

# Crop Wild Relatives – A manual of *in situ* conservation ©

## Communication, public awareness and outreach

### Getting your message across to protect and conserve Crop Wild Relatives

#### The Message: Communicating for Change

Policy-makers and the general public are largely unaware of the importance of crop wild relatives and the critical role they play in improving agricultural productivity and supporting food security and ecosystem health. An effective communication strategy can help change the attitudes and behavior of key audiences and raise awareness of the need to protect and conserve crop wild relatives (CWR), which is particularly important since CWR represent a significant body of neglected and threatened plant species.

The aim of this module is to help practitioners think more strategically about communications, to introduce a range of available communications tools and to explore the means for measuring communications impact.

#### KEY TERMS

**Agents of Change:** policy- and decision-makers and key institutions which have the power to influence CWR *in situ* conservation efforts.

**External Audience:** individuals or groups whose interest and support is key to achieving the overall goal of the project: CWR conservation.

**Internal Audience:** those directly involved in the project's planning and implementation, such as organizational or project staff and partners.

**Target Audience:** those individuals, organizations and institutions that your communications strategy must influence in order to bring about behavior change. This includes agents of change and members of the public.

#### COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY CHECKLIST

- Objectives:** The first step is to determine the objective of your intervention. Is the purpose to bring about policy change? To raise funds? To change research priorities within an institution? The communications strategy should be driven by these overall objectives.
- Target Audience:** Identify and clearly define the audience (s) you must influence in order to meet your objectives.
- Key Messages:** These should be strategic, targeted and consistent. Different audiences will respond to certain messages differently. Summarizing messages in no more than three key points will generate maximum impact. Short messages are easily repeated and shared.
- Communication tools and activities:** Appropriate tools should be selected based on your audience and the key messages.
- Budgets and resources:** These will need to be sufficient to support plans and activities or will need to include a well-articulated case for more resources.
- Timeline:** This will include a schedule of activities and actions and may start with a needs assessment of target audiences, capacity building activities or knowledge-sharing events, etc.
- Evaluation and refinement of the strategy:** This will be important for measuring success and making adjustments, where necessary – it should be considered for both internal and external audiences.

Adapted from: Media Trust

#### A MAJOR SELLING POINT TO POLICY-MAKERS

The contribution CWR can make to increased crop yields and quality. Globally has been estimated at about US\$115 billion/year worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Genes from CWR provide cultivars of food crops with resistance to pests, diseases and drought.

1- Pimentel, D., Wilson, C., McCullum, C. Huang, R., Dwen, P., Flack, J., Tran, Q., Saltmna, T. and Cliff, B. 'Economic and environmental benefits of biodiversity', *BioScience*, 47: 747-757.

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## GETTING STARTED...

An effective communications strategy should be based on two major assumptions:

- Public awareness can be used to change behavior by influencing changes in attitudes; and
- Influencing profound changes in attitudes will require sustained, long-term efforts.

The **OBJECTIVE** of the communications strategy is to convince individuals and institutions whose actions –or lack of actions– prevent the conservation and use of CWR that an environment promoting CWR conservation must be created and constraints removed. **TARGETS** of the strategy should include both agents of change (policy- and decision-makers and key institutions) and end-users.

For your strategy to be effective, **you must start by understanding the objective, the target audience, the audience's current attitude towards the issue, key messages to be communicated and the best ways to reach the audience.** The more you engage and consult with your audience about their information and communications needs, preferred formats and how they access information, the more likely your strategy is to have an impact.

## THINGS TO REMEMBER:

### Be Aware of Information Overload

Producing more information materials (pamphlets, briefs, brochures, etc) does not necessarily mean more results. Members of your target audience may already receive large amounts of information daily. Face-to-face conversations and visual presentations may be more useful and cost-efficient depending on the context and situation.

### Find a Helping Hand

Agriculture and biodiversity specialists, while experts in their own fields, may have difficulty understanding the range of opinions existing among multiple stakeholders. Therefore, **it is good practice to consult a communications professional for advice and guidance in the development of your communications strategy and intervention.** Help is available through networks which share and exchange expertise across different sectors; much information can also be found online.

### Learn from your neighbors

Look at how other activities and initiatives in your country have generated behavioral change and note how this was achieved and what approaches were used.

Source - Adapted from Communication, Education and Public Awareness; A Toolkit for National Focal Points and NBSAP Coordinators.

## CASE STUDY:

### Development of CWR Information Parks - Sri Lanka

Inspired by its attractive location along both banks of the river Mahaweli, the Sri Lankan Department of Agriculture established an Agriculture Information Park to give the public an opportunity to witness new agricultural technologies and research in an up-close and personal way. The park attracts about 30,000 people annually and visitors learn about conventional crops important in Sri Lanka, as well as home gardens, paddy cultivation and traditional farming systems.

The Department is using the park to raise public awareness about the importance of CWR to daily life and the need to conserve them. Wild relatives of pepper, bean, okra, banana and rice have so far been established along the river banks as part of the Department's initiative.



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## USING THE RIGHT TOOLS

When thinking about what tools and techniques to use to reach your target audience, it is important to distinguish between your internal and external audiences. Your internal audience (those involved in the project) should already be aware, and in support of, the communications strategy and key messages. Your external audiences are those towards whom you are directing your communications strategy and those who you want to listen to your message. A guiding principle for an effective strategy is to communicate internally before communicating externally.

**The most important thing to know about your tool is whether it is meaningful to your target audience.**

### External communications tools

**Print/Radio:** Media and press releases; Radio programmes Feature articles.

**TV:** News; Biodiversity, agriculture, science programmes; Videos/CDs/DVDs of interesting activities.

**Advertising and feature stories:** Print; Radio; Television.

**Publishing:** Brochures; Posters; Billboards; Leaflets; Technical reports; Websites; Blogging, Listserves, wikis.

**Public Relations:** Biodiversity, Science and Agriculture Shows; T-shirts, bags, stickers; Telephone calls; Side events; Conferences; Networking.

**Other Tools:** Policy papers; Lobbying; Role plays and drama; Educational materials for schools and universities; Making use of special occasions such as International Day for Biological Diversity (22 May); Special exhibits in botanic gardens; School painting, poetry, essay and quiz contests.

### Internal communications tools

Phone calls; Country visits; Face-to-face meetings with partners and stakeholders; Email; Progress reports and briefs; Project newsletters; Training workshops; International and national meetings; Study tours for project staff and other stakeholders; Intranets; Travelling seminar to bring together multidisciplinary group and policy makers.

## CASE STUDY:

### Uzbekistan



### Organising a media tour to promote and raise awareness of CWR conservation

In 2008, Uzbekistan hosted a national media tour involving more than 30 journalists from various national mass media organizations. The event provided an opportunity for professional ecologists and journalists to come together to discuss the importance of CWR and ways of increasing public awareness. Journalists visited Ugam-Chatkal State National Natural Park where various specialists working on CWRs were able to demonstrate conserved populations of wild relatives of pistachio, apple, almond and walnut and the devastating impact of threats such as water erosion, livestock grazing and tree cutting. A total of four television and 10 radio programmes and 18 stories in the national press resulted from the tour.

Source: Sativaldi Djataev & Feruza Mustafa

### The growing importance of online communications

Weblogs, wikis, listserves and other social networking tools are effective and efficient ways to reach a wide audience and to access up-to-date information on CWR. They are a key tool to encourage global communication on conservation issues. Discussion groups and networks can be formed to share information and learn from others. However, the power of these online tools does depend on audiences having access to the internet.

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## WHAT WORKS? Measuring the Impact

You need to determine if the audience is more aware of CWR issues than before your intervention, if behaviors have changed and if this has led to a long-term impact or an environment promoting CWR conservation. Measuring impact is fairly easy if your target audience is small; however, it may be more difficult with a larger audience such as the general public, unless you have an unlimited budget.

Baseline attitude surveys are a good place to start, while focus groups may be useful to clarify what works and doesn't work with your audience, what further information is needed, and what their opinions are about the messages they see or hear.

### KEY QUESTIONS:

- Have we achieved our objectives?
- Did we reach the right target audience and use the right tools?
- Did the audience understand the message and respond appropriately?
- Did this result in concrete action?
- Did we operate within our budget?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Hesselink et al (2007) **Communication, Education and Public Awareness: A Toolkit for NSBAP Coordinators**. CBD/IUCN. <http://www.cepatoolkit.org/>
- **The Communication Initiative Network**; <http://www.comminet.com/>
- Hovland, I. (2005) **Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations**. Overseas Development Institute. <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/155.pdf>
- The **Media Trust**; <http://www.mediatrust.org/about-us>
- The **IUCN Commission on Education and Communication**; <http://www.iucn.org/about/union/commissions/cec/>
- Geneflow, Bioersity International; <http://www.bioersityinternational.org/publications/publications/geneflow/2008.html>

## THE CHALLENGE

### *Changing attitudes is not a quick process*

Remember communications is a long-term process and continuous reflection is a must to determine if your strategy is effective.

Bringing about change will require significant resources, capacity and long-term commitment. You must determine the best way to reach your audience and ensure that key messages are delivered in the most appropriate way to influence agents of change. In the case of CWR, it is most likely that the agents of change will be limited in number; therefore, efforts should be focused on reaching this small, influential audience.

For behavioral change to occur, policy-makers and those people and institutions influencing policy must be convinced CWR need to be conserved and frameworks created to support this.

## CASE STUDY : Listserves to create a CWR community

Email discussion groups can be created as a way to share information and news on common topics of interest. There are thousands of listserves or discussion groups which exist online. It is easy to start such groups by following guidelines and using the software provided by Yahoo or Google. Creating a group is a quick process and membership can grow rapidly. Most software allows you to store and archive messages, add and store files and photographs and links to other relevant online sites and to build profiles of members.

The **Crop Wild Relatives Discussion Group** was established in May 2008 and now has a membership of over 300 people.