



INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2016/129

Audit of the advocacy, awareness-raising and education programme at the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

While the programme was implemented in accordance with plans, there were areas where programme and project management could be strengthened

7 November 2016
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Audit of the advocacy, awareness-raising and education programme at the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes over the advocacy, awareness-raising and education programme at the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The audit covered the period from January 2014 to July 2016, and it included a review of: implementation of the Conference of the Parties' decisions, strategic planning, risk management, performance monitoring and management of partnerships.

The UNCCD Secretariat implemented the advocacy, awareness-raising and education programme in accordance with the Convention's strategic plan (2008-2018) and approved work plans for 2014-2015 and 2016-2017. However, the audit identified a number of areas where programme and project management could be strengthened.

OIOS made six recommendations. To address the issues identified in the audit, the UNCCD Secretariat needed to:

- Ensure that performance indicators included in work plans are specific, measurable and relevant to the achievement of Convention objectives;
- Include in performance reports to Parties the outcomes achieved as a result of the activities undertaken;
- Monitor the implementation of its work plan based on the results/outcomes achieved, in addition to the reported outputs;
- Systematically identify, assess and manage the risks relating to the programme;
- Review and update the communication strategy to ensure that it is relevant and appropriate to current objectives and needs; and
- Develop appropriate manuals to guide the implementation of programme activities.

The UNCCD Secretariat accepted the recommendations and has initiated action to implement them.

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I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the advocacy, awareness-raising and education programme at the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).
2. The Convention was established in 1994 as a legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management. The Convention had 196 parties with the Conference of the Parties (COP) as its supreme decision-making body. The Convention's Secretariat is based in Bonn, Germany.
3. According to the UNCCD 10-year strategic plan and framework, the vision of the Parties was to forge a global partnership to reverse and prevent desertification/land degradation and to mitigate the effects of drought in affected areas in order to support poverty reduction and environmental sustainability. The strategic plan, which covered the period 2008-2018, had four objectives: (a) to improve the living conditions of affected populations; (b) to improve the condition of affected ecosystems; (c) to generate global benefits through effective implementation of the Convention; and (d) to mobilize resources to support implementation of the Convention through building effective partnerships between national and international actors.
4. The strategic plan had five operational objectives which included advocacy, awareness-raising and education. The aim of this objective was to actively influence relevant international, national and local processes and actors in adequately addressing desertification/land degradation and drought-related issues.
5. In 2014-2015, the UNCCD core budget for advocacy, awareness-raising and education programme was Euro 1,955,400 while in 2016-2017 the core budget for External Relations, Policy and Advocacy amounted to Euro 2,172,900. Programme activities were also funded through extra budgetary resources which amounted to Euro 1,980,450 in 2014-2015.
6. Comments provided by UNCCD are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

7. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes over the advocacy, awareness-raising and education programme at UNCCD.
8. This audit was included in the 2016 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to the risks associated with the programme and its relevance to the implementation of the Convention's mandate.
9. OIOS conducted this audit during August and September 2016. The audit covered the period from January 2014 to July 2016. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risks relating to programme and project management. This included: implementation of COP decisions, strategic planning, risk management, performance monitoring and management of partnerships.

10. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews with key personnel; (b) review of relevant records; (c) analytical reviews of data; and (d) testing of transactions based on judgmental sampling.

III. OVERALL CONCLUSION

11. The UNCCD Secretariat implemented the advocacy, awareness-raising and education programme in accordance with the Convention's strategic plan (2008-2018) and approved work plans for 2014-2015 and 2016-2017. However, the UNCCD Secretariat needed to: (i) ensure that performance indicators are measurable and relevant; (ii) monitor work plan implementation based on results/outcomes achieved; (iii) systematically manage risks relating to the programme; (iv) update its communication strategy; and (v) develop appropriate manuals to guide programme activities.

IV. AUDIT RESULTS

Programme and project management

The 10-year strategic plan and framework was being updated

12. The COP had adopted the 10-year (2008-2018) strategic plan and framework which was to be the basis for developing annual programmes of work. The strategic plan defined the vision, mission, strategic objectives, expected impact, operational objectives and expected outcomes. Progress on implementation was reported to the Committee for Review of the Implementation of the Convention.

13. Given that the strategic plan was the basis for development of work plans and resource allocation to achieve the Convention's objectives and expected outcomes, it is essential that the plan is up-to-date, relevant and responsive to the needs of the Convention.

14. A mid-term evaluation of the strategic plan conducted in 2013 found that the plan had achieved some progress "but less than what was hoped". Although it remained relevant and was consistent with the Parties' needs, priorities and policies, operational objectives needed to be updated to reflect recent developments and address the problems noted in the evaluation.

15. There was evidence that some important aspects of the strategic plan were outdated at the time of the audit. While the strategic objectives had remained unchanged, the expected outcomes for UNCCD interventions, as indicated in the 2016-2019 work plan, had changed in some cases. Furthermore, the expected accomplishments for the advocacy, awareness-raising and education programme (operational objective 1 of the strategic plan) had also evolved since the plan was originally adopted.

16. Without an updated strategy, there was a risk of resources being allocated to activities which may not contribute to achievement of the Convention's objectives. This could result in waste of resources and non-achievement of objectives. UNCCD stated that formulation of a new strategy was started by COP 12 in October 2015. An intergovernmental working group had been established to negotiate and draft the strategy, and the group had recently submitted a draft for consideration. The new strategy was expected to be presented and adopted at COP 13 in September 2017. In view of the action already initiated by UNCCD, OIOS did not make a recommendation.

Performance targets needed to be specific, measureable and relevant

17. By its decision 3/COP.8, the COP requested the UNCCD Secretariat to prepare multi-year work plans (2014-2017 and 2016-2019) using the results-based management (RBM) approach. According to

the guide on RBM in the UNCCD Secretariat (June 2015), RBM was to be used to focus and sharpen the planning of UNCCD institutions' and subsidiary bodies' work, make it more transparent to the Parties, and enable the Parties, UNCCD institutions and subsidiary bodies to monitor and evaluate the results.

18. UNCCD adopted four performance indicators and related targets in 2014-2015 for advocacy, awareness raising and education. Of these, three did not establish a clear linkage between achievement of expected performance targets and the stated objective of actively influencing relevant international, national and local processes and actors in adequately addressing desertification/land degradation and drought-related issues, and one was not adequately measurable.

19. In the multi-year 2016-2019 work plan, a new planning approach was adopted. Significant emphasis was placed on achievement of strategic objectives and no operational expected accomplishments were defined or targets set. While the main strategic outcomes and indicators were defined, no specific, measurable targets and related indicators had been set. Specific, measurable and relevant performance indicators are required to strengthen performance measurement, evaluation, reporting and accountability.

(1) The UNCCD Secretariat should ensure that performance indicators included in work plans are specific, measurable and relevant to the achievement of the Convention's objectives.

The UNCCD Secretariat accepted recommendation 1 and stated that specific, measurable and relevant indicators will be included in the next work plan, which will be submitted to COP 13 in September 2017. Recommendation 1 remains open pending receipt of evidence that specific, measurable and relevant indicators have been included in the next work plan.

Performance monitoring and reporting needed to be results-based

20. By its decision 3/COP.8, the COP requested the UNCCD Secretariat to report on progress in the implementation of the strategic plan and related work plans using RBM.

21. The results reported to the COP on advocacy, awareness-raising and education did not adequately reflect accomplishment of the stated objective, which was to actively influence relevant international, national and local processes and actors in adequately addressing desertification/land degradation and drought-related issues. For example, in the report on the performance of the Convention's institutions and subsidiary bodies for 2014-2015, the UNCCD Secretariat reported performance data that did not demonstrate achievement of expected accomplishments or the overall purpose of advocacy, awareness-raising and education. UNCCD reported performance based on the strategic orientation and multi-year work plan for 2014-2017. However, as discussed above, the performance indicators were generally not specific and measurable to support the attainment of the stated objective.

22. UNCCD had a mechanism for monitoring progress towards achievement of targets in 2014-2015. This included periodic progress reporting based on set targets, activities undertaken and main outputs achieved. The reported outputs included the number of average monthly unique visitors, Facebook "likes", procurement actions completed, new publications acquired, electronic messages distributed, and civil society organizations accredited for UNCCD sessions. However, the actual outcomes achieved remained unreported even though this information was available in the documentation concerning national reporting from the Parties. Therefore, the impact of activities undertaken on the achievement of the overall objectives of UNCCD was not clear.

(2) The UNCCD Secretariat should include in its performance reports to Parties the outcomes achieved as a result of the activities undertaken.

The UNCCD Secretariat accepted recommendation 2 and stated that in the next performance report, to be submitted to COP 13 in September 2017, the Secretariat will present the outcomes of its work, building on the UNCCD work plan, and link these outcomes to broader progress under UNCCD. Recommendation 2 remains open pending receipt of evidence that the next performance report to the COP includes outcomes of the activities undertaken.

(3) The UNCCD Secretariat should monitor the implementation of its work plan based on the results/outcomes achieved, in addition to the reported outputs.

The UNCCD Secretariat accepted recommendation 3 and stated that the 2016-2017 work plan monitoring will link the information on output delivery to the status of achieving the expected outcomes. Recommendation 3 remains open pending receipt of evidence that monitoring of work plan implementation includes linking of outputs to achievement of expected outcomes.

Need to implement a risk management framework for the programme

23. To achieve the intended objectives of the advocacy, awareness-raising and education programme, it is essential that all risks that could affect the successful implementation of the programme are systematically identified, assessed and managed.

24. There was no formal risk management framework in place for the programme, whose objective was to actively influence relevant international, national and local processes and actors in adequately addressing desertification/land degradation and drought-related issues. There were four expected accomplishments for this objective. However, the risks that could affect the accomplishment of expected results were not systematically identified, assessed and managed.

25. Although the UNCCD Secretariat had not formally established risk management policies and procedures, it had a risk register which was being updated at the time of the audit. A risk management framework is necessary to strengthen the UNCCD Secretariat's ability to manage risks and achieve its strategic goals and objectives.

(4) The UNCCD Secretariat should systematically identify, assess and manage the risks relating to the advocacy, awareness-raising and education programme.

The UNCCD Secretariat accepted recommendation 4 and stated that it is in the process of updating its risk register, which was started in May 2016 and followed up with a risk assessment training for the lead staff member in August 2016. Recommendation 4 remains open pending receipt of evidence that a risk management mechanism is in place at UNCCD.

Need to update the communication strategy

26. By its decision 3/COP.8, the COP requested the UNCCD Secretariat to document a communication strategy that was aligned to the Convention's strategic plan. Furthermore, in decision 4/COP.11, the COP requested the Secretariat to report on the implementation of this strategy.

27. The UNCCD Secretariat had developed a communication strategy in 2010 and reported on its implementation at COP 12. The communication strategy indicated the expected results and strategic actions to be taken by the Secretariat. However, OIOS review of the progress report to COP 12 indicated

that the reported activities and accomplishments did not address the expected results outlined in the strategy. Furthermore, there was no reporting on strategic actions taken and achievement of expected accomplishments.

28. The UNCCD Secretariat explained that many of the objectives in the communication strategy were outdated and therefore aligning the communication activities with outdated objectives would not yield optimal results.

(5) The UNCCD Secretariat should review and update the communication strategy to ensure that it is relevant and appropriate to current objectives and needs.

The UNCCD Secretariat accepted recommendation 5 and stated that the communication strategy will be reviewed and updated in the coming years, after which it will better serve as the results framework for communication activities. Recommendation 5 remains open pending receipt of evidence that the UNCCD Secretariat has reviewed and updated its communication strategy.

Procedures to guide programme implementation needed to be developed

29. Programme and project manuals assist management to ensure that activities are undertaken efficiently, effectively and consistently to achieve the intended objectives. They also enable assigning clear authority, responsibility and accountability for programme activities.

30. While the UNCCD Secretariat had developed templates which guided staff on key activities such as concept development, writing proposals and monitoring activities, it did not have programme and project manuals. Therefore, there was a risk that activities in the programme cycle may not always be performed efficiently and effectively.

(6) The UNCCD Secretariat should develop appropriate manuals to guide the implementation of programme activities.

The UNCCD Secretariat accepted recommendation 6 and stated that the Secretariat will clarify the information gaps that would be closed through the development of programme manuals by mid-2017. After that, the needed manuals will be developed. Recommendation 6 remains open pending receipt of the programme manuals developed by the UNCCD Secretariat to guide the implementation of programme activities.

Partnerships were generally managed adequately

31. The UNCCD Secretariat managed partnerships relating to the advocacy, awareness-raising and education programme in accordance with existing policies and procedures. Notably, the UNCCD Partnership Strategy of January 2016 established principles and practices to guide partnership arrangements for the Convention. This included appropriate tools and processes for managing partnerships. OIOS therefore concluded that partnerships were generally managed adequately.

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

32. OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the management and staff of UNCCD for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

(Signed) Eleanor T. Burns
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STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of the advocacy, awareness-raising and education programme at the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	C/ O ³	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ⁴
1	The UNCCD Secretariat should ensure that performance indicators included in work plans are specific, measurable and relevant to the achievement of the Convention's objectives.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that specific, measurable and relevant indicators have been included in the next work plan.	31 December 2017
2	The UNCCD Secretariat should include in its performance reports to Parties the outcomes achieved as a result of the activities undertaken.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that the next performance report to the COP includes outcomes of the activities undertaken.	31 December 2017
3	The UNCCD Secretariat should monitor the implementation of its work plan based on the results/outcomes achieved, in addition to the reported outputs.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that monitoring of work plan implementation includes linking of outputs to achievement of expected outcomes.	31 December 2017
4	The UNCCD Secretariat should systematically identify, assess and manage the risks relating to the advocacy, awareness-raising and education programme.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that a risk management mechanism is place at UNCCD.	31 December 2017
5	The UNCCD Secretariat should review and update the communication strategy to ensure that it is relevant and appropriate to current objectives and needs.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that the UNCCD Secretariat has reviewed and updated its communication strategy.	31 December 2017
6	The UNCCD Secretariat should develop appropriate manuals to guide the implementation of programme activities.	Important	O	Receipt of the programme manuals developed by the UNCCD Secretariat to guide the implementation of programme activities.	31 December 2017

¹ Critical recommendations address critical and/or pervasive deficiencies in governance, risk management or control processes, such that reasonable assurance cannot be provided with regard to the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.

² Important recommendations address important (but not critical or pervasive) deficiencies in governance, risk management or control processes, such that reasonable assurance may be at risk regarding the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.

³ C = closed, O = open

⁴ Date provided by UNCCD in response to recommendations.

APPENDIX I

Management Response

Management Response

Audit of the advocacy, awareness-raising and education programme at the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	The UNCCD Secretariat should ensure that performance indicators included in work plans are specific, measurable and relevant to the achievement of the Convention's objectives.	Important	Accepted.	Coordinator	2017	Specific, measurable and relevant indicators will be included in the next workplan, which will be submitted to COP 13 in September 2017.
2	The UNCCD Secretariat should include in its performance reports to Parties the outcomes achieved as a result of the activities undertaken.	Important	Accepted.	Coordinator	2017	In the next performance report, to be submitted to COP 13 in September 2017, the secretariat will present the outcomes of its work, building on the UNCCD workplan, and link these outcomes to broader progress under the UNCCD.
3	The UNCCD Secretariat should monitor the implementation of its work plan based on the results/outcomes achieved, in addition to the reported outputs.	Important	Accepted.	Coordinator	2017	The 2016-2017 work plan monitoring will link the information on output delivery to the status of achieving the expected outcomes.
4	The UNCCD Secretariat should systematically identify, assess and manage the risks relating to the advocacy, awareness-raising and education programme.	Important	Accepted.	Coordinator	2017	The UNCCD secretariat is in the process of updating its risk register, which was started in May 2016 and followed up with a risk assessment training for the lead staff member in August 2016.
5	The UNCCD Secretariat should review and update the communication strategy to ensure that it is relevant and appropriate to current objectives and needs.	Important	Accepted.	Coordinator	2017	The communication strategy will be reviewed and updated in the coming years, after which it will better serve as the results framework for communication activities.
6	The UNCCD Secretariat should develop	Important	Accepted.	Coordinator	2017	The secretariat will clarify the

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Management Response

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Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
	appropriate manuals to guide the implementation of programme activities.					information gaps that would be closed through the development of programme manuals by mid-2017. After that, the needed manuals will be developed.