



INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

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Audit of the Communication and Outreach programme at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Effectiveness of the Communication and Outreach programme could be enhanced

22 December 2017

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Audit of the Communication and Outreach programme at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the Communication and Outreach programme at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes over communication and outreach activities at UNFCCC. The audit covered the period from January 2016 to June 2017 and included a review of strategic planning, programme and project management, and regulatory framework.

UNFCCC had taken a number of actions to strengthen the management of its Communication and Outreach programme. The audit showed that these could be further enhanced.

OIOS made five recommendations. To address issues identified in the audit, UNFCCC needed to:

- Develop a coherent communication and outreach framework to ensure clarity of roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of all programmes involved in outreach activities;
- Implement risk management at the operational level to mitigate risks that could impact the attainment of programme objectives;
- Ensure that: (a) comprehensive Unit work plans are prepared in sufficient detail to guide the implementation of programme activities; and (b) monitoring of work plan implementation is documented for effective follow-up and resolution of any challenges;
- Ensure that staff performance plans and goals are linked to the Unit work plans to form a basis for their appraisal in accordance with the performance management system; and
- Ensure that all travel requests to purchase tickets for official business are finalized 16 calendar days in advance of commencement of travel in compliance with the policy on travel.

UNFCCC accepted the recommendations and has initiated action to implement them.

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Audit of the Communication and Outreach programme at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the Communication and Outreach programme at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

2. UNFCCC is an international treaty established as an overall framework for intergovernmental process to combat climate change. The Convention was ratified by 192 countries and came into force in 1994. The Convention was complemented by the Kyoto Protocol adopted in December 1997 and has 192 Parties. The Protocol established legally binding emission reduction requirements for 37 industrialized countries. The ultimate objective of both treaties is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system.

3. In December 2015, Parties to the Convention reached an agreement (the Paris Agreement) to combat climate change and accelerate and intensify actions and investments needed for a sustainable low carbon future. The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the Convention’s supreme legislative body; it is supported by the UNFCCC Secretariat which is required to: (i) provide support to intergovernmental negotiations; (ii) assist the Parties in the implementation of the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol; and (iii) facilitate the flow of authoritative information on implementation of the Convention.

4. The Communication and Outreach programme (hereafter referred to as “the Programme”) is responsible for external communication, media relations, public information and outreach to all governments, non-state actors and the public in support of the ultimate objectives of the Convention, its Kyoto protocol and the Paris Agreement. Its key areas of work are: (i) communication support to governments/constituted bodies via provision of broadcasting, press conferences, webcasting and media facilities; (ii) showcasing of governmental, scientific, economic, social and cultural action via the climate "newsroom", social media, and website in English, French and Spanish; (iii) event management/communication support for dialogue, side events, expert meetings supporting Global Climate Action and the Momentum for Change Initiatives; (iv) managing and promoting action for “climate empowerment - our work on youth to education”, and training under Article 6 of the Convention; (v) speechwriting, opinion polls, media engagement, strategic advice for the Executive Secretary, and engagement with governments/stakeholders; and (vi) strategic advice for United Nations system-wide communication on climate and messaging/links to Sustainable Development Goals.

5. The Programme was headed by a Director, who was also the spokesperson for the Executive Secretary. The Deputy Executive Secretary oversaw the work of the Programme. As at 30 June 2017, the Programme had a total of 23 approved posts funded from core and trust funds as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Communication and Outreach Programme staffing and funding source

Services	Staffing	Funding Source
Management and coordination	1 D-1; 2 P-3; 3 G-5	Core funding, trust fund for supplementary activities and programme support costs
Strategic communication services	1 P-5; 3 P-3; 1 G-4	Core funding
Public information and media services	1 P-4; 2 P-2; 1 G-6	Core funding and trust fund for supplementary activities
Momentum for change	1 P-3; 2 P-2; 1 G-5 and 1 G-4	Trust fund for supplementary activities
Communication for development	1 P-4; 1 P-2 and 1 G-5	Trust fund for clean development mechanism (Sustainable Development Mechanism)

6. The 2016-17 approved core budget for the Programme was \$ 2.2 million. Total resources available in the trust fund for supplementary activities as of 30 June 2017 were \$2.5 million. Staff of the Programme's Communication for Development Unit were funded by the trust fund for clean development mechanism.

7. Comments provided by UNFCCC are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

8. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes over communication and outreach activities at UNFCCC.

9. This audit was included in the 2017 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to the risks associated with the management of the Programme, which could adversely affect the achievement of UNFCCC's objectives.

10. OIOS conducted this audit from July to October 2017. The audit covered the period from January 2016 to June 2017. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risks in the CO Programme, which included: strategic planning, programme and project management, and regulatory framework.

11. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews with key personnel; (b) review of relevant documentation; (c) analytical reviews of data; and (d) testing of transactions.

12. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

III. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Strategic planning

Need to develop a coherent Secretariat-wide communication and outreach framework

13. The Programme is responsible for external communication, media relations, public information and outreach to all governments, non-state actors and the public in support of the ultimate objectives of the Convention, its Kyoto protocol and the Paris Agreement.

14. All substantive programmes of UNFCCC were involved in outreach activities. However, it was unclear as to how accountability, roles and responsibilities were differentiated between the Programme and the Convention's substantive programmes concerning the Secretariat's outreach operations and activities. In 2016, UNFCCC defined the risks pertaining to media relations and public information as "inability to anticipate and manage shifts in the information that stakeholders want, and the way in which they want it communicated to them; and ineffective ongoing, transparent communication with the public in order to create goodwill".

15. At the time of audit, there was no action plan on how to address the risk as the Secretariat had not yet developed a coherent organization-wide outreach framework in response to the identified risks. There was formal and informal coordination between the Programme and the Secretariat's other programmes, and the Management Team discussed issues and challenges affecting communications and outreach activities

during its meetings. However, the lack of coherent UNFCCC-wide outreach framework could lead to possible overlaps and lack of accountability for the Secretariat's outreach and external communications activities. A coherent Secretariat-wide outreach framework would ensure effectiveness of outreach activities to mitigate the identified risks.

(1) UNFCCC should develop a coherent communication and outreach framework to ensure clarity of roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of all programmes involved in outreach activities.

UNFCCC accepted recommendation 1 and stated that the Programme will continue to work with all departments and the Executive Office to enhance coherence and ensure that Secretariat-wide communication (internal and external) is improved and well-coordinated. Recommendation 1 remains open pending receipt of a coherent communication and outreach framework for UNFCCC as a whole.

B. Programme and project management

External communication through online and social media channels was adequate

16. UNFCCC provided communication support to the intergovernmental process through broadcasting, press conferences, webcasting and provision of media facilities. UNFCCC maintained a microsite called the "Newsroom for climate change and action" containing statements, press releases, news articles, videos and relevant links on climate change and action. The microsite was presented in English, French and Spanish. At the time of audit, the project to relaunch the UNFCCC website was ongoing; this was intended to improve the functionalities of the website and develop it into a hub that informs and frames actions of key stakeholders and groups of climate action. UNFCCC was also utilizing social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram in communicating with the public and stakeholders.

17. To monitor the effectiveness of its current online and media channels, UNFCCC planned to conduct a survey but did not implement it due to staffing constraints. However, the Programme gathered other information to analyze trends in its digital communication and outreach activities. This included statistics on its social media accounts and website visits, and monthly digital updates providing overviews, key conclusions and insights on the Secretariat's campaigns through the Newsroom and social media accounts. The Programme also analyzed digital communication activities for the COP in Paris. OIOS therefore concluded that the Programme had adequately utilized available online and social media channels in communicating to its stakeholders and target audience.

Need to integrate risk management into operational planning

18. UNFCCC had adopted enterprise risk management and internal control framework and developed risk registers in 2016. The UNFCCC enterprise risk register identified the risk that inability to obtain extra-budgetary funding may impact the achievement of its objectives. Reliance on extra-budgetary funding may jeopardize or appear to impact the independence of UNFCCC as projects that obtain earmarked funding are given higher priority. The enterprise risk register also recognized that failure to meet the requirements and obligations specified by donors may result in loss of confidence in the Convention's abilities to meet the desired objectives.

19. However, UNFCCC had not yet implemented risk management at the operational level to ensure that operational risks are identified and mitigated accordingly to enhance the effectiveness of operations. One of the activities undertaken by the Programme was called Momentum for Change (MfC) which

processes applications from around the world with the aim of recognizing the best lighthouse activities that demonstrated concrete action on the ground, and delivered clear and meaningful results that were innovative and replicable. MfC was funded from the trust fund for supplementary sources and relied heavily on donations from the private sector. In 2016, the Programme planned its MfC activities relying on a pledged amount of \$1 million from a private institution which backed out at the last minute. This resulted in funding challenges for the 2016 MfC activities that were already underway. Based on the status of the trust fund for supplementary activities as of June 2017, the estimated total cost of the MfC project for 2016 was \$1.2 million. However, by November 2016 the Programme only had a total of \$0.45 million (2014-15 ending balance and contributions received from January to November 2016).

20. Consequently, the Programme had to borrow funds from the programme support costs under Administrative Services to finance its planned activities, including payment of salaries to MfC staff during 2016. OIOS is of the opinion that UNFCCC needs to implement risk management processes at the operational level to mitigate the relevant risks and minimize their negative impact

(2) UNFCCC should implement risk management at the operational level to mitigate risks that could impact the attainment of programme objectives.

UNFCCC accepted recommendation 2 and stated that it has developed the risk response plan for the 2017 risk register. As part of the monitoring process, UNFCCC will ensure that risk management is also implemented at the operational level. Recommendation 2 remains open pending receipt of evidence that risk management has been implemented at the operational level to mitigate risks that could impact the attainment of programme objectives.

Need to develop and monitor Unit work plans

21. UNFCCC's Administrative Guideline AG/2016/1 on the Performance Appraisal System defines the Secretariat's strategy and goals in line its mandate. Heads of programmes decide on goals for the programme based on which managers define work plans for their Units or teams. At the beginning of the appraisal cycle, the first appraising officer shall meet with the staff member to ensure that the work plan connects with the goals of the Programme and Unit.

22. Units within the Programme were required to develop comprehensive work plans in sufficient detail so that they can be used for monitoring the progress in implementing the planned activities. Some Units only had work flow descriptions whereas others used budget and project documents for monitoring purposes. For example, the MfC adopted the work plans stated in the project documents, but did not have a consolidated work plan for all its project activities. Similarly, the work plan of Public Information and Media Services showed distribution of work activities but did not have documentation of work plan review and approval by the Head of Programme, expected timelines for achieving targets, and indication to funding requirements and their sources. There was no systematic process in place to ensure that Unit work plans were prepared and linked with the goals, outputs and expected accomplishments of the Programme. Such a systematic process would also assist in ensuring that funding requirements for the planned activities are assessed and resource mobilization strategies are developed to meet them. Unit work plans would also form the basis for developing individual staff goals to ensure linkage between Unit work plans and those of individual staff members.

23. The Director of the Programme stated that progress of planned activities was discussed through meetings. However, there were no minutes to document the discussions and identify any follow-up action. Without comprehensive Unit work plans that also form the basis for staff performance appraisal, the Programme may not be able to effectively achieve the intended outputs and accomplishments.

(3) The UNFCCC Director of the Communications and Outreach Programme should ensure that: (a) comprehensive Unit work plans are prepared in sufficient detail to guide the implementation of Programme activities; and (b) monitoring of work plan implementation is documented for effective follow-up and resolution of any challenges.

UNFCCC accepted recommendation 3 and stated that the Programme will endeavor to compile the necessary documents, ensure that a comprehensive consolidated Unit work plan is readily available, and follow up progress meetings duly documented. Recommendation 3 remains open pending receipt of: (a) comprehensive Unit work plans prepared in sufficient detail; and (b) documented evidence of monitoring of work plan implementation for effective follow-up and resolution of any challenges.

(4) The UNFCCC Director of the Communications and Outreach Programme should ensure that staff performance plans and goals are linked to the Unit work plans to form a basis for their appraisal in accordance with the performance management system.

UNFCCC accepted recommendation 4 and stated that the Director of Communications will ensure that linkages between the Unit work plan and staff work plan are clearly outlined and with sufficient details. Correlations and dependencies between Programme goals and staff goals will be equally highlighted and recorded. Recommendation 4 remains open pending receipt of evidence that staff performance work plans and goals are linked to Unit work plans to form a basis for their appraisal.

C. Regulatory framework

Need to ensure that tickets are purchased 16 calendar days in advance

24. Administrative Guidance AG/2014/1 states that heads of programmes shall ensure that all certified requests to purchase a ticket for individuals travelling on official business are finalized at least 16 calendar days in advance of commencement of any official travel. Any request for purchase of a ticket or changes to a purchased ticket that are made after the 16-day mark must be accompanied by a written justification by the head of the programme. Without such justification, issuance or change of the ticket will not be authorized. Further, official business travel for staff members requires prior approval by the Executive Secretary, the responsible head of programme or other specifically authorized staff. This includes travel to support events organized by the UNFCCC Secretariat and missions to externally convened events. Travel requests are required to be submitted in Umoja 21 days prior to travel to ensure that certified travel requests could be finalized at least 16 calendar days before commencement of travel.

25. OIOS review of 27 travel requests showed that only 13 were supported with duly approved mission objective forms. Forty-nine per cent of the Programme's staff travel requests for air travel for the period January 2016 to June 2017 did not comply with the requirement to purchase tickets at least 16 calendar days in advance. The following were the main justifications provided:

- In four travel requests, the Director justified that the Programme's staff needed to wait for the travel itinerary of the Executive Secretary whom they were required to support.
- In one case, the Director justified that the Executive Secretary requested the Programme staff member to be included in the team that accompanied her to a mission at the last minute, resulting in the travel request being submitted and processed on the day of official travel.

- In seven travel requests, the reason attributed was late invitation from the organizers but there were no documents to show that there was delayed invitation.

26. OIOS also noted that for three staff members, non-compliance with the 16-day rule became the norm rather than the exception; their non-compliant travel requests accounted for about 75 per cent of all their travels. While it could not be established whether there was any financial loss due to non-compliance with the 16-day rule in these cases, UNFCCC may have missed the opportunity to benefit from cheaper prices that are usually available when air tickets are bought at least 16 days in advance.

(5) The UNFCCC Director of the Communications and Outreach Programme should ensure that all travel requests to purchase tickets for official business are finalized 16 calendar days in advance of commencement of travel in compliance with the policy on travel.

UNFCCC accepted recommendation 5 and stated that the Director of Communication and Outreach will strive, as far as possible, to comply with the ticketing purchase policy and provide a rationale in the event of non-compliance. It is important to note that as a communication unit, the Programme is often required to conduct outreach missions or attend events with relatively short notice. Furthermore, the nature of the work, timelines and support provided to the Executive Secretary make it often impossible to meet this requirement. Recommendation 5 remains open pending receipt of evidence that tickets for official business are finalized 16 calendar days in advance of commencement of travel.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

27. OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the management and staff of UNFCCC 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 communication and outreach programme at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	C/ O ³	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ⁴
1	UNFCCC should develop a coherent communication and outreach framework to ensure clarity of roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of all programmes involved in outreach activities.	Important	O	Receipt of a coherent communication and outreach framework for UNFCCC as a whole.	1 June 2018
2	UNFCCC should implement risk management at the operational level to mitigate risks that could impact the attainment of programme objectives.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that risk management has been implemented at the operational level to mitigate risks that could impact the attainment of programme objectives.	1 March 2018
3	The UNFCCC Director of the Communications and Outreach Programme should ensure that: (a) comprehensive Unit work plans are prepared in sufficient detail to guide the implementation of Programme activities; and (b) monitoring of work plan implementation is documented for effective follow-up and resolution of any challenges.	Important	O	Receipt of: (a) comprehensive Unit work plans prepared in sufficient detail; and (b) documented evidence of monitoring of work plan implementation for effective follow-up and resolution of any challenges.	31 October 2018
4	The UNFCCC Director of the Communications and Outreach Programme should ensure that staff performance plans and goals are linked to the Unit work plans to form a basis for their appraisal in accordance with the performance management system.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that staff performance work plans and goals are linked to Unit work plans to form a basis for their appraisal.	31 October 2018
5	The UNFCCC Director of the Communications and Outreach Programme should ensure that all travel requests to purchase tickets for official business are finalized 16 calendar days in advance of commencement of travel in compliance with the policy on travel.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that tickets for official business are finalized 16 calendar days in advance of commencement of travel.	31 January 2018

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 UNFCCC in response to recommendations.

APPENDIX I

Management Response

Management Response

Audit of the communication and outreach programme at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	UNFCCC should develop a coherent communication and outreach framework to ensure clarity of roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of all programmes involved in outreach activities.	Important	Yes	Director Communications and Outreach	1 June 2018	CO will continue to work with all departments and the Executive Office to enhance coherence and ensure that Secretariat wide communications (Internal and External) is improved and well-coordinated.
2	UNFCCC should implement risk management at the operational level to mitigate risks that could impact the attainment of programme objectives.	Important	Yes	Director Communications and Outreach	1 March 2018	UNFCCC has developed the risk response plan for the 2017 risk register. As part of the monitoring process, UNFCCC will ensure that risk management is also implemented at the operational level.
3	The UNFCCC Director of the Communications and Outreach Programme should ensure that: (a) comprehensive Unit work plans are prepared in sufficient detail to guide the implementation of programme activities; and (b) monitoring of work plan implementation is documented for effective follow-up and resolution of any challenges.	Important	Yes	Director Communications and Outreach	Mid-Point Review of E performance appraisal plans in 2018	CO will endeavor to compile the necessary documents, ensure that a comprehensive consolidated unit work plan is readily available, and follow up progress meetings duly documented. Recommendation 3 remains open pending receipt of: (a) comprehensive Unit work plans prepared in sufficient detail; and (b) documented evidence of monitoring of work plan implementation for effective follow-up and resolution of any

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.

Management Response

Audit of the communication and outreach programme at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
						challenges.
4	The UNFCCC Director of the Communications and Outreach Programme should ensure that staff performance plans and goals are linked to the Unit work plans to form a basis for their appraisal in accordance with the performance management system.	Important	Yes	Unit Heads in Communications and Outreach	Mid-Point review of staff E performance appraisal plans	The Director of Communications will ensure that linkages between the unit work plan and staff work plan are clearly outlined and with sufficient details. Correlations and dependencies between Programme goals and staff goals will be equally highlighted and recorded.
5	The UNFCCC Director of the Communications and Outreach Programme should ensure that all travel requests to purchase tickets for official business are finalized 16 calendar days in advance of commencement of travel in compliance with the policy on travel.	Important	Yes	Travel Focal Points in Communications and Outreach	31 January 2018	The Director of Communication and Outreach will strive, in as far as possible, to comply with the ticketing purchase policy and provide a rationale in the event of non-compliance. It is important to note that as a communication unit, the CO Programme is often required to conduct outreach missions or attend events with relatively short notices. Furthermore, the nature of the work, timelines and support provided to the Executive Secretary make it often impossible to meet this requirement.