and practices of target groups and stimulate social change at the local and national level.
2. **Tailored messaging.** All creative messages and products disseminated through interpersonal, group and mass-media channels should be informed by in-depth knowledge of the intended audience.
3. **Two-way communication.** High quality SBCC requires two-way communication flows for feedback and improvement from the intended audience.
4. **Measurement systems.** Monitoring changes in attitudes and behaviours helps to measure the impact of communications outlined by the programme objectives.

More information

Strategic communication initiatives ensure that communication products and activities are synchronized and coordinated to achieve agreed goals and objectives. The following resources provide examples and models of this:

- [Campaigning](#) – How to design impactful, multi-channel communication efforts
- [Working with the media](#) – How to partner with media for SBC
- [Social and Community listening](#) – How to take the social pulse, capture local insights, and track misinformation

- [Digital engagement](#) – How to harness technology to mobilize and motivate for change
- [Education entertainment](#) – How to leverage popular edutainment for a cause
- [Strategic communication for behaviour and social change in South Asia](#)
- [A global communication strategy development guide for maternal, newborn and child health and nutrition programmes](#)
- [Strategic communication for Zika prevention: A guide to adapting locally](#)