

Winning Hearts & Minds

How Change Agents, Funders, and Creative Agencies
Can Harness the Power of Strategic
Communications in Nigeria

Summary Report

October 2023



Overview of the Winning Hearts and Minds Report

Released in April 2023, the Winning Hearts and Minds report commissioned by Luminate explores the reasons behind the disconnect between change agents and strategic communicators. It also provides insights on how to unlock the value-creation opportunities that lie at the intersection of their work.

A review of the report findings from the Nigerian context reveals many similarities in how change agents and funders in Nigeria engage with strategic communication firms. This condensed report explores the key findings from the Winning Hearts and Minds report that apply to the Nigerian context and it highlights important recommendations to strengthen collaboration between change agents and strategic communicators in Nigeria.



Key Findings from the Winning Hearts and Minds Report

1 Change agents underutilise strategic communication tools.



Change agents often have a limited understanding of how they can effectively collaborate with strategic communication firms. As a result, they underestimate the role strategic communication plays in creating behaviour change and inspiring action that enhances their work.

Change agents interviewed revealed that communications work is often discussed once the project has already started and treated as an add-on rather than as an integral component of the project itself.

2 Strategic communication firms have a limited knowledge of and exposure to change agents.



The social impact sector presents a unique opportunity for strategic communication firms to leverage their deep expertise to contribute to social change. However, they often find it more difficult to navigate the social impact sector than the for-profit commercial sector because they lack a

thorough understanding of how the sector operates and how change agents work.



3 Lack of impetus from funders has dissuaded change agents from focusing on strategic communication.

Funders play a critical role in determining how change agents approach strategic communication work. The capacity of change agents to enhance their strategic communication efforts largely depends on the willingness and ability of funders to provide financing to support this. Funders can emphasise the importance of strategic communication during funding conversations. Additionally, providing unrestricted funding can help change agents to develop their strategic communication capabilities.



How the Findings Apply Within the Nigerian Context

As noted in the Winning Hearts and Minds report, strategic communication is a key tool for change agents. This is especially true for the hundreds of change agents in Nigeria who work tirelessly to solve some of the most pressing societal problems.

Research which involved one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions with change agents and strategic communicators revealed that the key findings from the Winning Hearts and Minds report also apply within the Nigerian context.

1 Limited insight into the role of strategic communications

This was the greatest challenge identified by respondents when asked about the factors that limit the collaboration between change agents and strategic communicators. For a lot of change agents in Nigeria, communications has been reduced to social media management. Not only does this approach prevent them from maximising the power of communications, but it also has an impact on how they prioritise strategic communication within their social impact work.

“A lot of times, change agents don't appreciate the professionalism, effort, and work that goes into communicating. Usually, they think it's all about social media and posting content online. As a result, they don't see the importance of the work we do.” (Communications Manager of a Nigeria-based nonprofit)

2

Lack of understanding of what change agents do and how they work

On the other hand, when change agents engage strategic communication firms or personnel, they often find that the strategies and tactics that are proposed do not align with their needs and overarching goals. Without a clear understanding of the work change agents do and how they operate differently from for-profit organisations, strategic communication firms will struggle to create tailor-made solutions that will be beneficial to the change agents.

“Communications professionals need to think of how to optimise their processes with the knowledge and understanding of how nonprofits work. They also need to borrow the skills and level of excellence from other sectors to properly support change agents in their work.” (Executive Director of a Nigeria-based NGO network)

3

Inadequate funding and budget

Finally, because change agents in Nigeria are mostly focused on the social impact work to be done, they allocate budgets to their communications teams and strategic communication firms that are insufficient to work with. Indeed, it is common for all of the budget to be allocated to programme implementation because this is what is expected from funders.

Without dedicating an adequate budget to strategic communication efforts, change agents in Nigeria do not benefit from the results that strategic communication brings.

“Funders give money, but they often focus all their money on solutions. As a result, they want to see budgets that are directly tied to the solutions without factoring in that communications is a huge part of it.” (Respondent working at the intersection of communications and social impact)



Key Recommendations for Change Agents, Strategic Communication Firms and Funders

Change Agents

- Change agents need to strive to have a better understanding of how they want to communicate their work and influence their intended audience. They also need to recognise the pivotal role that strategic communication can play in facilitating their goals.
- To overcome budgetary constraints, change agents with shared goals can collaborate and pool resources to access the necessary communication tools and engage strategic communication firms.

Strategic Communication Firms

- To establish a significant presence within the social sector, strategic communication firms should prioritise the social impact issues they want to focus on, develop the necessary expertise, and actively participate in industry gatherings focused on social impact to connect with change agents.
- Strategic communication firms should also consider adjusting their business models to cater to the unique needs of change agents. This could be achieved by creating different rate cards for nonprofit and for profit organisations.

Funders

- Funders should encourage potential grantees (change agents) to prioritise strategic communication by incorporating this as a designated line item in the budget templates accompanying grant applications. They should also incentivise strategic communication firms by giving them access to exclusive funder networks that might otherwise remain inaccessible.
- Where possible, funders should provide change agents with unrestricted funding which will give them enough room to make the necessary investments to improve strategic communication.



Although strategic communication and social impact appear to be two distinct fields, a genuine collaboration will unlock the full potential to achieve a common purpose: to win hearts and minds.

To read the full Winning Hearts and Minds report and learn more about how change agents and strategic communicators can collaborate for increased impact, please visit - bit.ly/WinningHeartsAndMindsReport

Or scan:

