United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the UNCCD communication

The primary aim of this evaluation is to provide practical recommendations for strengthening UNCCD communication. It mainly focuses on the UNCCD (i.e. the work of the Convention secretariat) but also addresses elements of the communication of the Global Mechanism.

This evaluation is not assessing UNCCD communication performance against its Comprehensive Communication Strategy, but instead looking more broadly at communication from the perspective of 'outsiders' and good practice.

Executive summary

Despite the limited availability of systematic year-on-year monitoring and evaluation data, there is good evidence to indicate that the UNCCD has communicated effectively, relative to its human, financial and technological constraints.

- In a stakeholder survey, 84% of respondents said that their knowledge of the UNCCD had increased over the last three years, while 86% claimed that the information they received was relevant to their work and 46% said it influenced their work. Moreover, 60% of respondents rated UNCCD's communication as 'good' and 28% as 'very good'.

- Mentions of the UNCCD on other organisations' websites – an indicator of the UNCCD's relevance and influence - more than doubled over the last three years. There were also significant increases in the number of online references to the UNCCD in association with major global issues such as food security, migration and climate change

- Average daily visitor numbers to the UNCCD website increased by just 7% over the last three years, possibly due to technological issues associated with the Sharepoint-based site. However, social media activity has risen significantly, albeit from a low base, with the number of Twitter followers and Facebook likes increasing by approximately 400% and 550% respectively

- The number of online press and broadcast mentions of the UNCCD nearly doubled over the last three years, with a good geographic spread, including op-eds in major international publications.

While there has been good progress in UNCCD's communication, there are a number of ways that it can be improved to strengthen its effectiveness and the organisation's ability to achieve its strategy.

- *Messaging*: UNCCD's messaging should be streamlined, and have clear calls to action, so that the organisation establishes a more distinctive position in a crowded field. Currently, it is communicating across a wide range of issues, without a clear focus and in several fields where its voice is being drowned out by bigger, more established players. An overarching message that explains UNCCD's reason for being, probably based on land degradation, is required, supported by a small number of sub-messages, probably linked to a small number of global issues such as food security and migration. Practical calls to action for different audiences are also needed to mobilise action.

- **Website:** As the organisation's 'shop window' and core communication platform, the UNCCD's website urgently needs to be overhauled to address its numerous flaws, including its poor user experience, introspection, unintuitive structure and navigation, and failure to use the site to communicate key messages. The current site is probably not only limiting visitor numbers and interaction but also undermining the UNCCD's professional reputation. Most of these problems are attributed to the organisation's use of a Sharepoint web platform.

- **Visual branding:** Visual branding is important for visibility, credibility and for communicating in other ways, but UNCCD has virtually no visual identity as its visual branding is applied very inconsistently across its otherwise well-designed individual outputs. There is not a coherent visual brand that says "UNCCD". A better corporate identity manual is required, and should be adhered to. Ideally, the whole branding, including the logo, should be revisited. The Global Mechanism has a distinct visual identity but separate from the UNCCD; it should be established as a complementary visual brand or sub-brand.

- **Social media and other digital channels***:* A full-time online specialist should be recruited to optimise UNCCD's online potential in social media as well as to ensure a more coherent approach to other digital platforms, particularly the website.

- **Press and broadcast media**: Dedicated funds should be allocated to regularly train journalists, which is currently done on a rare and ad hoc basis due to resource constraints.

- **Written and visual content***:* All major documents should have at-a-glance summaries (few, if any, currently do) and use headings and other devices, including graphics, that communicate key points quickly for 'skim' readers (most people). In addition, infographics should be used much more extensively to improve impact and focus, and help overcome language difficulties.

- **Planning:** Communication plans should be based on a small number of long-running strategic themes, driven by key messages, not based around activities and events, as is currently the case.

- **Monitoring and evaluation**: Any monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of communication needs to be proportionate to the organisation's resources. Given UNCCD's resource constraints, M&E should be kept to a small number of more sophisticated digital indicators, using Google Analytics and social media engagement measures, as well as possibly an annual online stakeholder survey.

I.   Introduction

The primary aim of this evaluation is to provide practical recommendations for strengthening UNCCD's communication, not simply to establish how well it is communicating.

It mainly focuses on the UNCCD but also addresses elements of the communication of the organisation's affiliated Global Mechanism.

It is also worth noting that this evaluation is not assessing UNCCD's communication performance against its Comprehensive Communication Strategy (which does not address the Global Mechanism), but instead looking more broadly at communication from the perspective of 'outsiders' and good practice.

2. Challenges of evaluating communication

Evaluating any communication initiative is an inexact 'science', even more so with the UNCCD due to its limited monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data for communication.

Virtually every form of communication is an attempt to influence how people think and act. But how people behave is influenced by far more than just an organisation's communications, making it difficult to disaggregate its impact. Assessing the relative contributions of individual activities, such as publications, news releases and social media, to the overall effectiveness of an organisation's communication is even harder due to the fact that people now receive information, and interact, through an increasingly large and diverse number of media, online and offline.

- **UNCCD's M&E for communication is limited but this not necessarily a shortcoming:** The UNCCD reports in detail on all of its communication outputs such as the number of publications, press releases, events and other initiatives. On this basis, taking into account its small communication team (see below), the UNCCD has been very efficient: in one year alone (2012 – the start of this evaluation), it produced over 20 multi-media products, 20 news alerts, 6 issues of UNCCD news and managed 38 media requests, as well numerous other outputs. But quantity is not necessarily quality. To measure its effectiveness, the only systematic approach employed is to assess online activity for its web and social media, using the built-in analytical tools provided by these platforms. There is no systematic monitoring of press and broadcast coverage or stakeholder surveys, for instance.

  Focusing on online analytics makes sense as online communication is not only

increasingly the norm, but also essential for any organisation operating globally, as UNCCD does. However, the UNCCD's online M&E has two significant limitations. First, its Sharepoint-based website's built-in analytics are very basic. For example, there is apparently no way to distinguish between new and repeat visitors: it's important to track repeat visitors as this indicates the relevance of the site as a whole and individual pages. Second, staff appear not to be fully aware of the details and power of in-built social media analytics for tools such as Twitter and Facebook. For example, only basic metrics such as changes in Facebook 'likes' and Twitter 'followers' are monitored, not more insightful metrics of engagement, such as Facebook 'shares' and Twitter 'retweets'.

Setting aside those issues, the question is whether UNCCD's M&E for communication should be more ambitious? And the answer is probably not. Much more sophisticated and extensive analysis is possible but this will consume staff time, which is already in short supply, and financial resources, which are also limited. Recommendations for M&E are presented at the end of this report.

- **This evaluation, which covers the period 2012 to July 2015, draws on a variety of information and knowledge:** Sources include: an online survey of stakeholders; online analytical tools for Google searches, Twitter and Facebook; discussions with UNCCD staff; discussions with a cross-section of stakeholders, from UNCCD National Focal Points to UN counterparts and government officials; an assessment of UNCCD communication tools and materials; and the evaluator's 25 years experience of designing and implementing communication strategies and campains for over 40 public and private sector organizations worldwide.

3. Organisational and resource issues

Any evaluation of an organization's communication – and expectations of what it can realistically achieve – needs to take into account its human and financial constraints. The UNCCD has a very small communication team, with limited resources. Given these limitations, the team has performed admirably, as shown on the following pages.

Key organisational and resource points to note include:

- **The communication team is just '2.5' permanent members of staff**: This team includes a Communication Manager, a Public Information and Media Officer, and a Programme Assistant as a part-time graphic designer. All three are very able and a have a good understanding of the issues but are limited in what they

can achieve due to their limited numbers and time available. Additional staff – particularly an online specialist, as discussed later – would make a significant difference.
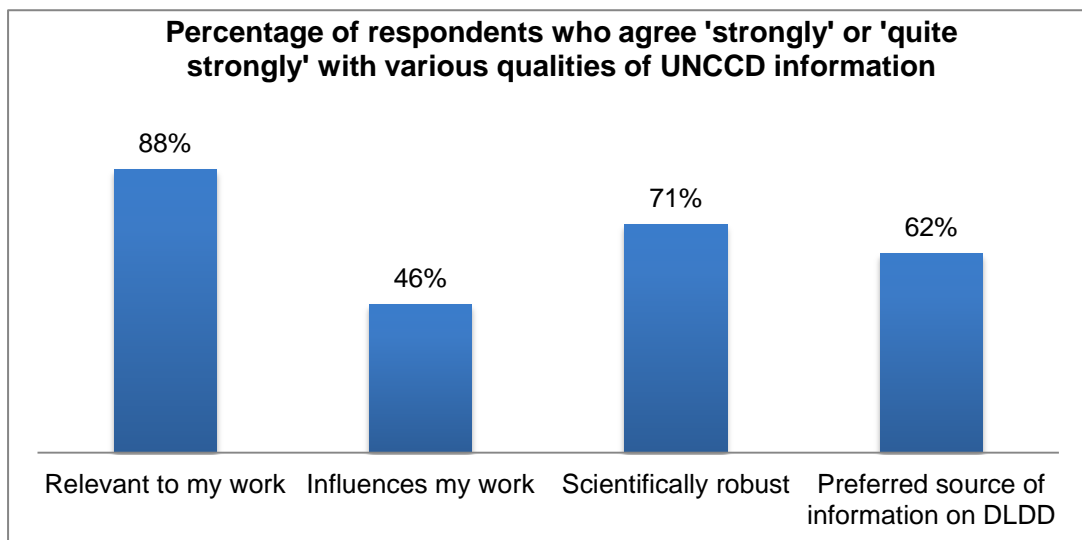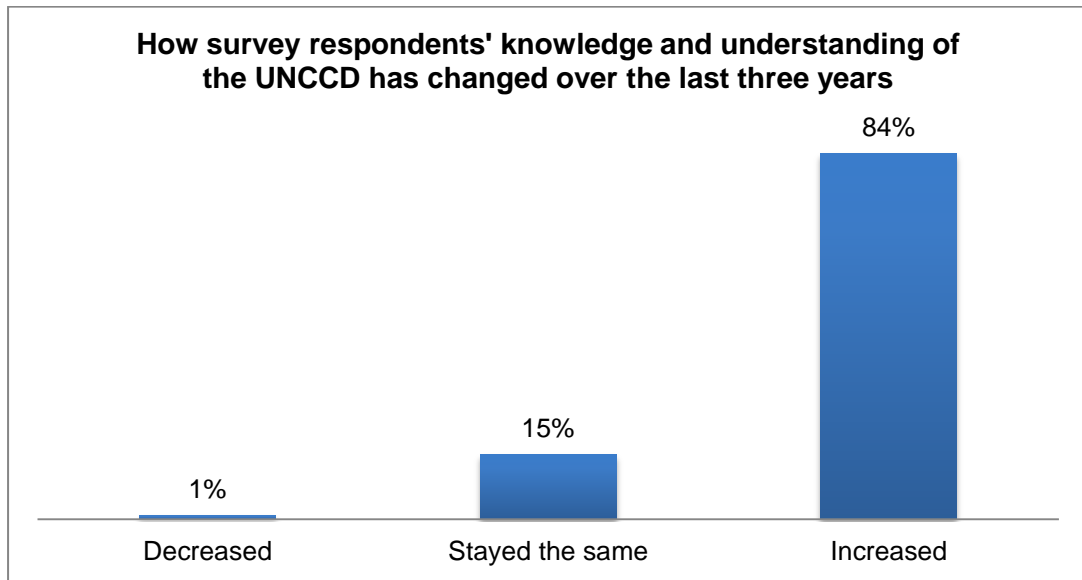
- **Interns are relied on for managing social media, but this not an effective approach:** While the interns, who are young, often use novel and effective approaches to social media, as discussed later, they are only at the UNCCD for a few months each and their numbers vary unpredictably across the year. This not only leads to variable levels of social media activity (and stoppages) across the year, which undermines the effectiveness of UNCCD's social media channels, as audiences expect continuous activity, but also squanders "institutional memory" due to the short-term nature of internships.

- **Partnerships with other UN agencies have been used smartly to partly compensate for UNCCD's resource limitations:** For example, the Communication Team has worked closely with the UNEP and World Bank, piggybacking on their initiatives. This has helped raise the UNCCD's visibility but has, arguably, restricted the organisation's ability in establishing a distinct, 'standalone' identity with its own agenda.

- **There is not a dedicated budget for communication, and funding is often required from partners, but not always forthcoming, restricting both planning and the scale of communication initiatives:** Given that communication is a core part of the UNCCD's mandate, it seems odd that there is not a dedicated budget for communication, which would help focus communication on the issues that matter each year and enable more effective planning.
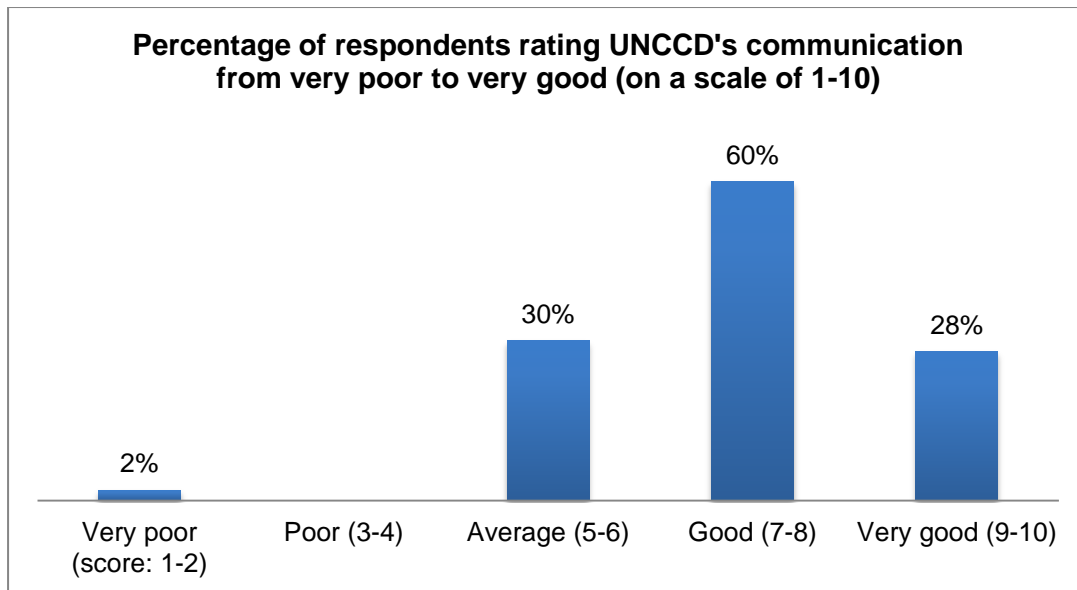
4. Overall effectiveness

A survey of stakeholders indicated significant satisfaction with the quality, relevance and usefulness of the UNCCD's overall communications. A basic online analysis also suggests that the UNCCD is reaching progressively larger audiences.

Charts highlighting key findings from the survey and online analysis can be found below in sections 4.1 and 4.2. These should be self-explanatory.

4.1 Survey results

How survey respondents' knowledge and understanding of the UNCCD has changed over the last three years

- Decreased: 1%
- Stayed the same: 15%
- Increased: 84%

Percentage of respondents who agree 'strongly' or 'quite strongly' with various qualities of UNCCD information

- Relevant to my work: 88%
- Influences my work: 46%
- Scientifically robust: 71%
- Preferred source of information on DLDD: 62%

Percentage of respondents rating UNCCD's communication from very poor to very good (on a scale of 1-10)

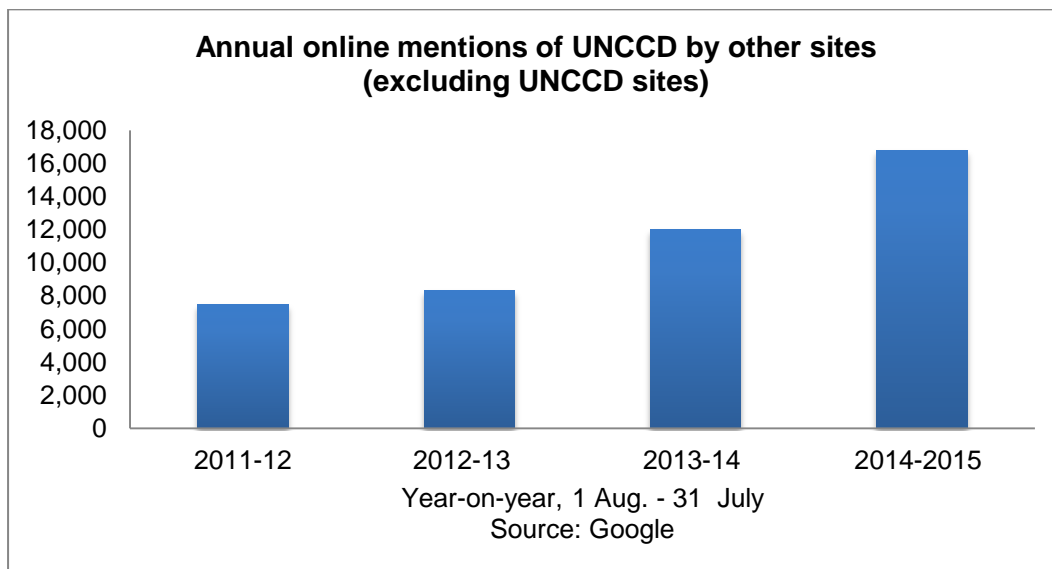| | | 60% | |
	30%		28%
2%			
Very poor (score: 1-2)	Poor (3-4)	Average (5-6)	Good (7-8)	Very good (9-10)

4.2 Basic online analysis

In the absence of further macro-level data, a basic, year-on-year Google analysis of sites mentioning the UNCCD (excluding UNCCD sites) was conducted as a very rough measure of the UNCCD's influence over time. As the figure below shows, UNCCD's online mentions by other sites have increased progressively over the last four years, more than doubling between 1 August 2012 (8,310 mentions) and 31 July 2015 (16,800).

Annual online mentions of UNCCD by other sites (excluding UNCCD sites)

18,000				
16,000				
14,000				
12,000				
10,000				
8,000				
6,000				
4,000				
2,000				
0	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-2015

Year-on-year, 1 Aug. - 31 July
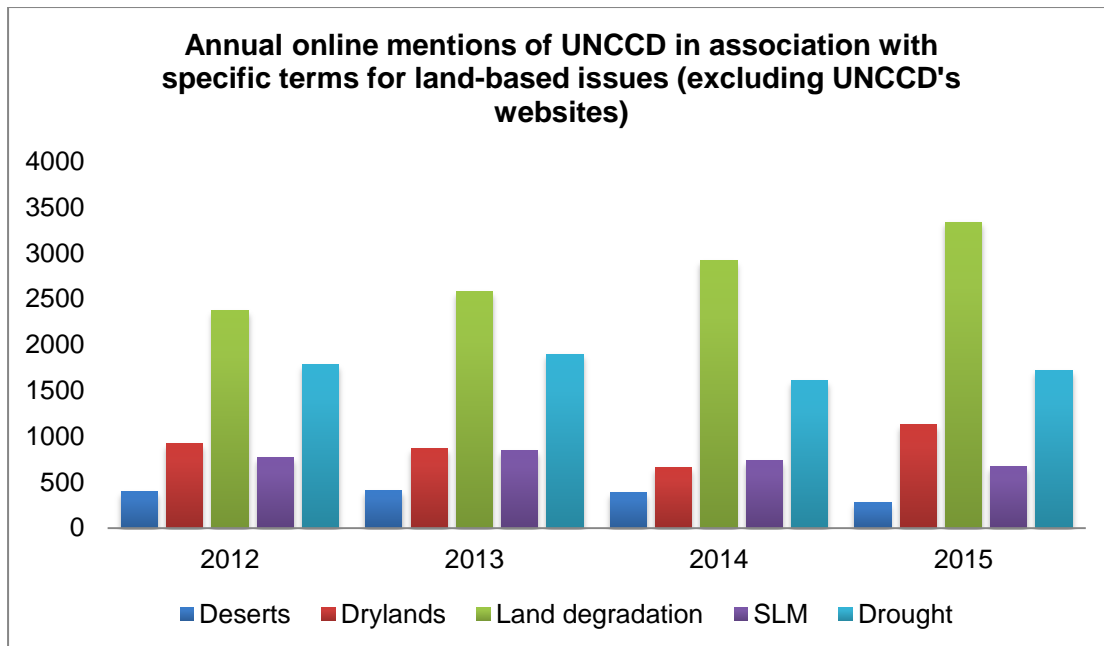Source: Google

5. Messaging and content

With many people now suffering from information overload from multiple sources, it's essential to have a distinct and compelling message, supported by easily navigable content that stands out from the crowd and engages audiences' interest and action. The UNCCD has yet to achieve this, partly due to the nature of the convention itself, although it is making progress by focusing on 'land degradation'.

5.1 Messaging

Terminology matters for people to understand and engage with issues. "Land degradation" appears to connect more strongly with people, relative to other terms used by the UNCCD, possibly pointing the way forward. By virtue of its name, UNCCD is in the business of combatting "desertification". Although this term refers to a specific type of land degradation, for most people it implies 'deserts' and most countries do not have deserts, potentially disengaging the interest of large numbers of people. As a Malaysian government official interviewed said, "We do not have deserts, but we have land degradation." A Ukrainian government official said the same, and called the term desertification "problematic". In a BBC World News interview with the UNCCD's Executive Secretary, the presenter opened with an explanation of "desertification", both because it is not widely known and to clarify its association with land degradation, not just deserts.

To complicate the issue, the Convention itself also talks about "drought", "drylands", "arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas", as well as "sustainable land management" (SLM). Although these terms all have a place in communication for different audiences, particularly specialists, a single commonly understood term is important, especially to win the wider public interest required to add global momentum to the UNCCD's core mission. It is also important for establishing an overarching message, as discussed below.

A Google analysis of non-UNCCD web pages that mention the UNCCD in connection with different terms – notably "deserts", "droughts", "land degradation", "drylands" and "sustainable land management" - was carried out. The fact that sites mention the UNCCD in connection with different terms can be viewed as a proxy for their interest. As the chart below shows, "land degradation" not only has substantially more interest among other organisations (represented by their websites) than other terms, but its popularity is gaining momentum (which is also probably a reflection of UNCCD's success in communicating it). A similar analysis of online news reports by media houses and bloggers showed the same strong interest in land degradation.

Annual online mentions of UNCCD in association with specific terms for land-based issues (excluding UNCCD's websites)

Legend: Deserts, Drylands, Land degradation, SLM, Drought

An overarching message or 'position' that is distinctive to the UNCCD is required, supported by a smaller number of related sub-messages: One of the UNCCD's core potential strengths is that the issue of desertification, or land degradation, depending on your preferred terminology, lies at the heart of many major global issues, from climate change and food security through to declining biodiversity, poverty and migration, as a UNCCD Land for Life brochure explains. But there are also two problems. First, for target audiences, the range of associated problems can be dauntingly large (and confusing): where do you start? People need focus, at least as a starting point, particularly in view of the wealth of information to which we are all exposed daily. Second, several of the issues such as climate change are already closely associated with particular organisations, or considered by certain agencies to be their 'territory', potentially leading to time-consuming negotiations and political problems.
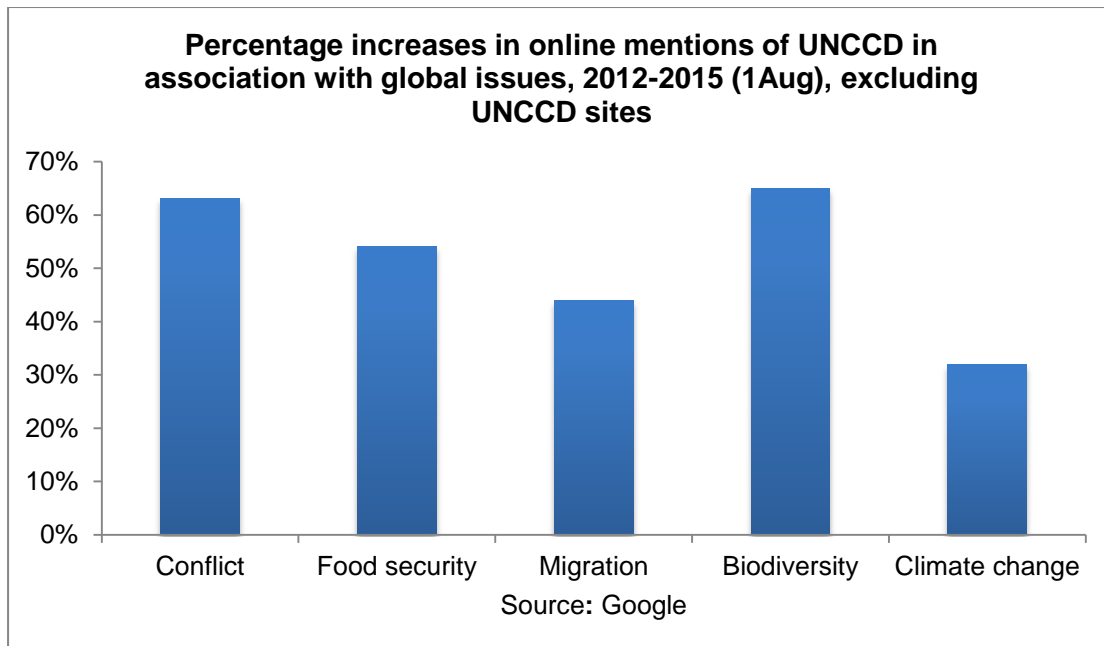
Currently, the UNCCD releases a large number of messages related to most of the issues mentioned above and appears to chop and change between them without the sustained focus on individual messages needed for consistent, memorable messaging. The World Day to Combat Desertification (WDCD) is a case in point, although the need to refresh this day each year is appreciated. One year it is about water security (2013), the next about climate change (2014) and then food security (2015). The opening line of the main press release for WDCD 2014 highlights the multi-messaging in one sentence: "*UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has called for the recovery of degraded lands in order to avert the worst effects of climate change, produce sufficient food and ease competition over resources.*" Addressing three major global issues in one sentence is quite a shopping list." UNCCD's Twitter and Facebook pages also cover multiple issues.

Greater focus of messaging would strengthen both UNCCD's and its 'brand' association with particular issues. Specifically, the UNCCD would benefit by having and concentrating on:

- *An overarching message* that encapsulates the essence of the UNCCD's mission and that can accommodate topic-specific sub-messages (see below). A recent UNCCD op-ed in The Guardian entitled "*When land is degraded, its people and their prospects are degraded too*" could provide the basis for developing an overarching message.

- *A smaller number of sub-messages* that focus on specific global consequences and that the UNCCD can start to strongly associate with land degradation. Food security, which touches everyone's lives, directly and indirectly (e.g. via food prices), is one possible candidate; migration (international, and within countries to cities) is another. Having a smaller number of sub-messages does not mean that other issues such as climate change, biodiversity and water scarcity should not be mentioned, just that they should not be centre stage. The specific choice of the issues with which to associate needs to take into account both their global appeal and the space to associate with them without confusion with other institutions. Ideally, it should be possible to connect the issues or messages to tell a coherent story that supports the overarching message.

UNCCD has successfully linked DLDD to global issues but messages could be strengthened by bringing supporting data down to a more human scale: Although there is a need for more focused messaging, as discussed above, UNCCD has raised the profile of its association with major global issues over the last five years, as the chart below shows, based on a Google analysis of other sites mentioning UNCCD in association with each of the issues.

Many of the messages relating to global issues either incorporate or are supported by statistics, which is important for both credibility and understanding the scale of the issue. However, the statistics are very often on a global scale that is difficult to comprehend, imagine or be meaningful for most people. For example, "12 million hectares of productive land become barren every year"...."the cost of land degradation reaches about $US490 billion per year". The standard journalistic practice of converting such large numbers to a more human scale should be employed, for example by translating millions of hectares into a fraction of a well-known country's land mass or costs that are in billions into what they could buy (e.g. X hospitals in Africa). More imaginative and appropriate conversions can doubtless be made by UNCCD's communication team.

Percentage increases in online mentions of UNCCD in association with global issues, 2012-2015 (1Aug), excluding UNCCD sites

[Bar chart showing percentage increases by global issue:]

Issue	Percentage
Conflict	~63%
Food security	~54%
Migration	~44%
Biodiversity	~65%
Climate change	~32%

Source: Google

Raising awareness is important but what is the 'call to action'? What does the UNCCD want different audiences to do in practice? Much of the communication focuses heavily on the problems of desertification and related issues, which is important for raising awareness and engaging interest. UNCCD does this well. Broad solutions are also often but not always suggested in communication materials, as are more specific solutions, for example through Land for Life examples. However, the communication often raises the question in a reader's or viewer's mind "So, what do you want me to do?". How different target audiences such as government officials and the general public could help will vary, requiring different messages, but unless there is a clear call to action, with advice on how to do it, people are much less likely to act. Depending on the issue, what in practice can policymakers, the private sector, general public others do? Concrete, practical suggestions are required. For governments, this could include stronger cross-references to the Global Mechanism (lacking in many communication channels) as a partner for finding finance.

The communication team recognises this issue and has attempted calls to help raise awareness and form stakeholder groups but more effort is required in developing practical and engaging actions, and regularly communicating them. One added advantage of calls to action is that they can be used to drive traffic to websites for further details about the practical steps, with online interactions, such as downloads, monitored.

5.2 Content

The content is high quality and factually rich but often lacks at-a-glance summaries and useful signposting to navigate through the often lengthy documents. The arguments made in publications, online tools and other channels, as well as the facts supporting them, are strong and well-written; UNCCD is very 'content rich'. However, the majority of materials,

which are quite often lengthy, rarely have at-a-glance summaries at the start (for example, bullet-pointed key points) and tend not to use headings, pull-out quotes and other devices to tell a story. It is widely recognised that most people flick through documents first, and often just that: the story and key messages need to stand out and work for these increasingly common types of readers. Ensuring the top-line points are at-a-glance, both in summaries and for people browsing through information, would be a useful step forward, particularly if applied consistently across most communication outputs.

Much greater use of visual communication, particularly infographics, could significantly improve the content's effectiveness and accessibility: Visual communication is becoming increasingly important for a number of reasons, including the shift to the smaller screens of mobile phones and tablets; the globalisation of information, requiring tools that help overcome language barriers (particularly relevant for the UNCCD); and a general trend towards and expectation of visual communication, fuelled by digital media and a recognition that it can be a far more powerful form of communication.

However, the UNCCD has lagged behind this trend. Most communication is text heavy, with photographs as visual relief, but infographics and other graphic devices appear to be used relatively rarely. The *Land in Numbers* brochure is an example. Number-based publications lend themselves perfectly to infographics but the brochure contains none. Indeed the numbers are difficult to pick out as nearly all are buried in the text. In contrast, the *publication A Stronger UNCCD for a Land Degradation Neutral World* does use a high proportion of graphic tools with considerable story-telling success, as shown above.

As an organisation that relies heavily on statistics for its communication, the absence of infographics in UNCCD's communication armoury is a lost opportunity for telling its story in a more impactful and concise manner that can help transcend language barriers. Other visual storytelling devices could also be explored such as animated illustrations.

A note on translating content into languages other than English: Several survey respondents, particularly Spanish-speaking respondents, said that translating more materials was important for the UNCCD to improve its communication. The UNCCD is aware of this issue, including the additional costs and production time involved. A stronger focus on infographics and summaries translated into more languages could help lower these costs and production delays due to the smaller volume of text involved.

6. Communication channels

As online channels, including websites and social media, are core to how UNCCD communicates with its international audiences, the evaluation paid particular attention to these channels. There are significant weaknesses here, particularly in terms of the UNCCD's main website, which is effectively its 'shop window'. These problems, and their solutions, are fundamentally issues of human and financial resources.

The chart below shows survey respondents' preferred channels for receiving information from the UNCCD. These results are discussed later.

Percentage of survey respondents 'strongly' or 'quite strongly' preferring different communication channels
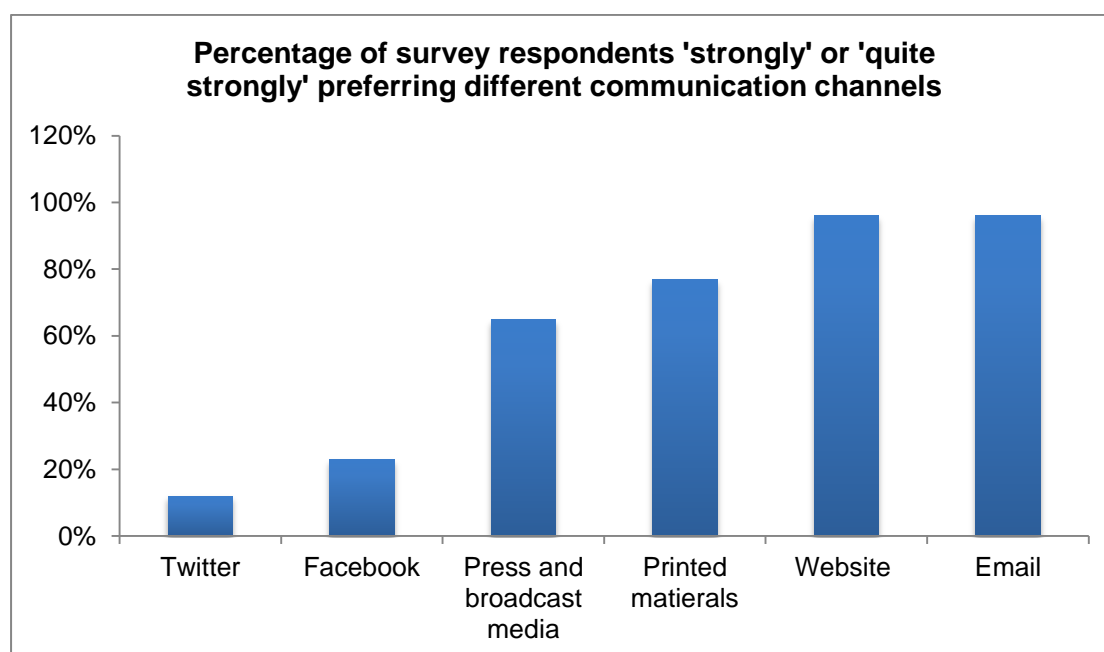
6.1 Websites

UNCCD's website is its digital 'Achilles heel', probably largely due to being based on Microsoft Sharepoint software. UNCCD has two main websites: its UNCCD site (www.unccd.int) and the Global Mechanism site (www.global-mechanism.org). Both will be discussed more below but, broadly, the Global Mechanism site, which is based on the free, open-source Drupal platform, is fairly well organised and visually presented, while the main UNCCD, which is based on the commercial Microsoft Sharepoint platform, communicates poorly in many ways, as discussed later.
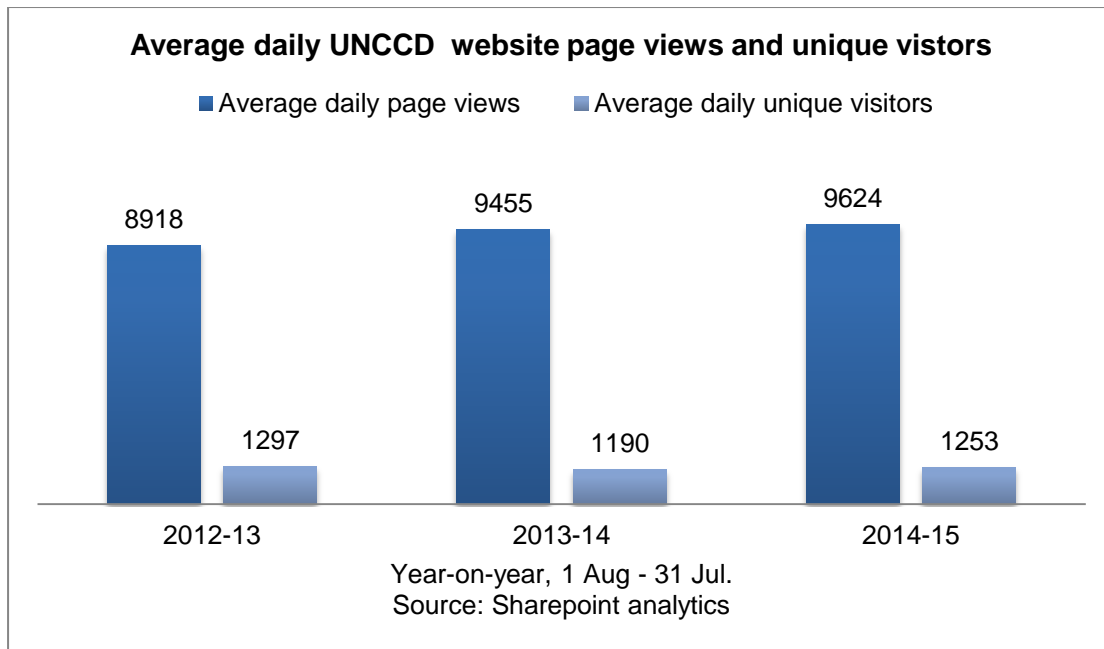
It is believed that this difference is largely due to the choice to use Sharepoint for the main UNCCD site several years ago. Although Sharepoint is widely used as an intranet platform, it is scarcely used for websites (usually to enable websites to double up as intranet systems), accounting for just 0.4% of all websites, compared to the open-source Wordpress (24%) and bespoke sites (58%). There are probably good reasons for its very low market share – reasons

that undermine UNCCD's site, including the lack of flexibility to improve it. For example, major structural and design changes often require costly Sharepoint specialists. The system's in-built analytics for measuring traffic are also very weak relative to the industry standard of Google analytics; a consultant was employed to integrate Google analytics but it was not fully integrated. Moreover, UNCCD's current communication team now know how to use Sharepoint but, given its relative rarity as a web platform, there is significant probability that any new staff will not be familiar with it, creating a costly 'learning curve'. In short, the system appears to be a significant constraint on communication efficiency and effectiveness.

The limited data tracked by UNCCD for its main website, using Sharepoint's in-built analytics, show little change in website activity. But would better analytics reveal more? As the chart below shows, there has been little change over the last three years in two of the main metrics monitored by the UNCCD: average daily page views have increased marginally by about 7%, while the number of average daily unique visitors has remained broadly the same. These are very basic and potentially misleading metrics. For example, changes in the number of unique visitors are important but changes in returning versus new visitors are far more revealing of the relevance of a site. However, according to UNCCD staff questioned, Sharepoint does not distinguish between returning and new visitors, nor is it obvious how to assess measures of user engagement, such as downloads, which could reflect a Sharepoint weakness or lack of staff understanding of the metrics available. Like many people, this evaluator is not familiar with the full capabilities of Sharepoint's analytics. Yet it is revealing that a UNCCD staff member, not in the communication team but with extensive online experience, has abandoned Sharepoint metrics in favour of Google analytics for his Capacity Building Market Place pages. Switching all website monitoring to the more functionally rich Google analytics seems an obvious solution, even though it will mean establishing a new baseline.

More generally, if the metrics used are a fair assessment of website activity, the comparatively small changes in activity could be due several factors, including a limited 'market' for UNCCD's information and activities, but the strong increase references to UNCCD by other sites suggest this is not the case, as does a steep increase in social media activity (see below). Another more likely explanation is that the website is considered unappealing by users.

Average daily UNCCD website page views and unique vistors

■ Average daily page views ■ Average daily unique visitors

8918   9455   9624

1297   1190   1253

2012-13   2013-14   2014-15

Year-on-year, 1 Aug - 31 Jul.
Source: Sharepoint analytics

The UNCCD website is seriously flawed as a user experience, and structurally; the Global Mechanism site is much better but struggles to live up to its promise of providing practical assistance. Key observations for each site include:

- ***UNCCD site – urgently in need of an overhaul*:** This site has serious problems that possibly account for its sluggish growth in visitor numbers and that are probably due its use of Sharepoint as its platform. Apart from the relative difficulty (and cost) of making changes with Sharepoint, preventing the site from being strengthened, different staff – who are not communication or web specialists in the main - are responsible for their respective pages, contributing to the site's inconsistent structure, layout, appearance and other elements. As one member of staff noted in a report: *"Lack of staff capacity for updating their responsible web-pages and the absence of a Sharepoint technical expert have been the constant challenge."*

  Key issues include:

  - <u>Introspective and lacking 'user focus'</u>**:** In many respects, the site appears closer to an introspective, intranet site for UNCCD 'insiders' than an internet site designed to help 'outsiders' – an unknowing outsider would probably struggle to understand the relevance of quite a lot of information, let alone be able to navigate easily around it. For instance, the 'Key topics' section in the main toolbar, which you would expect to lead you into heart of the UNCCD's work and services, includes sections such as 'Reporting review and assessment, 'Awareness raising', 'Thematic priorities' and 'Synergies with Rio Conventions'. Are these issues really 'key topics' for organisations and people who might be able to hep UNCCD realise its objectives? Thrown into the 'key topics' mix are

'Science, technology and knowledge' and 'Capacity Building Marketplace'.

This evaluation does not have the time to set out a detailed structure (although follow-up recommendations will be provided to the secretariat), but a more user-focused 'key topics' section is more likely to include issues such 'land degradation neutrality' and 'sustainable land management'. Accompanying main sections in the toolbar are also likely to include issues such as 'Services' (e.g. Capacity Building Marketplace and the Global Mechanism), 'Knowledge' (e.g. SKB Knowledge Bases and Land Scan) and so on. There are some section that appear user-oriented, most notably the Capacity Building Marketplace, which also 'talks to people', as opposed to just providing information (e.g "Do you want to study abroad, perform research..?").

o <u>Structurally confused and difficult to navigate</u>: The structure of individual pages is often confused about priorities and difficult to navigate. For instance, in the 'Publications' section of the main tool bar, the 'Library' section has a pointless 'Library mission' statement at the centre, as if people do not know what a library is, with the links to sources of information side-lined to the bottom and sides of the page, leading to long, disorganised lists. Generally, the most useful navigational links are sidelined (and difficult to navigate through), rather than incorporated centre stage, as is now standard in most website. Sharepoint is a template-based system: it appears that UNCCD has chosen the wrong template. If the data were available, it would be interesting to see what proportion of users use the search function at the top of the page: searches on a website are often a good indication of poor site navigation and user confusion.

o <u>A poor communication platform in every sense</u>: An organisation's website is its 'shop window', providing an opportunity to explain its strengths and values, build professional credibility and communicate key messages throughout. The UNCCD site fails on all these counts. On the home page, for instance, there is no explanation of what UNCCD does or its key priorities. There is an obvious, lost opportunity here to highlight the organisation's relevance and importance by promoting the links between DLDD and global social problems such as migration, food insecurity and conflict, as well as to highlight solutions, including the Global Mechanism. Currently, the Global Mechanism is relegated to a hyperlinked logo alongside other logos as 'Quick access links'. Links to what? There is no explanation of what these organisations, represented

purely by their logos, do, reinforcing the sense that this site is for 'in-the-know' insiders'.

Throughout virtually every other page, there is very little attempt to communicate key points and messages, for instance through smart use of typography and headings, except on a few individual pages, presumably reflecting the fact that different staff are responsible for different pages. Instead, the site is largely a library – and not an intuitively organised one. Inconsistent visual branding and layout further compound the problems.

Overall, the website creates the impression of an unprofessional, dated and disorganised institution, which is both reputationally damaging and, of course, a false picture of the real professionalism of the organisation. The site urgently needs to be revamped.

- **Global Mechanism site**: In contrast, the Global Mechanism's site is well organised, simple and easy to navigate, clearly explains its purpose, consistently branded and appears user-focused. Arguably, it has a simpler job to perform than the UNCCD site because it has one main functional task, simply stated on its home page – "*The Global Mechanism works with countries on financing strategies for sustainable land management*". Nevertheless, it generally works well. For instance, its user focus comes from providing well-signposted services such as a 'Finance Info Kit', as well as country and regional factsheets, often translated in the local language, recognising its audiences' needs. It also provides links for users to "Make the case for SLM investments".

  In addition, the site communicates well about relevant issues, for instance with a major news item on its home page about *Unlocking the investment potential of forest and landscape restoration*. It knows what it is 'selling'.

  However, there are two significant issues with the site, one related to content, one more strategic:

  o The links that it provides to ostensibly practical information, for instance in its Finance Info Kit and 'Making the investment case for SLM', often lead to home pages of the sites containing the information, not the information itself. It would also be useful for the Global Mechanism to summarise the key points on its own site, not just provide links.

  o The bigger issue, discussed later, is why is the Global Mechanism a separate site from the UNCCD?

Lack of technical 'responsiveness' undermines both sites' appeal and impact as more users access sites via phones and tablets: Neither the main UNCCD website nor the Global

Mechanism site are 'responsive'. This means that the sites do not adjust to provide the optimum reading experience and navigation on smaller mobile phone and tablet screens, with minimum scrolling and resizing of text. Instead, the UNCCD 'unresponsive' sites are squeezed into the smaller screen as if these screens were larger desktop screens. This inevitably limits the sites' appeal and effectiveness, a problem that is likely to increase as the trend towards accessing online material through phones and tablets continues its strong upward trajectory. It is worth noting that several related UN sites are responsive, including those of the UNFCCC and UNEP.

Integrating the Global Mechanism site into the main UNCCD site would be strategically and operationally logical: The main UNCCD site and the Global Mechanism site are currently separate. As the Global Mechanism is part of the UNCCD, it would make sense to merge the two sites, with the Global Mechanism as a subset of the main site. This would not only strategically align these two elements, demonstrating that the UNCCD provides both solutions and a mechanism to help fund their realisation, but also increase visitor awareness of the UNCCD and its full capabilities: current visitors to the Global Mechanism would be exposed to more UNCCD communication and vice versa.

6.2 Social media

The stakeholder survey indicated relatively little interest in social media, possibly reflecting respondents' demographic profiles. But to engage the wider (and younger) public, social media are likely to be key: The low level of interest in social media by survey respondents could be due to a variety of factors, including the relatively low number of respondents and their demographic profile: most were government officials, who are likely to be older than the typically younger social media user. However, it is worth noting that UNCCD's social media activity has increased significantly so there is clearly an appetite for it. In addition, it should not be viewed in isolation: for example, Twitter responses in particular are often used by journalists, helping to expand media coverage.

More crucially, social media provide a powerful tool for mobilising wider (and younger) public interest and support for the UNCCD's mission and activities, which is important for influencing policymakers. There is significant potential to expand this support. For instance, UNCCD currently has over 6,300 Twitter followers, which is more than the UN Convention on Biodiversity (about 5,400 followers), but other related Twitter accounts have dramatically more, including the UN Climate Action or UNFCCC (over 200,000) and UNEP (over 420,000). UNCCD cannot expect to reach similar levels but there is clearly substantial room for growth.

Social media activity has increased sharply, albeit from a low base. Better use of analytical tools could shed more light on users' 'engagement' and other indicators of effective communication. UNCCD tracks 'likes' for Facebook and 'followers' for Twitter, as well as 'reach'. These metrics have increased substantially over the last three years, as the chart

below shows. However, changes in them only provide a rough measure of popularity, not the more telling level of engagement by users – for example, the number of Facebook posts that are shared or commented on, or the Tweets that are retweeted. Both Facebook and Twitter provide in-built analytics for assessing issues such as engagement and audience reach, although there are limitations with the tools offered by both. Providing training in these analytics would be useful; employing an online specialist familiar with these tools and online communication as a whole would be even more valuable, as discussed next.
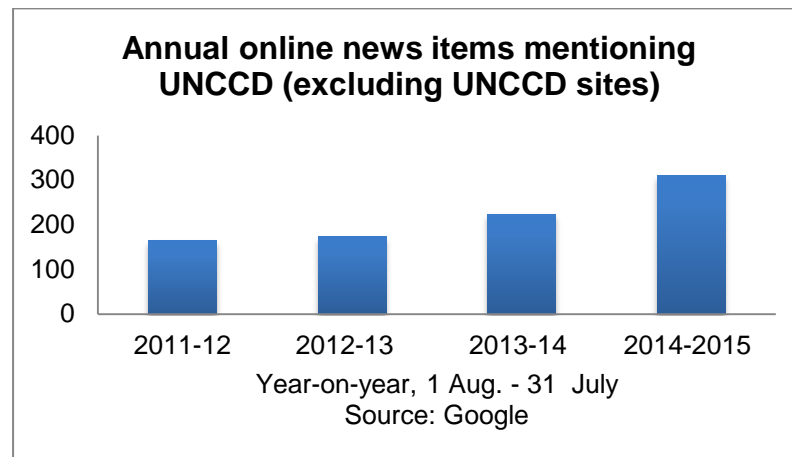
Increase in social media activity, 2012-2015
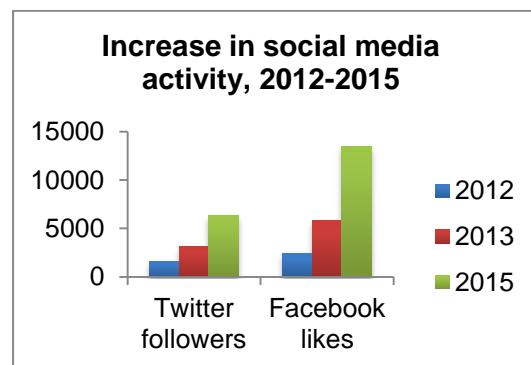
UNCCD's potential to capitalise on its substantial social marketing (and website) potential is significantly restricted by its lack of a full-time online specialist. As discussed earlier, UNCCD relies on a rotating, often seasonal and unpredictable supply of short-term interns to manage its social media, leading to inconsistent activity (there are clear monthly spikes in activity when interns are present in force) and loss of 'institutional memory'. The advantage of having a full-time online specialist, who is familiar with all the social media tools and techniques, was dramatically illustrated by a consultant who worked on the 2013 World Day to Combat Desertification: on one day that year, the UNCCD reached over 3 million social media users through a tool called Thunderclap.

6.3 Press and broadcast media

News coverage of the UNCCD has increased substantially, nearly doubling over the last three years: Although UNCCD does not systematically monitor press and broadcast coverage, it is possible to gauge coverage through Google, filtering for 'news', which includes blogs, over particular time periods: nearly all news outlets, including in most developing countries, have an online presence. A more comprehensive alternative is to hire a specialist news monitoring agency – a cost of questionable value for the UNCCD. As the diagram below shows, based on a Google analysis, UNCCD's news coverage has progressed well, nearly doubling between 2012-13 (171 news items) and 2014-15 (311 news items).

Quantity, of course, is not quality. Although a study of the quality of coverage is beyond the scope of this evaluation, well-respected publications and channels mentioned UNCCD in news items, from the *Guardian* and *Reuters* to *Nature* and *Scientific American,* as well as a

good geographic spread of media houses, from the *Namibia Economist* to *Vietnam Plus* and *Gulf News*.

Annual online news items mentioning UNCCD (excluding UNCCD sites)

A bar chart showing annual online news items mentioning UNCCD:
- 2011-12: approximately 160
- 2012-13: approximately 170
- 2013-14: approximately 220
- 2014-2015: approximately 310
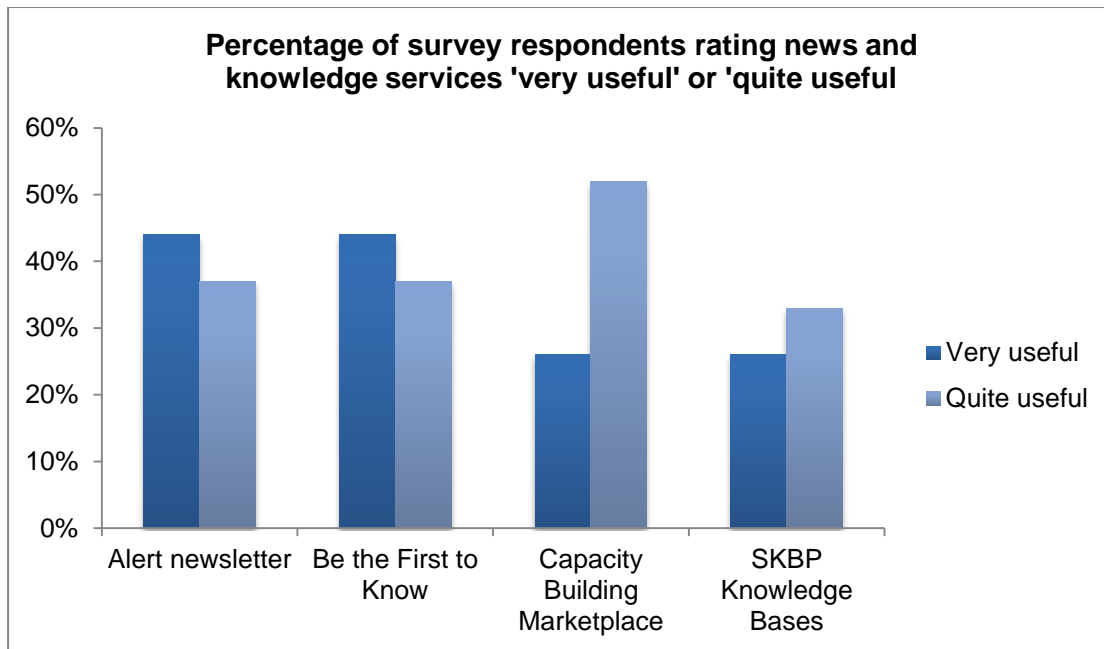
Year-on-year, 1 Aug. - 31 July
Source: Google

Significant progress has been made with op-eds and their broadcast equivalents, underscoring the value of linking DLDD with other global issues. UNCCD has recently placed greater emphasis on op-eds, gaining coverage in 2014-2015 in high-profile, mass-market media outlets such as *the Huffington Post, Reuters* and *BBC World News*. Many of these link DLDD with global issues such as food security, migration and conflict, underlining the value of making these connections. These linkages are reflected in op-ed titles: "All you can eat, the global greed for land", "Food security is land security" and "Migration for the good".

Training journalists in DLDD issues and their wider implications is essential but efforts to do this have been limited by funding problems: Several training workshops for journalist and environmental correspondents have taken place in 2011, 2012 and a forthcoming event at COP12 this year. However, lack of funding has made these events rare and sporadic. UNCCD has managed to piggyback on other agencies training initiatives, such as World Bank course for community radio broadcasters in Africa, but the need for dedicated funding for training journalists should be addressed.

6.4 News and knowledge services and products

Emailed and online news and knowledge services have been positively received. This can be seen in the chart below, describing survey respondents' assessment of some of these services. Revamping the UNCCD website to make it more navigable and the presentation of the services better structured, is likely to improve users' perceptions of the value of these services, and increase visitor traffic.

Percentage of survey respondents rating news and knowledge services 'very useful' or 'quite useful

	Very useful	Quite useful
Alert newsletter	44%	37%
Be the First to Know	44%	37%
Capacity Building Marketplace	26%	52%
SKBP Knowledge Bases	26%	33%

Numerous publications have been produced but 'less is more', with clearer roles of categories of publications, might be more effective: Over the last three years, UNCCD has produced more than 40 major brochures and reports, all published to a high standard. As these are updated or reprinted, there should be a move towards a smaller number of publications, possibly with one overarching publication about the UNCCD, concisely presenting its agenda and range of services, and one publication per strategic focus area or 'key message' (to be decided). As mentioned, the content for each should have at-a-glance summaries and focus strongly on infographics and other visual devices that will work not just on paper but in digital formats such as the web. 'Good practice' would be to write all publications for the web and other digital formats first, focusing on simplicity and clarity of messaging, and then convert them to printed formats, possibly with more detailed text, later. With better visual branding, different visual devices – such as colours and icons – could be used to signify different types of publications, which is now common practice.

6.5 Campaigns and other events

Major initiatives such as the World Day to Combat Desertification have proved very successful but how can their impact be sustained throughout the year? There tends to be significant but uneven spikes of website and social media activity across the year, linked to major events. Ideally, there should be a relatively steady flow of activity to maintain interest, but the question is how? One possibility, as discussed later, is to base communication around long-running themes, such as land degradation and migration. Another option is to create new, low-cost events that engage different audiences and that provide an opportunity for a public 'call to action'. For example, each year the UNCCD could ask people around the world to test how relatively degraded their land is (including at their homes), using a simple, inexpensive chemical device or other tools, possibly even photographs. This would create

opportunities to launch the event, to announce the results (globally, regionally and nationally) and to trigger a wider, later debate about solutions that could lie in the hands of the broader public.

7. Visual branding

As thousands of organizations have demonstrated, strong and consistently applied visual branding can be a powerful source of communication, particularly in terms of awareness and associating organizations with particular issues. UNCCD's visual identity is not only weak but also applied inconsistently to the point that it has little to no coherent, visual identity.

Please note that these comments and those below refer to the UNCCD, not the Global Mechanism. On its own, the Global Mechanism is a coherent and professional visual brand, achieved mainly through a simple use of colour. However it bears no relationship to the original but inconsistently applied UNCCD, apart from sharing the UNCCD logo alongside its own very different logo. Unless there are strategic reasons for positioning the UNCCD and Global Mechanism as separate operations, it would make sense to make it a clearly related sub-brand of the UNCCD, but only once the UNCCD's own visual branding issues are resolved.

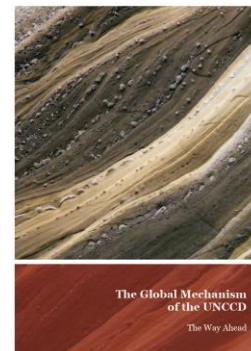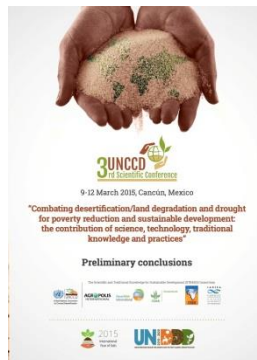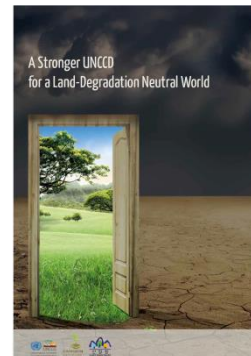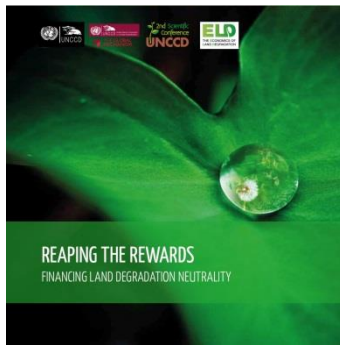Key observations about the UNCCD's visual branding include:

Individual UNCCD products are generally well designed; collectively there is no sense they are part of a coherent brand family that says "UNCCD": The quality and professionalism of the design of individual items is not under question. The problems appear in a very inconsistent application of UNCCD's corporate identity. With any visual branding, all the outputs should clearly be part of the same 'brand family' (and different but related visual techniques used to distinguish between different products and services). However, as the images of various publications below show, there is no consistency or any sense that these products are from the UNCCD, apart from a logo (often cluttered and confused with other logos); a logo alone is not visual branding – colours, layout, typography (and how it is used for headings and sub-headings), plus other factors, all contribute to visual brand.

Pages from the website are also very confused, both in the use of colours and (often clumsy) layout – possibly another symptom of the challenges of Sharepoint.

Collectively, these products are a poor advertisement for the quality and professionalism of the UNCCD.

Selection of UNCCD publications, plus one Global Mechanism publication

REAPING THE REWARDS
FINANCING LAND DEGRADATION NEUTRALITY

TRANSFORMING LAND MANAGEMENT GLOBALLY
Q&A ABOUT LAND IN THE 6TH GEF REPLENISHMENT PHASE (GEF-6)

A Stronger UNCCD
for a Land-Degradation Neutral World

The UNCCD: Laying the groundwork for future security (2014-2015)

3UNCCD
rd Scientific Conference

9-12 March 2015, Cancún, Mexico

"Combating desertification/land degradation and drought
for poverty reduction and sustainable development:
the contribution of science, technology, traditional
knowledge and practices"

Preliminary conclusions

The Global Mechanism
of the UNCCD

The Way Ahead

Selection of pages from UNCCD website

The confusion is compounded by the creation of multiple, visually disjointed sub-logos, in addition to (an arguably misleading) master UNCCD logo: As one member of UNCCD staff commented, "we seem to create logos for everything". The master logo and examples of sub-logos that have been created for various events are shown below, highlighting the confusion. Part of the problem is that the sub-brands are either treated very differently from the master logo in terms of imagery, typography and other elements, creating a disconnect, or they are erring very close to the master logo, raising the question, "will the real UNCCD logo please stand up?". Collectively, there is almost no branding consistency, diluting further UNCCD's already weak branding and creating a sense of organisational incoherence.

A clear and coherent policy for producing sub-logos, including how they should relate to the master logo, is required, both to limit their proliferation and to ensure consistent branding. Less is more is often the best yardstick.

A related problem is the master logo itself. It presents two main challenges. First, its very specific, fairly detailed illustration of what is apparently intended to be a dryland or desert, limits opportunities to create visually-related sub-brands. Second, the tree depicted in the logo (an 'Umbrella Thorn' tree?) is strongly associated with Africa, if not unique to that continent, misleading viewers to believe that the UNCCD's main or sole focus is on Africa. As a piece of graphic communication, the master logo is ineffective, and possibly counter-productive.

Master logo
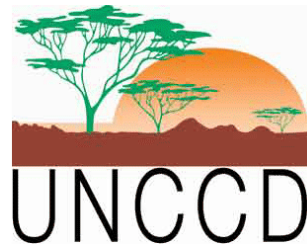
Sub-logos created for events and other initiatives

A weak corporate identity manual lies at the heart of the problem: It is probably unfair to criticise the corporate identity manual (and the logo that came with it) as it was produced 'pro bono' in 2011 by Young & Rubicam, which is an advertising agency, not a branding company. However, to borrow the slogan from UNCCD's World Day for Combatting Desertification (WDCD), "there is no such thing as a free lunch" – UNCCD is paying the price for this very basic and incomplete identity manual in terms of branding and visual confusion.

The manual only covers the most basic issues, such as the logo and its positioning on printed items, typography and colour palettes. However, it gives no direction on how to apply the logo and colours consistently in different formats or for different issues (e.g. publications

covering different issues), nor how to layout text, including headings and sub-headings, nor the use of imagery and numerous other issues. There is also no guidance on so-called 'brand architecture', including how to treat any sub-brands such as Land for Life and WDCD.

As a result of these major omissions in the identity guidelines, 'creativity' has stepped in and filled the gaps, leading to original and professionally designed items at an individual level but with virtually no brand consistency across the portfolio of outputs.

8. Strategy and planning

It might seem odd to discuss strategy and planning last but the changes that the UNCCD needs to make to have a greater impact, discussed above, are more basic and practical than strategic. Nevertheless there are a few strategic and planning issues to consider:

- **Is a 58-page Comprehensive Communication Strategy practically realistic for a communication team with 2.5 staff**? The current strategy is certainly comprehensive but probably too extensive for UNCCD's resources. If the points mentioned earlier in this document are accepted, notably the ones about strategic focus and messaging, it would be useful, but not essential, to produce a 1- to 2-page communication with key objectives, messages and channels so that everyone within the organisation – particularly those currently responsible for individual web pages – is up to speed with what the UNCCD wants to say and how, to ensure consistency.

- **Plan communication around long-running issues, not events:** The UNCCD's communication plans are typically based around forthcoming events such as Global Soil Week, a Financing for Development conference and other events, but without a pre-planned view of the key messages that will be communicated or the objective. As a result, its messaging tends to be driven by the subject of the event, not by the UNCCD's own agenda, leading to piecemeal and inconsistent messaging. Instead, the organisation should agree at the start of each year a small number of three to four strategic themes that it wants to champion – such as land degradation and food security - and concentrate on these, ideally focusing on each issue for a sustained period of time, say three months. All communication should consistently promote the issue over this period, including at other organisations' events. This repetition and consistency will help the UNCCD become more closely associated with key issues and help establish a more distinctive personality and raison d'être for the organisation.

9. Monitoring and evaluation

As mentioned at the start of this report, UNCCD's monitoring and evaluation of its communication is fairly basic. Given the organisation's limited human and financial resources, the M&E does not need to be any more complicated but it can be more sophisticated.

Recommendations for strengthening the M&E, without complicating it, include:

- **Use Google Analytics for all web M&E:** This should be done whether the UNCCD's website is revamped or not: Google Analytics has already been partly installed in the UNCCD site. Metrics that highlight the site's relevance and practical value, such as 'new versus returning' visitors, downloads and page shares, should be used.

- **Focus on 'engagement' measures for social media:** The current use of just 'likes' for Facebook and 'followers' for Twitter is restrictive. Both Facebook and Twitter offer more sophisticated measures of user engagement, such as page shares and retweets, which should be used. A short training course for staff on these analytical tools is recommended as most staff do not appear to be aware of how to use them fully. Even better, if an online specialist is recruited, they will be able to set up and manage these tools effectively, together with appropriate Google Analytics.

- **Conduct an annual stakeholder survey**, based on the questions asked for this evaluation.

- **Invite online feedback** through the website and other communication channels, both to generate ideas for strengthening the type of information that the UNCCD provides and to demonstrate that the organisation is responsive to users' needs and 'human', in the sense of establishing a dialogue.

10. Key recommendations

Throughout this report, there have been recommendations for strengthening UNCCDcommunication. Below is a round-up of the key recommendations in priority order:

1. **Streamline the messaging,** with one overarching message about land degradation that defines the UNCCD and a smaller number of issues-driven sub-messages (e.g. the relationship between land degradation and migration). Concentrate on issues where UNCCD's voice is likely to be distinctive and heard. In all messages, don't just highlight

the problem but also point to the solution, preferably supported by a clear and practical call to action.

2. **Reconfigure the UNCCD website** so that it is more user-focused, easier to navigate (aided by a stronger, more consistently applied visual identity – see point below) and communicates key messages, supported by a more thematic, issues-based structure. The site should also have a greater focus on providing practical suggestions for combatting land degradation, including more frequent 'cross-selling' of the Global Mechanism. The UNFCCC website provides a good example of how to do this.

3. **Upgrade the visual identity**, including aligning the Global Mechanism with a new, more coherent and consistently applied identity, supported by better visual identity guidelines. The UNCCD master logo should also be re-thought to make it more representative and to simplify it so that it can be used for any sub-brands, such as the Global Mechanism.

4. **Appoint an online specialist** to manage both the social media and the UNCCD website – having one person responsible for the website will significantly improve its coherence and impact, as well as enable other members of the communication team to concentrate more effectively on their respective roles.

5. **Use infographics and at-a-glance summaries more extensively in future materials,** including the proposed new website, both to appeal to the expectations of today's audiences and to help overcome language barriers. Statistics should also be made more 'human' by converting large numbers (e.g. '5 million hectares') into more meaningful, 'everyday' equivalents for audiences

6. **Provide dedicated funding for training journalists,** and, if possible, a dedicated budget for communication as a whole to enable better planning.

7. **Base communication plans on long-running strategic issues, not events.** For example, each quarter focus most if not all communication on a particular issue such as land degradation and food security. For events, such as partners' conferences, find an angle or 'twist' that enables the quarter's strategic issue to be promoted at each event.

8. **Monitor and evaluate progress using a small number of digital indicators**, notably Google Analytics (particularly new versus returning visitors) and 'engagement' measures for Facebook and Twitter. A dedicated online specialist at the UNCCD would be able to advise on and manage appropriate indicators. An annual online stakeholder survey, based on the one used for this evaluation, would also be advisable.