

# Strategic communications for economic development





## Introducing AO

Absolute Options LLC (AO) was created in 2011 by a team of economists and communications experts in order to drive innovations in international economic development and humanitarian assistance.

By merging fundamental economic principals with detailed experience-based situational analysis, AO creates development strategies that are evidenced-based, actionable, and impact-oriented.

AO principal staff and associated technical experts have led reforms in diverse sectors including small and medium enterprise (SME) development, access to finance, agricultural value chain development, food aid, and disaster and post-crisis relief.

The company's global experience includes projects in the Middle East and North Africa, South and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, and Sub-Saharan Africa.





## The AO approach to strategic communications

*Transformation* is the very essence of economic development. AO extends and intensifies the transformative outcomes of the economic development programs we design through our innovative approach to strategic communications.

We begin this process by mapping stakeholder interests and concerns and analyzing how they influence decision makers and public opinion. Our communication strategies facilitate improved information sharing that strengthens stakeholder engagement, raises public awareness, and catalyzes social and public policy transformation. By developing stakeholder capacity to design, adopt, and implement strategic communication strategies through the most effective media, AO empowers stakeholders beyond the life of the projects we design.

Principal elements of AO's strategic communications approach include:

- a. outreach efforts to inform the public
- b. advocacy and promotion with decision makers
- c. stakeholder engagement

## Informing the public

At the broadest level, our strategic communications activities target the general public in order to inform and engage the widest possible selection of potential stakeholders in a given initiative.



CASE STUDY - Coffee in Chiapas: Between November 2013 and January 2014, AO staff provided technical support to Heifer International, the Howard G. Buffet Foundation (HGBF) and the Coca-Cola Company to develop the coffee value chain in the Soconusco region of Chiapas, Mexico.

As part of this effort, AO designed strategies to empower coffee producers through dissemination of best practices that improve the productivity and quality of local coffee. AO also developed the video above as an outreach tool to inform and engage the coffee industry and the general public about the region's opportunities and challenges. For the full video go to: [facebook.com/photo.php?v=558632500891181](https://facebook.com/photo.php?v=558632500891181)

# Advocacy and promotion

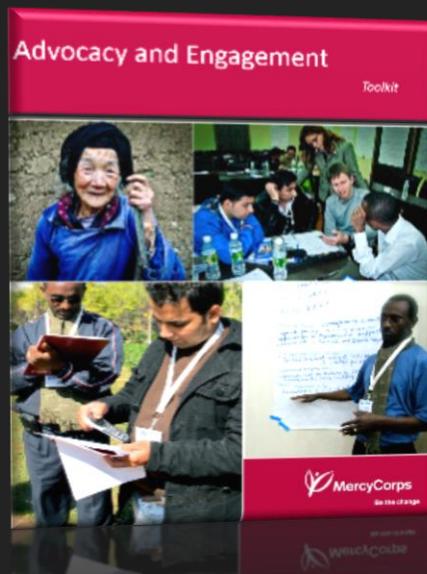
AO advocacy and engagement efforts have targeted decision makers and project champions, not only to reform policies that limit the enabling environment, but also to launch promotion initiatives in target sectors.

## CASE STUDY – Global Water Policy Reform

In 2012, AO worked with Mercy Corps International to develop its global advocacy capacity in the areas of water and disaster preparedness. Through this initiative, we created an Advocacy and Engagement Toolkit, and trained Mercy Corps staff to design and implement corollary policy reform initiatives in these sectors.

## CASE STUDY - Positive Promotion in North Africa

In 2011, AO staff implemented the Results-Oriented Commercial Organization Capacity Development (ROCCD) project for the U.S. State Department, an 18-month project to build the capacity of business development organizations and chambers of commerce across North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia). Through the ROCCD project, we introduced cutting edge approaches to trade and finance sector promotion, which have led to new initiatives that are now ongoing across the region.





## Stakeholder engagement

We design stakeholder coordination plans to enable the engagement of diverse stakeholders in paradigm-changing initiatives. To ensure the integrity of these plans, AO technical specialists implement detailed *Stakeholder Assessments* that:

- a. map stakeholders and stakeholder groups
- b. identify concerns of each group
- c. design media strategies for effective stakeholder communication

### CASE STUDY – Water Finance in Central America

Beginning in August 2013, AO began working with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to study the feasibility and design of a facility to finance water services in Central America. This initiative replaces donor-funded water projects with sustainable technical assistance and finance by linking water service providers with private sector technical support services and water system funding.

In support of this initiative, AO undertook a Stakeholder Analysis to better understand and address the reticence of water users to engage with the private sector, and the concerns of the finance sector in providing credit services to water service providers and users.



## A world of options for strategic communications

Stakeholder assessment

Communications strategies

Outreach materials

Media campaigns

Advocacy capacity development

Advocacy campaigns

Photojournalism

Promotional photography and videos

Multimedia presentations

Branding and marketing



For more information go to: [absoluteoptionsllc.com](https://absoluteoptionsllc.com)