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2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: implications for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Implementation of the comprehensive communication strategy and the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010–2020)

Report on progress in the implementation of the comprehensive communication strategy and on the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010–2020)

Note by the secretariat

Summary


The Comprehensive Communication Strategy (CCS), developed by decision 3/COP.8 to support the effective implementation of the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018), has been the basis of the UNCCD's core communication activities. As the lifespan of the CCS nears its end, there is a need for a revised communication framework that complements the future strategic framework of the Convention.

This report reviews the action taken by the secretariat for the implementation of the CCS. It also incorporates the action taken as a result of the independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the UNCCD communication. It contains recommendations for the consideration of the Conference of the Parties at its thirteenth session.

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I. Background

1. The Comprehensive Communication Strategy (CCS) was formed as an outcome of decision 3/COP.8 to support the effective implementation of the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) (The Strategy). The CCS has been the backbone of the implementation of core communication activities undertaken by the secretariat since its adoption at the ninth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 9).

2. At COP 12, Parties requested the secretariat to: (i) develop a compelling communication narrative for action and structure communication around key strategic themes in view of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 15.3; (ii) identify inspiring human-interest stories and testimonies from sustainable land management (SLM) projects for promotion and dissemination through the Land for Life multi-media products in order to build awareness and public support for addressing drought, land degradation and desertification (DLDD) by maximizing the expertise and strengths available through the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) of the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight Against Desertification (UNDDD); and (iii) continue coordinating the implementation of the CCS and the General Assembly mandated resolution on UNDDD.

3. By decision 4/COP.12, the general communication narrative of the secretariat was developed around key strategic themes in view of SDG target 15.3 as a tool to advance the implementation of the UNCCD and to capture the attention of a wider audience beyond the conventional UNCCD stakeholders, particularly, the general public.

4. In September 2015, an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of UNCCD communication was conducted. Although the evaluation was not intended to assess UNCCD communication performance against the CCS, the communication activities undertaken by the secretariat were reviewed from the perspective of ‘outsiders.’ This report addresses the evaluation outcomes and recommendations in connection with the analysis of activities undertaken by the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM). It also reports on the actions taken by the secretariat and the GM as the result of the evaluation outcomes.

II. Implementation progress

A. Outreach through campaigns and events

5. Held every year on 17 June, World Day to Combat Desertification (WDCD) gained increasing momentum in 2016 when 87 governmental, intergovernmental and civil society organizations reported to the secretariat on their observance activities. The increase in reporting numbers is probably linked to the 100-day WDCD online countdown campaign where social reach during the period via Twitter and Weibo reached 444,100 and 1,196,700 respectively. The UNCCD Facebook page recorded an increase of 921 likes during the campaign while #2016WDCD was the most popular hashtag on Twitter on 17 June. More than 380 people participated in online pledge and quiz during the campaign. Some countries, such as Brazil and Portugal, celebrated the WDCD and their National Dryland Champions on the same day.

6. The global observance for the WDCD and the High-level Dialogue on the Belt and Road Joint Action Initiative to Combat Desertification was hosted by the State Forestry Administration of China (SFA). High-level attendants included H.E. Mr. Wang Yang, Vice Premier of China, H.E. Ms. Tarja Halonen, Former President of Finland and UNCCD Drylands Ambassador, and nine Ministers/Vice Ministers from eight countries (Argentina,

China, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Namibia, Niger, Republic of Korea and Turkey). The United Nations Secretary-General sent a video message to the observance which was attended by 400 people.¹

7. The 2017 WDCD global observance is scheduled for 15 June 2017 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, hosted by the Ministry of Environment, Green Economy and Climate Change for Burkina Faso. When this report was prepared, the event was expecting the attendance of three Heads of State and 10 ministers. H.E. Mr. Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, President of Burkina Faso, will open the event. A high-level ministerial forum is scheduled during the observance event under the 2017 WDCD theme, “Our Land. Our Home. Our Future”.

B. Information dissemination

8. At the time of the independent evaluation on the UNCCD communication, survey respondents listed their preferred channels for receiving information. Email came in first place, followed by the website and printed materials. During this reporting period, the secretariat strengthened information dissemination through email correspondence. Several e-newsletters have been consolidated as bi-weekly UNCCD News Alerts since January 2017 with a specific focus on the latest news and developments. Currently, the UNCCD News Alert has more than 23,000 active subscribers. Seventeen publications were also published during this reporting period, all of which were translated into at least French and Spanish, and some of which into other United Nations languages.

9. The UNCCD Library and e-catalogue collection have been integrated into the Knowledge Hub (see below), starting in October 2016.

C. Web and social media

10. The UNCCD website is the Convention’s core communication platform. According to the independent evaluation, mentions of the UNCCD on other organizations’ websites – an indicator of the relevance and influence of the UNCCD – more than doubled between 2012 and 2015. There was also a significant increase in the number of online references to the UNCCD in association with major global issues such as food security, migration and climate change.

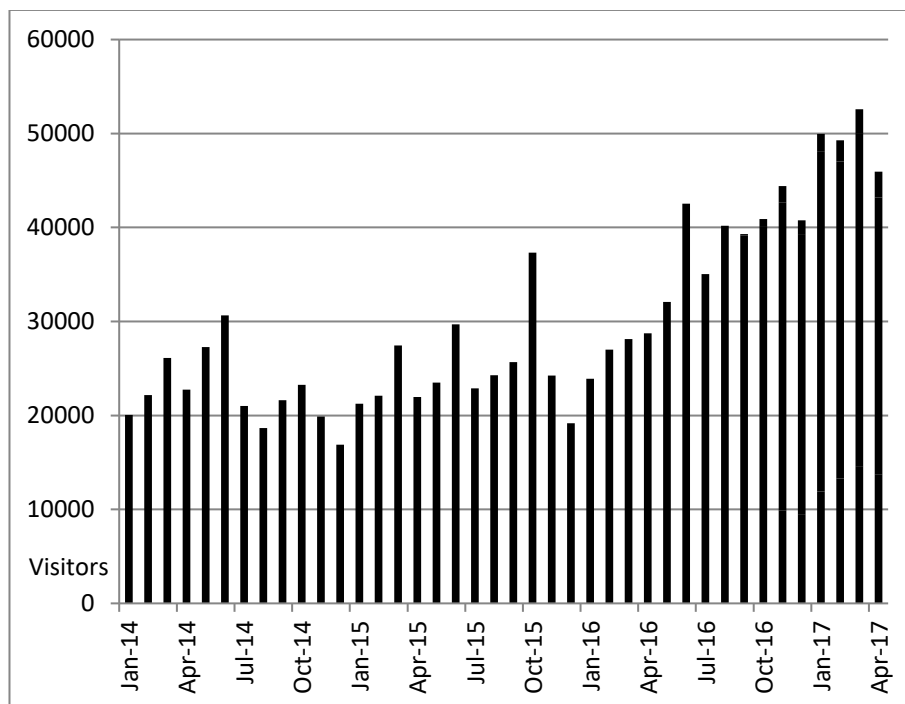
11. That said, the evaluation pointed to weaknesses in the UNCCD website, including a poor user experience, introspection and an unintuitive structure and navigation. The evaluation recommended an urgent overhaul of the website. As a result, the secretariat embarked on the development of a new website in August 2016. The new website was launched in November 2016 and the entire migration from the old website platform is expected to be completed by July 2017.

12. The new website encompasses the work of the secretariat and the GM, and works in close collaboration with the UNCCD Knowledge Hub, which was also launched in November 2016. The Knowledge Hub (then the Scientific Knowledge Brokering Portal) was strengthened by decision 20/COP.12 in order to facilitate and promote access to relevant knowledge from multiple sources through the internet, mobile phones and other communication channels. Further information on the UNCCD Knowledge Hub is available in document ICCD/COP(13)/CST/8.

¹ The detailed report of the global observance event is available at:
<www.unccd.int/en/programmes/Event-and-campaigns/WDCD/wdcd2016/Pages/Beijing_WDCD_Report.aspx>.

13. Figure 1 shows the changes in numbers of unique visitors since January 2014. The figures differ from past COP reports on the same subject as past reports were made by SharePoint, the content management system for the old UNCCD website. The statistics in figure 1 were generated using Google Analytics, which offers more detailed information. Due to the limits of Google outreach, however, the statistics do not account for all visitors to the UNCCD website. Nevertheless, the increase in visitors since the launch of the new website is apparent from the figure. The substantial increase in visits after November 2015 is mainly attributed to the Capacity Building Marketplace web page.

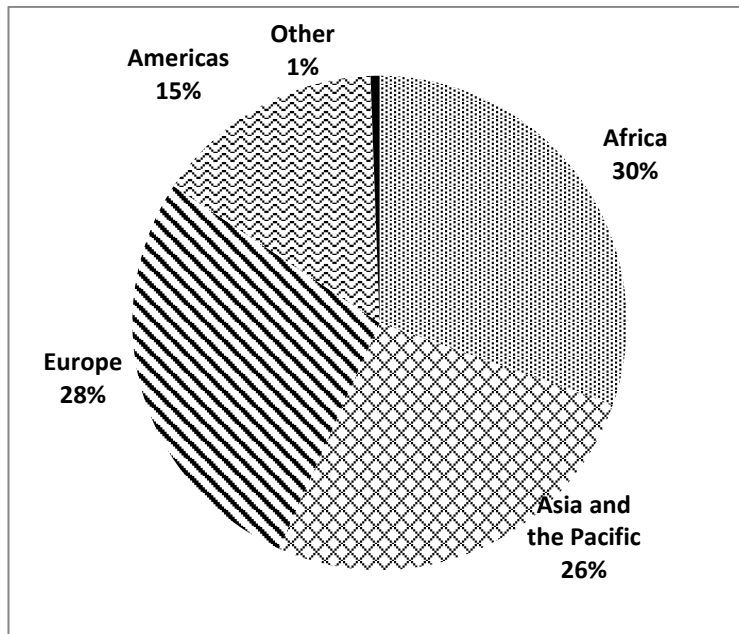
Figure 1
UNCCD web visitors between January 2014 and March 2017



14. As in figure 2, Africa accounts for most users, followed by Europe and Asia and the Pacific.² In a separate analysis, the top five cities from which the UNCCD website is accessed are all located in Africa.

² The limit of Google analytics due to its outreach must be noted.

Figure 2
 Access to the UNCCD website by continents as registered by Google Analytics



15. The evaluation report noted a significant rise in social media activity, albeit from a low base, with the number of Twitter followers and Facebook likes increasing by approximately 400% and 550% respectively between 2012 and 2015. The table below shows the increase in UNCCD social media outreach from June 2015 to May 2017. The recorded social reach number was 444,100 for Twitter and over 1 million on Weibo during online campaign periods such as e-Forum, “Empowering Youth through Green Jobs” and the UNCCD “Land for Life Youth Social Media Activists Challenge: Are you the One?”. Tweet impressions relating to campaign Tweets reached 6,437 while campaign partnerships with civil society organizations (CSO) and other United Nations organizations also increased the level of outreach. Average social reach per month since January 2017 is 90,000.

Table
Social media outreach

| <i>Social Media tool</i> | <i>Outreach June 2015</i> | <i>Outreach May 2017</i> | <i>Approximate increase</i> |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Facebook | 13 504 likes | 17 604 likes | 30.4% |
| Twitter | 6 328 followers | 13 041 followers | 106.1% |
| Weibo | 33 760 fans | 34 933 fans | 3.5% |

D. Best practice promotions: “Land for Life” programme

16. During the programme review in 2015, the “Land for Life” programme was re-established and now operates under two major components: (i) the Land for Life Award and (ii) Awareness-raising and Knowledge Support. The Award raises significant interest among the public, CSOs and the UNCCD National Focal Points in search of nominations,

especially during its nomination processes. It plays an important role in raising the UNCCD profile as well as collecting good SLM practices.

E. Public outreach and agenda-setting by the media

17. The main media outreach by the UNCCD was through the media database, having grown from 1,000 subscribers in 2009 to over 4,000 by the end of the biennium. According to the system's feedback, all media materials disseminated are read by around 20% of subscribers. During the reporting period, this outreach was enhanced through partnerships and cooperation with other United Nations partners and intergovernmental partners, particularly the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the United Nations Department of Public Information. Strategic outreach continued via links developed with individual journalists working for global media or wire services such as Reuters, Inter-Press Service (IPS), SciDev, Xinhua and La Prensa. For the biennium, the primary targets were policy-makers and decision-makers, business leaders, non-governmental organizations and the development community.

18. A minimum of 30 media pieces are disseminated by the secretariat each year, including opinions and interviews. The secretariat made a strategic decision to turn the messages published on United Nations Days into opinions, which are subsequently featured on the UNCCD website. This has enabled the secretariat's messages to be published on media platforms reaching new segments of the general public.

19. The UNCCD entered into a partnership with the IPS to direct public outreach on land degradation neutrality (LDN) to niche readers and platforms at national level, to which the secretariat does not have access. The IPS produced a series of stories which were disseminated extensively through diverse channels: media subscribers which replicated the articles worldwide on their own platforms; newsletters with more than 200,000 subscribers; and social media with up to 500,000 followers. Depending on the focus, the stories were then translated into Spanish, Portuguese, French, Swahili, Finnish, Dutch, Swedish and German. As the largest wire service of developing country journalists, the partnership with the IPS has enabled the UNCCD to share stories across developing countries. By way of example, the stories on drought in Sri Lanka and women's empowerment in Ethiopia were picked up by niche media in the Americas and the Caribbean, and the op-ed issued on International Women's day was further disseminated worldwide by another 100 media outlets for each of the English, French and Spanish versions.

20. Two media training sessions were conducted during the biennium. IPS, in collaboration with UNCCD and the United Nations Foundation, organized a capacity building workshop for media, civil society, academia and United Nations officials and interns in Bonn, between 25–26 October 2016. The focus was the SDGs with an emphasis on desertification, drought and climate change. Seventy participants attended, some of whom published articles on the event. Hungary also organized a one-week media training workshop between 11–14 April 2017 in Georgia with the support of GIZ and in collaboration with the UNCCD. The purpose of the workshop was to create a pool of journalists to write about land erosion/degradation and environmental problems in Southern Caucasus countries.

21. Overall, the number of online press and broadcast mentions of the UNCCD have nearly doubled over the last three years, with a good geographic spread, including op-eds in major international publications. One of the biennium's key achievements was the production of a National Geographic film focusing on the combined effects of desertification and climate change in the Sahel in terms of driving migration within the region and to Europe. The initiative and partnership created unprecedented interest among

other global media outlets, such as the British Broadcasting Corporation, Al Jazeera and Le Monde which also reported on the subject during the same period. In another unprecedented development, the New York Times published three opinion pieces and a front-page news article on the film.

22. The UNCCD is approached with increasing frequency for interviews and contributions to newspapers, magazines and publications read by developed country audiences. An unprecedented number of requests came from Parties involved in the LDN Target Setting Programme for the capacity building of journalists at national level in order to strengthen awareness-raising around LDN and, in future, report on success stories and best practices. UNCCD official meetings and events have also become a strategic opportunity for other intergovernmental organizations to reach out to their general public. Emerging issues, such as migration, the energy crisis and drought have provided strategic moments for public outreach.

23. Some key actions to improve outreach to public media include: (i) access to robust research or scientific data on emerging issues; (ii) a refocused message to prioritize people over the land³ and promote the Convention as a provider of what people want and are looking for; (iii) delivery of strategic UNCCD products to venues where primary actors congregate; and (iv) the development of an iconic or symbolic concept/image associated with the Convention to inspire people to act. By way of example, the “growing a world wonder” concept by the GM transformed the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and Sahel initiative from a subject of media cynicism to a highly sought-after partnership.

F. Drylands ambassadors and celebrities

24. During the reporting period, the Drylands Ambassadors contributed by: (i) participating in the 2016 World Day social media and global observance events; (ii) organizing the “Save the Earth, Save the Land” exhibition at the UN Headquarters, opened by former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; and (iii) attending national events as keynote speakers and panelists.

25. As most of the active Ambassadors provide the service at their own cost, the Drylands Ambassadors’ programme is not necessarily run in line with a demand-driven approach. It may be necessary to look at the programme from a different angle to maximize the benefits of the support from these highly regarded public personalities in view of the future strategic framework.

G. United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight Against Desertification

26. Decision 4/COP.12 requested the secretariat to identify inspiring human-interest stories and testimonies from SLM projects for promotion and dissemination in order to build public awareness and support for DLDD by maximizing the expertise and strengths of the IATF of the United Nations Decade. In 2016, the secretariat issued two formal calls to UNCCD stakeholders for the submission of human-interest stories. It also invited IATF members to submit stories from their field of activity and testimonies from individuals who have benefitted from these projects/activities.

27. With the financial support of the World Bank/TerrAfrica, the submitted stories were published under the series, *Land for Life: Create Life, Transform Lives*, in English and French. The book highlights the benefits of sustainable land and water management for

³ The guiding principles for national and global media: “if it bleeds, it leads the news”.

human security, with the key themes of climate change adaptation, the halting of forced migration, poverty eradication and wealth creation. Around 300 hard copies were disseminated at the fifteenth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention by the partners and online. The initiative has produced around 100 high-quality pictures of land restoration in Africa and Asia which have featured in UNCCD publications. A three-minute social media video and a 27-minute broadcast media film were produced as a sequel to the 10-minute film produced at COP 12. The three films were offered for use free of charge to all stakeholders as part of the observance of the 2017 World Day.

28. Task Force members continued to promote women's empowerment by: (i) raising awareness of the adverse effects of gender inequality on land use and management; (ii) mobilizing new partners to support women's empowerment in the Convention; (iii) sharing UNCCD achievements in other Multilateral Environmental Agreement forums, such as the Global Environment Facility and UNFCCC; and (iv) providing technical advice on gender to the secretariat. The partners began preparations for a Gender Day event at COP 13 in May 2017. The interest and engagement of Task Force members varies, however there is interest to mark the end of the United Nations Decade in 2020 in a highly visible manner.

III. Re-branding of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

29. Improvement of visual identity was another recommended area in the evaluation report. The previous logo was developed by the secretariat in 1994 and adjusted slightly in 2011 to illustrate the global nature of the desertification and land degradation issue. However, the descriptive illustration was often critiqued as obsolete.

30. The UNCCD corporate logo was revisited in terms of its design and representativeness, resulting in the launch of a new logo in January 2017. The new corporate logo (see figure 3) strengthens the positioning of the Convention and better communicates to external audiences on the importance and urgency of land restoration. It combines the Convention's key elements in an elegant and simplistic delivery that can be instantly interpreted by an international audience. These elements are:

- (a) The landscape, which represents land stewardship;
- (b) The hand, which shows a human presence;
- (c) Nature, which suggests hope, progress and life;
- (d) The circle, which symbolizes an inclusive Convention with global reach;
- (e) The traditional United Nations laurel wreath, which demands respect and demonstrates authority.

Figure 3

New logo of the UNCCD



IV. Future directions post 10-year Strategy

31. As mentioned in the Background section, the current CCS was developed and implemented to support The Strategy. A new communication strategy that complements the future strategic framework of the post-Strategy is now required.

32. The independent evaluation and its outcomes are important indicators in the development of the future direction of UNCCD communication. Of the key recommendations to emerge from the evaluation exercise, some have already been implemented, including the redesign of the UNCCD website and the visual identity. One critical recommendation for the post-Strategy communication activities is the mainstreaming of the message with one overarching message distinctively defining the UNCCD, supported by a smaller number of issue-driven sub-messages.

33. The overarching message will be developed to support the implementation of the future strategic framework of the Convention (ICCD/COP(13)/3). In addition, as recommended by the evaluation report, communication work plans will be based on the long-running strategic issues, not events. Major UNCCD communication products such as the Global Land Outlook could be optimized as a strategic communication platform. At the same time, it will be important to ensure the UNCCD continues to be perceived as a people-centered Convention that meets the visions of the people through SLM.

34. Furthermore, the evaluation report suggests a short and succinct communication strategy, pointing out that the current CCS is too extensive for the UNCCD's resources.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

35. The evaluation of the communication activities highlighted the effectiveness of the communication activities implemented by the secretariat under the CCS. However, some areas require improvement.

36. The next communication strategy will place its emphasis on strengthening the credibility of a UNCCD corporate brand that seamlessly supports the awareness-raising and outreach by the secretariat and GM among all stakeholders, including decision-makers, investors, women, youth, indigenous peoples and land users. There is also a need to boost engagement with the public and a wider range of decision-makers and implementers at country level for further implementation of the Convention through the efforts to achieve LDN.

37. There is a need for a continuous advocacy on LDN as a tool for implementing the Convention and as a way of building the resilience of both ecosystems and populations. The communication needs to be further oriented towards this goal and the outcomes of the future strategic framework of the Convention.

38. In view of the above, Parties may wish to:

(a) Develop a short communication strategy framework with key objectives, messages and channels to ensure consistency on the UNCCD positions and identity, based on the outcomes of the future strategic framework of the Convention;

(b) Also develop an overarching narrative that captures the work of the UNCCD and promotes LDN as a tool for the delivery of the Convention and multiple SDGs, supported by a smaller number of issue-driven sub-messages on emerging issues related to the Convention;

- (c) Translate agreed UNCCD advocacy policy positions into useful decision-making tools (brochures, guides and tools, infographics) conducive to scaling up and integration into national implementation measures;
- (d) Enhance the effectiveness of media outreach through partnerships, and develop and align the subscriber database with the new strategy, media training, increased publication of people-focused stories, improved delivery and dissemination of products;
- (e) Increase the profile of SLM among the general public by providing data, video footage and graphics as well as access and incentives to better promote the implementation of the Convention, using LDN as a tool;
- (f) Establish a framework to better promote awareness of good practice and build the capacity of key stakeholders to scale up the most fitting approaches or access new or more appropriate technology;
- (g) Encourage a UNCCD presence at a calendar of strategic advocacy and high-profile events, including, but not limited to, an annual celebration of World Day to Combat Desertification and the UNDDD, which create the biggest impact and reach;
- (h) Strengthen the UNCCD visual identity with the production of branded corporate material and ensure the UNCCD corporate website, social media channels, newsletter and library information services contain dynamic and interactive content;
- (i) Enhance outreach through UNCCD social media as one of the core communication platforms and in line with other digital platforms, particularly the website.

39. The table in the annex to this document contains an estimate of the financial requirements for implementation of the activities referred to in paragraph 38 above, to be funded from extra-budgetary resources.

Annex

Financial requirements for the implementation of the activities to be funded from extra-budgetary resources

The table below indicates the budget requirements for the implementation of the activities referred to in paragraph 38 of this document.

Table
Activities and cost estimates

| <i>Activity</i> | <i>Estimated cost (euros)</i> |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Provide communication support for policy messages (Brochures, Events, Visual presentation materials) | 10 000 ^a |
| Strengthen outreach and engagement through the website, social media platforms and relevant international events | 80 000 ^a |
| Provide media training for national and community-level journalists | 25 000 ^a |
| Involve Drylands Ambassadors in advocacy & lobbying at targeted events | 10 000 ^a |
| Organize global observance of the World Day to Combat Desertification | 50 000 ^a |
| “Land for Life” programme (online campaigns, publications/publicity materials, L4L Award) | 270 000 ^b |
| Total extra-budgetary resources | 445 000 |

^a The activity will be implemented at a reduced scale if resources are not secured.

^b Funds secured.