

Mid-term Evaluation of the “Clean Seas Campaign”

Campaign Overview

The Clean Seas Campaign - implemented across three one-year phases from 2017 to 2022 - addresses the pressing global issue of marine plastic litter. The use of plastics has increased exponentially in recent decades and much of it ends up in the oceans harming wildlife and contaminating the food chain. Marine litter is increasingly becoming a significant economic, environmental, human health and aesthetic problem, posing complex and multi-dimensional challenges. UNEP advocates for change, proposing that the ultimate solution is a systemic reduction of the consumption and production of plastic.

The Campaign strategy is based on the premise that compelling communications will help increase public and consumer concern, shift attitudes towards the need for immediate widespread action and help drive tangible changes in public behaviour. In turn, increased signs of public concern and changes in behaviour are expected to motivate decision makers in government and industry to take further action. The Campaign aims to achieve attitudinal and behavioural shifts through a broad-based, global, public-facing set of interventions, using a mix of online and offline channels and vehicles, events and consumption and production partnerships. The Campaign contributes to the broader UNEP project, Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML, 2015 - 2018). This project focused on work with governments and industry to promote and support action at national and private sector levels.



Volvo Ocean Race was a dominant theme of interest in Campaign's 1st Phase

The Mid-term Evaluation of the Clean Seas Campaign was designed to assess campaign performance to mid-2019 (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency), and determine the likelihood of the Campaign achieving its intended outcomes and impacts, including their sustainability. The evaluation was undertaken between November 2018 and March 2019 by a consulting team from The Advocacy Hub and with social media analytics by 89up. UNEP's independent Evaluation Office managed the evaluation process.

Achievements: Stimulating and Sharing Informed Dialogue

The evaluation found that, to-date the Campaign has achieved much of what it was designed to do in terms of amplifying public concern and getting people to engage on the issue: it has helped increase the salience of the problem of marine litter and potential solutions to ending single use plastics on social media platforms. Tapping into public attention and concern about marine plastic pollution, the GPML project has augmented discussions with technical input and examples of good practice. Campaign-led events such as beach clean-up operations, the Clean Seas Virtual Reality experience and the Flipflop Dhow (a 9m dhow made of re-

used plastic and flip flops, launched from Lamu and sailed in the region) attracted high participation rates and received a great deal of positive feedback. Partner-organised events significantly extended the reach of Campaign initiatives, although partnerships themselves could have been more strategically targeted. Social media has been a key vehicle for Campaign communications and there are examples of substantial spikes in sharing on Campaign-related threads and topics after planned posts. There is also anecdotal evidence of some wider shifts in behaviour in certain geographies (e.g. Brazil, China, India, Kenya). For example, immediately

after the Chinese micro-blogging platform was launched there was a spike of over 1.7 million posts and onward sharing of posts centred around a range of topics deemed relevant to the broader Campaign. Project outputs such as this attracted more than 600 million readers and generated 32 million discussions.

A group of 5 UN ambassadors accounted for 85% of posts by all ambassadors: Dia Mirza, Lewis Pugh, Aidan Gallagher and Adrian Grenier. Former Executive Director of UNEP, Erik Solheim, was also a key influencer as was, Afroz Shah and Ravi Shankar in India and Ellyane Githae in Kenya.

What this Campaign Achieved

Shifts in Public Concern, Attitudes and Opinion

The Campaign's contribution to positive and rapid action is part of a wider movement for change. The Campaign's communications work forms part of a longer-term narrative which has also included many marine experts and scientists, civil society and grassroots groups and media outlets. The first two years of the Campaign witnessed an increase in the salience of the issue as well as public concerns, with the Campaign playing a central role within a network of public communications. Data from social media analytics shows that the spike in posts discussing the Campaign and related topics after the launch, culminated in an increase of close to 2 million posts, resulting in an estimated 18 billion potential impressions. The dialogue has demonstrated a stronger focus on finding solutions and taking personal and collective action. Specific commitments to act have increased over the same period.

Shifts in Consumer Behaviour and Calls for Action

Shifts in consumer behaviour and the effects of calls for action are difficult to measure and even harder to attribute to a single cause. However, the social media data revealed that the online conversation was qualitatively different before and

after the launch of the Campaign, not only in terms of increasing awareness, but eventually moving towards articles and media content about the wider issue of plastic pollution and marine litter, rather than mentioning the Campaign specifically. For example, phrases such as 'turn the tide on plastic' have developed into stand-alone phrases, often used without reference to the Clean Seas Campaign, particularly by the media. The evaluation confirmed that posts featuring statistics on the devastating effects of plastics and stories about the effects on wildlife were retweeted the most and that adopting a re-usable water bottle and giving up plastic straws were the most popular pledges among consumers.

"the Campaign shows that actions in one place have had a reverberating effect"

In terms of raising public awareness the Campaign shows that actions in one place have had a reverberating effect. Social media analytics show that when governments have acted, public interest in the same topic has increased with substantially more online activity and visibility. In the follow up period a ripple effect – the topic and discussion being shared among a wider and fundamentally global audience – is evident. The most highly shared media content, particularly during the second phase of the Campaign, centred around successful initiatives by countries taking a stance against plastic pollution.

Although UNEP's influence is clearer in some contexts than others, it was found to have likely influenced, and certainly supported, Governments to take action in a number of cases during the Campaign. The promises made by the Modi government, for example, have clear links to UNEP's work. In Kenya too, there are strong grounds for acknowledging that UNEP helped promulgate a tough plastics ban. A key added value of UNEP, throughout the Campaign, has been its leverage and convening power to get decision-makers to the table in ways that NGOs cannot do so easily. UNEA resolutions calling on countries to significantly reduce single use plastics are specific markers of progress in the political arena and are indicative of contributing towards catalytic change in the future.

Increased Political Will and Commitments to Act

A significant number of governments have made promises to act, which, along with UNEA resolutions calling on countries to significantly reduce single use plastics, are specific markers of progress in the political arena. Fifty one countries had joined the Campaign by June 2018 – some have already taken action and others have made substantive commitments to act. For example, India made an ambitious pledge in June 2018 to eliminate all single use plastics by 2022 and Kenya banned the use of plastic bags in 2017. In both cases the close involvement of the two countries with the GPML project and this campaign, indicates a positive influence of UNEP's work.

Campaign Outputs Included

- World Environment Day accounts for the highest volume of online posts (25% of total posts) throughout the 3+ year period. There were also substantive spikes on World Oceans' Day.
- The FlipFlopi Dhow - UNEP was heavily involved during the expedition, setting up press conferences and using the momentum that the voyage created to leverage political action.
- The Volvo Ocean Race - 'Turn the Tide' boat, associated with the Campaign, participated in the race and sent regular updates about plastic pollution along its journey around the world.

Industry Policy and Practices

Work with industry has produced some significant results although it has generally proved to be an area of either slower take up, or less robust promises and subsequent action. As a positive example, Volvo made two ambitious commitments: aiming to remove single-use plastic from all their offices, restaurants and events by the end of 2019, and to ensure 25% of plastics in new cars are made from recycled sources by 2025. The follow through on these commitments can only be seen in the future. Industry partners noted that events organised by the Campaign worked to engage their employees in the issues around plastic pollution.

Key Factors Affecting Performance and Impact

The Campaign's aim of reducing marine litter is central to UNEP's priorities, underpinned as they are by United Nations Environment Assembly resolutions. Particularly significant in this case was the fact that the Campaign was contextually relevant to the wider public and supported by burgeoning public and political interest in environmental issues. Some respondents highlighted that the Campaign made use of innovative and globally relevant communications' techniques to become part of the wider movement for change. Significantly there has been an increasing amount of support for the Campaign shown in the Global South.

While the Campaign has not always been entirely well coordinated with the Global Partnership on Marine Litter, it has managed to contribute to the achievement of the GPML project outcomes through the development of Campaign and awareness materials. However, the design and use of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), baseline data and the Campaign's monitoring system to support the evaluation across all three of its intended phases has been sub-optimal and the campaign strategy was not closely used to guide the implementation of the Campaign. This is largely the result of inefficiencies at the strategic level stemming from a lack of clarity over decision-making, faltering governance procedures within the framework of the Project and the dynamic relating to how funding is decided.

Challenges in the relationship between those responsible for the Campaign and those responsible for managing finances were cited in reporting, with concerns around delays in funding, and short-term deadlines. This made forward-planning difficult. At the same time, levels of resourcing have been described as inadequate for meeting both the global challenge of marine litter and the opportunity represented by the growing number of government pledges. As well as funding, the forward planning necessary to capitalise on government pledges was also lacking. Although the Campaign was found to be reasonably well designed,

"the Campaign made use of innovative and globally relevant communications' techniques"

based on a detailed analysis of the context and the issue, it may have benefited from developing a more detailed mechanism for ensuring that countries that signed up to the Campaign actually took further action.

Despite these issues the problem of marine litter is widely recognised as an important challenge in global agenda and declarations. Policy decisions and national actions to reduce the negative impact of marine litter on the environment have also increased significantly since the launch of the Campaign.

Contributions to Impact:

Reduction of Plastics in the Oceans

The Campaign's long-term impact goal is a closed-loop plastic material chain whereby plastic's management is improved, non-recoverable plastics are phased out, single-use plastics are drastically reduced, and all plastics consumed re-enter the product life cycle, with no waste generated. In cases like this, where widespread change is dependent on many actors playing significant roles and when changes take time to both become evident and to take effect, it is difficult to identify the specific effects of a single cause. Currently, records suggest that plastic production and marine litter are continuing to grow. However, looking at the nature of engagement by consumers, suppliers and policy/regulatory authorities in the Campaign's central issues, as well as the positive context provided by the Global Partnership on Marine Litter and the UNEA resolutions, there is reason for cautious optimism; the changes seen in attitudes towards plastic pollution, reports of changes in user habits, calls for action and commitments towards action at national levels are likely to be long-lasting and lead to a reduction in marine litter. At the national level, links between the Campaign and GPML project and government/private sector action can be more confidently made (e.g Brazil, India, Kenya etc). This optimism is founded on the recognition that knowledge and awareness is increasingly circulating in dynamic ways that promote participation; changes in public opinion are emerging, as is a willingness to engage in collective activity and national decision-makers have shown signs of being prepared to initiate new regulations. Private sector actors may at present still be weighing up the costs of changing production practices but with evidence of a shift in consumer attitudes and increasing salience of the problem of marine litter by both the public and governments, future changes to more sustainable practices within the private sector are plausible.

Table 1. Campaign Social Media Coverage

Campaign periods	Dates	Twitter		Instagram
		Total posts	Potential impressions	Total posts
Pre-campaign	Feb 2016 – Feb 2017	134,045	980 million	9,525
Campaign Phase 1 ("During")	Feb 2017 – June 2018	1,906,540	18 billion	115,217
Campaign Phase 2 ("Post")	July 2018 – June 2019	1,766,322	17 billion	73,178
Totals		3,806,907	35.98 billion	197,920

What Does this Mean for the Future?

Lesson 1: The Campaign shows it is possible for UNEP to shape and promote clear and salient messages through media and online channels and ensure that these are promoted and shared widely.

Context: UNEP has been a prominent actor on social media and the Campaign has been a major contributor to the conversation. It has also crucially generated momentum that will likely continue, hopefully having a catalytic effect, increasing the call for action and encouraging new countries to address the issue.

Lesson 2: It is possible for a Campaign to use clever and globally relevant communications techniques to become part of a wider movement for change and move the conversation away from traditional Northern audiences.

Context: The campaign helped to create, and now rides, a wave of favourable public and political opinion. It has had global results and has grown support in the Global South. It has shown that the need to cut plastics' use resonates globally and that it is possible to mobilise champions of progressive measures among Southern governments.

Lesson 3: A broader, more widely-owned strategy, properly resourced, should have been agreed and followed through from the outset in anticipation of success. Success beyond expectations created opportunities, which have not always been capitalised upon to full effect.

Context: The campaign strategy was not closely used to guide the implementation of the Campaign. This resulted in a considerable disconnect between the scope of work/KPIs and the course of action followed, which effectively hindered analysis of the Campaign's impact.

Lesson 4: Better decision-making structures and systems at the operational, strategic and governance levels are required in order for the campaign to be even more effective.

Context: The Campaign is not a project in UNEP's use of the term (i.e. specific entry in the Programme of Work), rather a component of the GPML project. This structure has supported a more flexible approach, allowing the Campaign to work across Divisions and teams. While the Campaign has had adequate operational decision-making systems allowing it to produce significant outputs, campaign governance and leadership could have been improved.

Lesson 5: Campaigns with a partnership approach should make roles and responsibilities regarding relationship and partnership-building work clear between the coordinating role that the central campaign staff play vis-à-vis the work of technical and regional staff.

Context: The campaign strategy suffered from a lack of strategic 'follow through' at the national/regional level. Although the Campaign was found to be reasonably well designed, based on a detailed analysis of the context and the issue, it did not fully establish a mechanism for making countries that signed up to the campaign take further action. The Campaign did not envisage substantive national campaigns which could have potentially helped activate the commitment made by Governments. Although many regions experienced high-level government sign-up early in the Campaign, it was unclear what success looked like in detail. As such, a more concrete communications strategy for following through on the commitment of Governments that initially signed up, may have been beneficial for the Campaign.

Lesson 6: Demonstrating success and linking it to the Campaign required a coherent and consistent overview of the logic of the Campaign, informing the setting of a baseline and ways to track progress that would support making real-time judgements to strengthen the Campaign's results.

Context: Monitoring and Learning systems were not applied to the campaign in a meaningful way. Regular monitoring and data, including digital monitoring (e.g. use of Google Analytics etc), were not available to the campaign team in order to make informed, real-time decisions, as well as to provide evidence of results and/or to justify how money was spent for accountability purposes. Data were not collected on the Key Performance Indicators.

Lesson 7: Public communications work can benefit from analysis and consideration of disaggregated audiences, especially relating to gender and geography.

Context: The different roles played by women and men in shopping (and by extension in running the household) was recognised by staff but gender and human rights considerations were not apparent in the Campaign. The take up of the Campaign differed geographically and this could be consciously promoted in future campaign designs.

Important information:

This evaluation was undertaken by independent evaluation specialists (The Advocacy Hub and 89up) under the guidance of the Evaluation Office of UNEP.

The full Evaluation Report can be found online at:

www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment/evaluation.

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