



منظمة الأغذية  
والزراعة  
للأمم المتحدة

联合国  
粮食及  
农业组织

Food  
and  
Agriculture  
Organization  
of  
the  
United  
Nations

Organisation  
des  
Nations  
Unies  
pour  
l'alimentation  
et  
l'agriculture

Organización  
de las  
Naciones  
Unidas  
para la  
Agricultura  
y la  
Alimentación

## PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

### Ninety-fourth Session

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### Evaluation of the Cross-organizational Strategy on Communicating FAO's Messages – Management's Response

#### I. Introduction

1. FAO is convinced that it is in the interest of the Organization itself and its Members to communicate effectively with a wide range of audiences in order to increase public awareness and understanding of issues related to its mandate. In particular, we recognise the need to secure broad public support for efforts to deliver the 1996 World Food Summit commitment of reducing by half the number of the world's hungry by 2015, as well as the Millennium Development Goal of reducing the proportion of the world's population suffering extreme poverty and hunger by the same date. At the same time we recognise that successful communication requires the development of a genuine and deep-rooted communication culture across the Organization, at headquarters and in decentralised offices. Such a communication culture must be based on a shared foundation of knowledge, in which FAO staff become informed and convinced partners in communication efforts.

2. FAO took its first steps to foster such a communication culture with the adoption of the Corporate Communication Policy and Strategy in 1999, but it was always realised that this would not be an overnight process. A key element has been development of a fully participatory corporate communication planning process. The evaluation clearly identifies areas where progress has been satisfactory, and others where it has been slow and more effort needs to be made. The analysis is welcome and will make a positive contribution to the development of more focused and effective strategic communication.

3. In his introduction to the Corporate Communication Policy and Strategy, the Director-General stated unequivocally that FAO has a mission to communicate. He noted that the effectiveness and credibility of the Organization as a policy-making forum and a unique, multilingual centre of excellence, knowledge and technical expertise, depended to a considerable degree on its ability to communicate.

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4. We have to recognize that in an increasingly globalized and digitalized world, we face a major challenge to make our voice heard among so many competing for the attention of the public, of decision-makers and law-makers. To do so effectively requires professional expertise and access to the most modern technologies. It also requires adequate resources; in this context the benchmarking analysis undertaken by the evaluation team is extremely valuable.

5. This independent external evaluation confirms that “many elements conducive to a good communication of FAO’s messages exist”, and finds through media analysis “the general impression given of FAO as a reliable, credible and serious organization which could speak with authority on food and agriculture.” It makes a number of recommendations that are wholeheartedly welcomed, and we are convinced that it will help us to improve both the focus and effectiveness of the communication process, to the benefit of the membership and the Organization itself.

## **II. Response to the Specific Recommendations of the Evaluation**

### **A. COMMUNICATION PLANNING**

6. The evaluation reviews at some length the evolution of the process of corporate communication planning and formulation of messages, and recognizes that progress has been made, although the buy-in at departmental level varies across the Organization. There is welcome recognition that advanced planning has enabled GII to offer better assistance to departments, that the efficiency of the division has increased and its relationships with the departments and regions have been strengthened.

7. The recommendation to establish a truly corporate rolling communication plan, integrating top-down and bottom-up planning and distinguishing topics from messages is fully accepted. We agree that there is a need for greater involvement of senior managers in the process of shaping messages and also with the suggestion that the Corporate Communication Committee is the appropriate forum for this. This will be implemented starting in the coming biennium.

8. We view with great interest the suggestion that FAO should embark on integrated campaigns such as WHO’s on tobacco or TB. It has always been a communication challenge to represent the full range of activities undertaken by FAO and at the same time to project a clear, comprehensible image of the Organization – in other words, “one” FAO, rather than a collection of narrowly focused departments working and communicating independently. However, we believe that it may be possible to develop packages of messages related to key issues central to FAO’s mandate that would complement a prime corporate focus on food security.

### **B. FLAGSHIP PUBLICATIONS**

9. We agree that better advantage could be taken of the flagship publications, both printed and electronic (such as FAOSTAT), as channels for conveying corporate messages. We accept that more press briefings and consistent use of summary flyers, particularly in decentralised offices, could increase international media coverage, with the caveat that there is a need for the technical authors to develop clear and consistent messages that have a resonance for non-specialist audiences. Outreach to the popular sector press for agriculture, forestry and fisheries could also be improved with a more targeted approach to news dissemination and more attention to messaging. Ways of achieving this will be explored, in line with this recommendation.

### **C. FAO HOMEPAGE**

10. We share the view of the evaluators that the Organization’s Web site is one of the most important communication channels available to us. The example cited of UNESCO, which established a special unit responsible for editorial content and for bringing greater coherence and

“communication outlook” to a heterogeneous collection of inward-looking and technical sub-sites, will be studied closely.

11. We thus fully accept this recommendation, noting that work is already well advanced on development of a refreshed and redesigned homepage with improved navigation, greater emphasis on news, and graphic techniques inspired by modern advertising. The homepage and other high-traffic pages such as FAOSTAT and Codex Alimentarius will be used as vehicles for priority corporate messages.

#### **D. TELEVISION**

12. We accept the desirability of pursuing appropriate partnership and co-production arrangements so long as issues of editorial control can be resolved. However we have concerns that to eliminate in-house production capacity would be neither cost-effective nor acceptable in terms of loss of editorial control and of institutional memory. We will focus on improving the placement of video material as a route to enhancing its impact. UNESCO’s innovative approaches in this area will be studied closely, as recommended, and further efforts will be made to enable us to monitor effectively the impact and usage of radio and TV productions, while recognising the difficulties all organizations face in doing this cost-effectively.

#### **E. TARGETED COMMUNICATION VS. INFORMATION**

13. We accept the recommendation that more attention should be given to targeting our media communications and have already initiated a process of improvement to the existing list-serve based system. We will also make greater efforts to obtain feedback from users to ensure the suitability of the material disseminated. At the same time we wish to emphasise our conviction that our mandate requires us to maintain a global public information component to our communication programme.

14. On the question of style and language, we note that there will inevitably sometimes be disagreement between GII, which endeavours to draft press releases in language accessible to non-specialists, and technical staff, concerned that such language may lead to technical inaccuracy or imprecision. GII will continue to try to exclude jargon and institutional language. In this context, we think it is worth noting that communication colleagues in other UN agencies and programmes have commented favourably on the journalistic style of FAO’s news releases, as compared to the more institutional language they feel constrained to use, and we have also received positive feedback on our style from journalists.

15. Regarding the volume of material produced and disseminated, it must be said that to some extent the increasing number of press releases is an indicator of the success of GII in demonstrating to technical units the benefits of communicating information about their activities – an example of the communication culture becoming a reality. Thus the volume is driven by demand from the technical departments, not imposed by GII. One approach to reducing the number of stories issued as press releases that we are exploring, is to place more of the secondary stories only on the Newsroom Web page, bringing them to the attention of journalists through the newly launched NEW@FAO e-mail alert tool or placing them in specialist media.

#### **F. COMMUNICATING IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

16. We fully accept the evaluators’ recommendation that work with the media in developing countries be integrated with FAO policy priorities. We agree that locally based media are more effective in reaching local audiences than international media, which is why FAO Representatives are encouraged to build relations with the local media and establish their own media distribution lists. They are also encouraged to create opportunities for communication through, for example, launches for flagship publications. The recommendation that potentially newsworthy projects include a communication budget is wholeheartedly accepted.

### **G. FAO GOODWILL AMBASSADORS**

17. While the recommendation that contractual agreements should be developed for FAO Goodwill Ambassadors, outlining their duties and responsibilities, is already in force, we accept the recommendation to focus on fewer, more active Ambassadors.

### **H. WORLD FOOD DAY THEME**

18. We appreciate that there is merit in the suggestion that the World Food Day theme be developed together with the other UN food agencies, and possibly other partners – perhaps in the context of the International Alliance Against Hunger – thus underlining the truly worldwide nature of the day. At the same time, we have concerns that should the Organization renounce its sole “ownership” of the annual theme decision, it might no longer be able to count on World Food Day as a key focus of our communication campaign, as the evaluators propose. To reconcile these conflicting considerations, we will consider ways of broadening the scope of those consulted when the WFD theme is being decided, perhaps including IAAH partners.

### **I. NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS**

19. We accept that careful review and analysis of potentials are needed before any additional national FAO Associations are established. The further study recommended will concentrate on selected developed countries with high potential for advocacy and fund-raising activities. We would note that these associations are generally maintained for as long as they are considered useful by government authorities, and FAO’s influence on their activities is limited.

### **J. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS**

20. The need for better coordination and definition of the roles of the various units involved in communication is clearly indicated by the analysis of the evaluators and this will be taken into account in working out the detailed organizational and structural changes being proposed by the Director-General, in so far as they affect communication activities. We note the suggestion that there should be a closer relationship between GII and ODG, and will work to establish this, while recognizing that it is the policy of the Director-General not to build up his own office. Already GII is working closely with ODG to develop a Major Events planning and tracking system.

21. We agree that there is a need to revisit the TeleFood coordination structure and its institutional isolation, for a more efficient use of resources and better coordination of outreach. This will be done in the context of the structural reorganization referred to above. At the same time, we welcome the planned in-depth study of fund-raising issues by the Evaluation Service and believe that the study should also consider the question of whether maintenance of a separate brand for fund-raising is necessary or effective.

## **III. Conclusion**

22. FAO welcomes this evaluation report as a constructive contribution to development of communication in the Organization and believes that implementation of its recommendations, as outlined above, will improve the focus and effectiveness of our external communication and speed up the process of establishing a genuine communication culture internally.