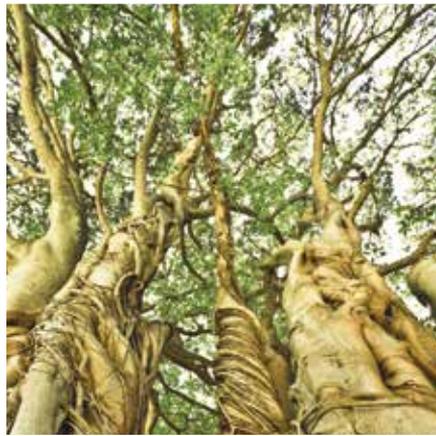




African Forest Forum

A platform for stakeholders in African forestry



The African Forest Forum Communication Strategy



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Section 1: Scene-setting report on existing communications

Background to the African Forest Forum

The African Forest Forum (AFF) is an international NGO and members' association, formed in 2007. It was created at the request of African forestry stakeholders and continues to be led by its membership, who set the agenda for AFF's work.

AFF's **remit** (stated in its strapline) is to be 'a platform for stakeholders in African forestry'. AFF's **vision** is 'to be the leading forum that unites all stakeholders in African forestry'. AFF's **goal** is 'to galvanize a common African voice and opinion, and mobilize resources that are required to address forestry and related issues that cut across countries and regions, with the aim of enhancing the relevance and contribution of forestry and trees to the people of Africa and the stability of their environment'.

AFF's overall **strategy** for 2009–2014 states four specific objectives:

- Build and strengthen networking among the many and varied stakeholders in forestry in Africa.
- Develop, solicit funding for, and implement specific programmes, projects and activities that address already identified priority issues and opportunities in African forestry.
- Raise the profile of forestry, highlight threats to forest resources and the environment, and champion better management of African forests.
- Undertake institutional organisational development of AFF, including its Secretariat and governance structures.

Communication is clearly crucial to the first three of these four objectives. Current activity focuses on the following subject areas:

- Good governance and fair trade in forest products
- Climate change: forest relations in socioeconomic development
- Forest–water relations
- Transboundary forest management
- Certification capacity in African forestry
- Tree-seed germplasm capacity in Africa

AFF also wants to reach out to the agricultural sector. Trees on farms have significant potential to enhance livelihoods and protect the environment: potential that is not yet fully tapped. The agricultural sector would benefit through working with the forestry sector.

There are many other organisations supporting sustainable African forestry. AFF's unique elements are the broad range of forest stakeholders that it serves and its membership structure. Because of its broad stakeholder base, it brings together not only science, but also indigenous knowledge, technical expertise and first-hand experience. Because of its membership structure, it can truly claim to be an independent voice that speaks objectively for stakeholders across the sector. This document has been informed by a member survey on communications, conducted in November 2012 (see appendix 1).

Target audiences for communications

Major stakeholder audiences for AFF's communications are described below, in order of priority. The majority of AFF's work is done regionally and flows out to the national level from there.

Membership

Membership is over 640 and growing. Membership is for individuals only, which assures the independent voice of the organisation. Institutes can participate, in an observer capacity, at AFF's Governing Council level. Forty per cent of members are foresters; the rest are individuals working in other sectors related to forests and trees. These include researchers, government representatives, civil society, development or economic groups, farmers' associations and the private sector. Most African regions are well represented. New members are mainly recruited through meetings and events.

The membership sets the agenda for AFF, by identifying the priority issues and which stakeholders might address problems identified by AFF (for example by providing research or training

services). As well as being a target audience, the membership is also a communication channel. Through them, AFF reaches out to rural and forest communities, in addition to policy and decision makers at all levels. The purpose of communication with the membership is to:

- share research findings, ideas, experiences, new developments and best practice
- encourage networking and dialogue on forest issues
- identify new and emerging issues, developing problems and new opportunities
- inform about interesting publications, meetings, job opportunities, etc.
- increase AFF's profile and credibility.

Communication should also seek to recruit new members and strengthen existing membership. AFF communicates with the membership directly, via the website, the email list, forums and workshops.

Private sector

The private sector is vital in helping Africa to realize the economic potential of resources from sustainably managed forests. This group includes individuals, companies and trade associations associated with natural forests, tree plantations, wood processing, forest products and ecotourism. AFF has an active partnership with ITTO, an organisation with strong representation from the global tropical timber trade.¹ However, the private sector is poorly represented in AFF's membership, comprising about 6% of the total. Communication with the private sector has the same aims as communication with the membership but, in addition, should:

- build support and involvement with forest law enforcement, governance and trade (FLEGT), and corporate social responsibility and sustainable forestry initiatives (e.g. forest certification and fair trade activities)
- facilitate the evolution of an organized and structured private sector in African forestry.

This is a difficult stakeholder set to engage with, given the heterogeneity and lack of organisation

¹ All acronyms are spelt out in appendix 3

in the sector. Possible channels of communication include trade associations and networks, trade fairs and the trade press.

Partners

AFF forms partnerships with like-minded organisations from forestry, economic development and related sectors, such as agriculture and wildlife management. These are formed as required to increase resources, reach and impact for specific activities. Current partners include the regional economic and development communities and initiatives (EAC, COMESA, ECOWAS, NEPAD, SADC), regional and international research organisations (FARA, ICRAF, CIFOR), UN bodies (UNFF, FAO, UNECA, and UNEP) and other organisations and initiatives working on various related issues, including sustainable forestry, rehabilitation of degraded lands and education (ANAFE, AFWC, GGWSSI). AFF would like to broaden its links with its partners.

Communication with partners and potential partners should:

- establish trust in AFF as a valuable partner
- raise awareness of AFF and its areas of activity among potential partners
- reduce overlaps and increase synergies with partners
- increase efficiency in mobilizing and using resources
- increase the reach and impact of activities
- address issues more holistically and conclusively.

This diverse group can be reached via a wide range of communication channels, including: development, scientific and economic conferences; academic journals; learned societies (e.g. academies of sciences such as AAS); and related networks (FORNESSA). Most of these organisations have a social media presence.

Policy makers

AFF aims to address a lack of political awareness on some issues and increase support for the African forestry sector. It seeks to influence policy makers at the international, regional and sub-regional levels. For example, AFF supports African delegations to international policy-making processes (UNFF, CBD, and UNCCD). It also engages with African policy-making bodies

and events (AUC, AMCEN, CAADP, CILSS, and UNECA) and sub-regional bodies (COMIFAC, SADC). This group is usually time-poor and requires specialized communications tailored to their needs (e.g. policy briefs and presentations).

Communication with this group should:

- provide support for evidence-based policy making
- encourage policy-making decisions that support sustainable African forestry
- enhance recognition of the role of forestry in other economic sectors.

Building relationships with this group requires direct communication and meetings with key contacts. These communications should raise awareness and appreciation of forest issues and how they relate to a range of policy issues (environmental, economic, wildlife and tourism). AFF's communications should also seek to influence them indirectly via mainstream media coverage, high-level fora and think tanks.

Donors

AFF's primary funders are the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). A wider funding base could be sought, with more donor partners from developed countries (CIRAD, DfID, GIZ, NORAD, USAID) and from other sources, such as the African Development Bank.

Communication with this group should:

- build relationships with current and potential funders
- demonstrate effective use of past AFF funding
- influence future funding decisions on forestry-related issues.

To do this, AFF's communications need to include material such as endorsements from high-profile stakeholders, evidence of impact and success stories.

Overview of existing communications

Website

Because of its international accessibility and the ease of updating, the website is a crucial communication tool for reaching all stakeholder groups. AFF's well-established website is hosted and managed by an external contractor. The communication survey showed it to be the most regularly used of the AFF communication resources. The website provides a comprehensive range of AFF publications for downloading, enables members to register online, and provides information on AFF developments and major international events (such as Rio+20, UNFF10, COP17 and COP18).

The most-visited pages (in the 3rd quarter of 2012) were those on AFF events, vacancies or membership. Search engines rank AFF highly when searches are made using relevant terms ('African forest(+ry)', 'African sustainable forest management'). Website hits over the 3rd quarter of 2012 were around 15,000.

The website is currently being upgraded. The new website is a major improvement, giving a much clearer picture of the AFF remit and activities and also incorporating social media. However, there is potential to develop it further, if resources are available.

The website needs to reflect dialogue more prominently, by reporting on the results of online forums or on discussions or debates at meetings. The membership nature of the organisation also deserves a higher profile, perhaps by providing profiles of key members or posting member articles. There is also potential to add more information on developments in the sector (national events, relevant reports, blog posts, vacancies, funding opportunities). An internet search in November 2012 revealed the following developments that would be of interest to members. These are examples of the kind of information that might be disseminated via the website:

- World Forest Day²
- an FAO report on forest, trees and woodlands in Africa: an action plan for World Bank engagement³

2 www.forestsclimatechange.org/events/forest-day/forest-day-6/home.html

3 <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2012/06/16903104/forest-trees-woodlands-africa-action-plan-world-bank-engagement>

- a blog post on formalizing Cameroon's timber section⁴
- the latest edition of the *Journal of Southern Forests*.⁵

AFF's members are drawn from a number of sectors and come to the AFF website looking for different types of information. They would find it easier if there were specific website sections that drew together the information they are looking for. For example, a page for policy makers might include:

- policy briefs and fact sheets
- an overview of relevant policy areas (e.g. FLEGT, REDD+)
- details of the support that AFF gives to policy makers and African delegations
- news of policy progress
- contacts for the policy support group at AFF.

A page for researchers might include:

- books, reports and working papers
- details of AFF's research partners
- relevant conferences
- new research papers.

Key pages (e.g. the home page) should be made available in French.

Publications

AFF's publication portfolio includes books, reports, working papers and policy briefs. Download figures for these publications are respectable (10,600 in the 3rd quarter of 2012). These publications are mostly well written and presented, but they are written by various authors and the quality is variable. For example, executive summaries are sometimes absent, overlong or fail to carry any recommendations. More could be done to tailor the content and style of the writing to different audiences and formats. For example, policy makers need to be able to quickly scan a policy brief and pull out the necessary information. All AFF's publications would benefit from a light copy edit before publication.

The AFF newsletter comes out 3-4 times a year and carries AFF news, as well as other major developments in the sector. The newsletter could adopt a more informal style, with a greater variety of articles and a stronger focus on the membership voice (e.g. interviews with key figures, lists of new members, profiles of members, members' letters). An AFF flier or

brochure is an essential part of the portfolio, and this is currently in production.

Publications are available in electronic format. Hardcopies of selected publications are also available. These should be printed on certified, sustainably-sourced paper, and labelled as such (most printers and/or designers will do this). Most publications are translated into French. Translation into other languages (especially Arabic, Portuguese and Swahili) will increase readership further; this should be done if resources are available.

Events

Events are an important opportunity for advocacy, AFF promotion, and networking and dialogue with key stakeholder groups. Events are also the main route to recruiting new members. AFF organizes discussions, workshops, seminars and conferences. It holds regular meetings of its Governing Council and other committees in different African countries. It also has a presence at important events organized by others (e.g. UNFCCC, AFWC, FAO/COFO, WFC, UNFF, UNEP, ITTO, FORNESSA, IUFRO).

AFF could extend its presence at events to reach out to new target groups, such as North African stakeholders and the African agricultural sector. An adaptable set of exhibition materials would support AFF's presence at such events.

Social media and media

Social media is growing in use and will be an increasingly important arena for AFF's dialogue, networking and dissemination. AFF plans to develop a presence on Twitter, Facebook, Google+ and LinkedIn. Twitter is already used to good effect by many relevant institutions and NGOs (CIFOR, ICRAF, FSC), and AFF could use it to communicate with them. LinkedIn includes some promising discussion groups and these should be investigated and monitored to assess their worth for AFF (see appendix 2).

However, managing a social media presence is time-consuming and the survey demonstrates that this is not a priority communication channel for the membership. AFF must ensure that it uses new media effectively, with a proportionate use of its resources.

AFF has periodically appeared in the press. However, there is no strategy for proactively engaging with the press and media coverage is not tracked.

⁴ http://blog.cifor.org/11463/cutting-through-formalising-camerouns-huge-domestic-timber-market/#.UKo_iOR318F

⁵ www.tandfonline.com/toc/tsfs20/74/4

AFF's communication capacity and communication implementation

AFF contracts a web company (Integrity Systems PLC) to host and maintain the website. Occasional upgrades and new functionality are also outsourced. Content is generated by Secretariat staff and from the programmes. AFF staff produce corporate documents. Experts working on AFF projects produce programme outputs, such as working papers and reports. Editing and translation is contracted to New Alliance Publishers, PLC. Document production (layout, graphic design, PDF production and printing) is outsourced. Beyond basic web analytic data (hit rates and download figures), AFF has not monitored or evaluated its communications before this study.

A major constraint is the amount of in-house support for communications, currently only around 50-70% of one staff member's time. This limits the addition of up-to-date content to the website and precludes effective monitoring and evaluation. AFF is not currently seeking in-kind support for communications from partners; this could be a source of additional resources.

Stakeholder awareness

A member survey (see appendix 1) was conducted in November 2012. It should be noted that the survey was voluntary and emailed to the membership and thus only represents engaged members with good levels of awareness of AFF.

The results show that there is great potential to increase awareness of AFF. Out of the 118 responses:

- 83% first heard of AFF from colleagues or at meetings, with most of the others discovering it via the website
- 4% felt that AFF was widely known and regularly mentioned
- 61% stated that only some of their colleagues knew about AFF
- 9% stated that few of their colleagues had heard of AFF.

The websites or publications of many key players mention AFF, including partner and donor institutes (AfDB, African Conservation, ANAFE, ASB, CGIAR, CIFOR, Dfid, FAO, Forestry Commission of Ghana, ICRAF, IISD, IUFRO, ITTO, Lusaka Agreement, NL-aid, REDD+, Sida, SIG, UFWG, UNFF, UNDP, UNFCCC). It also appears on information aggregators and blogs (Agri4dev, Africa Regreening, Focali, Fornis, Profor, Teaknet). However, few external websites link to the AFF website (only ANAFE, SIFI, ICRAF, WWF, IISD).

Media coverage is not tracked but some media coverage can be found online, i.e. Africa News, SciDevNet (UK), Global Times (China), Engineering News (South Africa). AFF does not yet have mentions or followers on Twitter. The Facebook page has only attracted seven 'likes' so far.

SWOT analysis of AFF's existing communications

Strengths

- AFF's membership structure gives it a direct connection to a wide range of stakeholder sectors across Africa.
- AFF can truly claim to be an independent voice, representing a wide range of interests.
- AFF's active programme of publications and events provides regular opportunities for communication.
- Partnerships with major players and support for African delegations to high-level meetings give AFF prestige and credibility.
- Web analytics indicate that AFF's publications are well used.
- The website is kept up-to-date with AFF developments, and the current upgrade will further improve online communications.

Weaknesses

- AFF lacks a dedicated communication specialist within its staff, which is a major limitation.
- AFF currently lacks a strategic approach to social media engagement.
- Communication gaps exist with harder-to-reach groups: this is reflected in low membership in these groups e.g. the private sector.
- The content and style of AFF's communications are not fully tailored to different audiences or formats.
- AFF's communications do not give a strong sense of a membership voice (membership interviews or opinion pieces).
- Communications do not provide a strong message about AFF's unique nature and remit.
- Communications do not carry materials on influence or impact (high-level endorsements, success stories).
- There is little on-going monitoring or evaluation of communications.
- There is little proactive media engagement.

Opportunities

- Internet and social media use is soaring in Africa, increasing the opportunity for effective and low-cost online communications.
- Africa's media is booming, with an increasing number of specialist science and environmental journalists that AFF can work with.
- There may be opportunities for partnerships to share communication resources and increase outreach.
- Events in 2013 will provide good opportunities for communication (UNFF10, World Teak conference, etc.).

Threats

- There are many organisations working on African forestry and conservation: AFF must communicate clearly to be heard and to distinguish itself from others.
- Linguistic diversity is a barrier to engaging with non-English and French speakers, unless there is an increased budget for translation.
- The African private sector is not strongly organized, making it harder to engage with.

Section 2: Principles of the communication strategy communication objectives

Determining clear objectives for communication, and clarifying how such objectives support overall goals, will help AFF to focus and prioritize its communication activities. A set of communication objectives for AFF are defined below. Relevant supporting activities have been outlined for each objective; section 3 of this report has more specific recommendations.

1) Share AFF findings and other developments in the sector

This involves the provision of relevant and up-to-date information via the website and publications. The information will be generated by AFF programmes or other AFF activities. However, AFF will also share information on general developments in the African forestry sector, as well as ideas, experiences and best practice. AFF will not only make such material available, but also alert stakeholders to it through newsletters, social media and mainstream media. As a membership organisation, AFF should be transparent and promptly share news and developments with members.

2) Facilitate networking and dialogue on forest issues

This will be done by providing meetings, workshops and online fora, and through AFF's presence at meetings and networks hosted by others. Social media will be used to encourage dialogue and feedback. Content that reflects this dialogue will be added to the newsletter and the website. These outlets will also carry information on the membership (e.g. member profiles, interviews with key members and member-generated articles and letters). All communication activities will encourage feedback.

3) Increase AFF's profile, reputation and membership

This objective involves promoting AFF through a presence (talks, posters and exhibits) at major events. It also involves raising awareness of AFF through social media and media coverage. It requires the development of promotional website content and literature to enhance AFF's reputation, such as endorsements, testimonies,

prestigious partnerships and evidence of impact. Extra effort should be made for harder-to-reach groups, evidenced through gaps in the membership or partnerships (e.g. the private sector). For example, social media will help to reach younger audiences, a key group that AFF seeks to engage with.

4) Raise awareness of threats and opportunities for African forests

AFF will generate compelling content on the contribution that African forestry makes to the economy and environment, and how this contribution is threatened. Communications will also help to build support for sustainable forestry initiatives, such as certification. This content will be available in policy briefs, fact sheets and on the website. Both threats and opportunities will be publicized, with the help of exhibits, presentations, social media and mainstream media coverage.

5) Support evidence-based policy making for African forestry issues

AFF and partners will generate clear, up-to-date, evidence-based information for policy makers. This could be fact sheets (providing background on key issues), policy briefs (making recommendations on urgent policy issues) or briefing notes (information for individuals at specific events). AFF will also seek to influence policy processes via the media. With any communications strategy, it is important that the communication objectives clearly align with the organisation's overall objectives. Table 1 demonstrates how these objectives support AFF's overall goals. Note that some communication objectives support more than one strategic goal.

Table 1: How AFF's communications objectives align with its strategic goals

Strategic goal	Supporting communications objectives
Build and strengthen networking among the many and varied stakeholders in forestry in Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share AFF findings and other developments in the sector • Facilitate networking and dialogue on forest issues • Increase AFF's profile, reputation and membership
Develop, solicit funding for and implement specific programmes, projects and activities that address already-identified priority issues and opportunities in African forestry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share AFF's findings and other developments in the sector • Raise awareness of threats and opportunities for African forests • Increase AFF's profile, reputation and membership • Support evidence-based policy making for African forestry issues
Raise the profile of forestry, highlight threats to forest resources and the environment, and champion better management of African forests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share AFF's findings and other developments in the sector • Raise awareness of threats and opportunities for African forests • Support evidence-based policy making for African forestry issues
Undertake institutional organisational development of AFF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share AFF's findings and other developments in the sector

Key messages

This section has a set of key messages that AFF needs to convey to its target audiences. In AFF's existing communication materials, there are many different descriptions of what AFF is and does. Using agreed key messages will give communications from AFF direction, focus and consistency. AFF should endeavour to include these messages as often as possible in its communications, including presentations, media interviews and even conversations with stakeholders. Thus, these messages need to be simple to remember and repeat.

They appear in order of priority: if there is only an opportunity to get one message across, it should be message 1; if two messages, they should be 1 and 2, etc. The key messages appear in bold, and each message is followed by 'proof points' – evidence that backs up the message and makes it more compelling. These proof points can also be used in communication resources, when circumstances allow (see the CIFOR brochure⁶ for a good example of using proof points). Key messages should stay relevant for several years, but proof points can be altered or updated regularly. AFF may be able to suggest better or more up-to date ones than are provided here.

1. The African Forest Forum (AFF) is an association of stakeholders committed to the sustainable management and conservation of Africa's forests and trees

- AFF promotes the independent voice of African forestry, with over 600 forest stakeholder members from academia, government, civil society, development organisations and the private sector.
- AFF offers objective analysis, advocacy and advice on Africa's forest and tree resources, and helps to mobilize resources to manage and protect them.
- AFF aims to improve the livelihoods of African people and the environment they live in through the sustainable management and use of tree and forest resources.

⁶ www.cifor.org/fileadmin/templatesnew/res/documents/brochures/CIFORBrochure2009-E.pdf

2. African forests are invaluable to human livelihoods and the environment

- Forests and woodlands cover roughly 23% of Africa's land⁷ and constitute around 20% of the global forest area.⁸
- Forests and woodlands generate valuable export and tourist income, and supply domestic demand for fuel, construction materials, wild foods and local medicines. More than half a million people in Africa are involved in the production of forest goods⁹
- African forests provide vital environmental services such as hosting biodiversity, sheltering wildlife and helping to regulate the climate.

3. Africa's forests are threatened with destruction by agricultural expansion, overexploitation, urbanization, population growth and climate change

- The rate of deforestation in Africa is four times the global average; Africa loses 3.4 million hectares of forest every year.¹⁰
- Over 65% of Africa's original wildlife habitat has been lost.¹¹
- Africa's various forest types are among the ecosystems expected to be most affected by climate change.
- Africa's urban population is predicted to increase from 414 million to over 1.2 billion by 2050,¹² increasing demands for food, fuel, water and habitation.

Sources do not need to be cited in external publications, but are cited here for information.

7 AFF book on Climate Change and African Forest and Wildlife Resources

8 AFF Fact sheet on sustainable management of African forests in the context of climate change

9 New AFF website

10 Fact sheet on forest livelihoods and climate change

11 Policy brief on climate change and the forest sector

12 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division: World Urbanization Prospects, the 2011 Revision: Press Release, New York, 2012.

Prioritization of activities

While there is huge potential for AFF to extend and enhance its communications, resources are limited. AFF has 50-70% of one staff member's time to contribute to communications. It also has a budgetary allocation for external communication support over 2012–2013. This budget is sufficient to cover website support and upgrading; publications (the production of five policy briefs, five fact sheets, four issues of a newsletter, Powerpoint templates and 10 posters); media liaison (e.g. two press releases); and monitoring and evaluation.

Suggested communication actions for 2012–2013 will be in line with this level of resources and support. However, AFF should be ambitious in its communication plans, and the longer-term recommendations in this strategy will assume increased resources for communication in the future. These increased resources could come from additional donor funding, or in-kind communication support from partners.

To deliver effective communications with limited resources, activities must be prioritized in terms of target audiences and communication channels. AFF's audiences were categorized and described in the scene-setting report. Of these categories, the membership remains the priority audience. Effective communication with them is essential to retain their engagement and to continue recruitment. Increasing involvement with the private sector (with increased private sector membership and partnership) will also be a priority for the next phase of AFF's activities. While other stakeholder groups will not be neglected, these priorities will be reflected in the emphasis of the communication action plan.

The website is a crucial communication channel for AFF and will continue to be a priority, with efforts to increase functionality, content and use. Developing an improved media and social media presence for AFF is also a priority.

Section 3: Communication Action Plan

The Communication Action Plan (CAP) sets out recommendations for AFF's communication approach and defines a set of specific priority activities for completion in 2012–2013. The plan also suggests which activities should be completed in-house and which should be outsourced. AFF's communication activities (both existing and proposed) are then mapped to demonstrate that there is good coverage across both the communication objectives and the target audiences. Additional supporting information on potential new channels for engagement is provided in appendix 2.

A set of communication milestones and targets for 2012 and beyond will be developed as part of a separate contract to develop monitoring and evaluation. These will then be added to this action plan.

Overall recommendations

AFF should increase the resources available to support communication, including a dedicated full-time communication post. In addition, AFF should look for free or in-kind communication support to increase its communication activities and reach. Firstly, it should develop partnerships for communication support, particularly with Nairobi-based organisations such as ICRAF and ANAFE. For example, partners might be prepared to disseminate press releases via their press office or share exhibition space at conferences. Secondly, AFF should seek content contributions from its members.

Key messages should be used consistently across all communication resources. AFF is about to develop monitoring and evaluation processes for communications and these should be used to report back annually to the AFF Governing Council on communications progress.

Priority actions to complete in-house

- Approach key partners for possible in-kind support or shared communication initiatives.
- Encourage member-generated contributions, such as opinion pieces and event write-ups.

Priority actions to outsource

- Integrate the key messages into new AFF communication resources.

- Monitor and evaluate progress against targets and report back annually.

Website

The website upgrade is a major improvement but content and functionality should continue to be developed to reflect AFF's progress. The usefulness and interest to stakeholders should be increased by including information on wider developments in the sector. This can most easily be achieved by displaying the Twitter feed on the homepage or on the news and events page (see social media section of this strategy).

Increased visitor numbers should be encouraged by regularly adding new content, increasing links from other sites and using social media alerts. The website should carry material that promotes the reputation and relevance of AFF, such as prestigious partnerships, high-level endorsements or evidence of impact. Key stakeholder groups should have specific website sections that gather together the resources and information most relevant to them. There should also be a webpage for the media (see media section).

The membership section should carry some member-generated content, such as member testimonials or interviews. Key pages should be available in French. Note that, with the current level of support, not all of these content additions can be made in the short term, but priority actions are listed below.

Priority actions to complete in-house

- Encourage partners and members to link to the AFF website.
- Add tailored website pages for specific target audiences, starting with policy makers and researchers.

Priority actions to outsource

- Integrate AFF's social media with its website, displaying the Twitter feed and carrying a link to the LinkedIn page.
- Create an 'about us' section that carries key messages and promotes AFF's reputation.
- Make the homepage available in French.

Social media

Developing a social media presence will enable AFF to develop its networking, raise its profile and increase its capacity for dialogue. Although the survey revealed that the membership uses social media less than other channels, many key stakeholders are using it and it is likely to increase its reach rapidly. Researchers, funders, NGOs and development agencies are active on Twitter, while LinkedIn provides a possible avenue for engaging with the private sector. A weekly allocation of at least two hours should enable AFF to engage effectively in both these channels. In addition, all secretariat staff should be encouraged to regularly contribute by suggesting new developments for tweeting.¹³

Priority actions to complete in-house

- Allocate a minimum of two hours a week for developing social media content.
- Tweet regularly (2-3 times a week) on AFF developments and other relevant news. At least two thirds of the tweets should be on non-AFF developments.
- Use retweets, direct messaging and relevant hashtags (see appendix 2) to engage other contributors and build an AFF following on Twitter.
- Produce an AFF page on LinkedIn and encourage secretariat staff to produce personal pages.
- Engage with at least one relevant LinkedIn discussion group (see appendix 2).

Media

AFF should start to proactively engage with the media, in order to increase its own reputation and profile and to raise awareness of the threats and opportunities facing African forest and tree resources. Newsworthy developments should be sought, particularly in the run-up to major conferences or before the publication of reports and policy briefs. These developments should be promoted to the press using press releases, feature pitches or press briefings.

AFF should build contacts with science, environment and development journalists from both African and western media outlets. It should recruit interested journalists as members, website users and Twitter followers. It should also help journalists report accurately on forest issues by providing them with information and support. For example, a webpage for the media could be produced, carrying fact sheets, press releases and

contacts. AFF could also play a role in sourcing relevant experts for the media, on request.

Records of past press coverage should be kept and the website should carry links to relevant online articles. The private sector is an important audience for AFF and press coverage in trade publications should also be sought.

Priority actions to complete in-house

- Approach relevant journalist associations and invite their members to join AFF (see appendix 2).
- Designate AFF spokespeople and provide them with outsourced media training.
- Create a webpage for the media.

Priority actions to outsource

- Identify newsworthy AFF developments.
- Produce a press release to mark a major AFF development and disseminate to African and European science and development journalists.
- Pitch an AFF story as a feature article or opinion piece to a mainstream media or trade press outlet.

Publications

AFF has already produced a series of fact sheets and policy briefs for 2012–2013. Future fact sheets should target key audiences in the agricultural and private sectors (e.g. fact sheets on agroforestry or timber certification). The next set of newsletters should have a more informal tone, with a greater variety of articles and a stronger membership contribution.

AFF's promotional brochure is a key publication in the portfolio. It needs to be made more compelling, carrying key messages and making clear why AFF matters. Publications written by programme members would benefit from a copy edit by a science writer before publication or, failing that, an edit of the executive summary.

As AFF progresses, the publications portfolio should feature AFF case histories that demonstrate impact. AFF should also seek to appear in the publications of key stakeholders by offering content or interviews to suitable newsletters and blog sites (see appendix 2).

Priority actions to complete in-house

- Seek to place articles in the publications of others, including trade groups.

Priority actions to outsource

- Develop a new tone and more varied

¹³ A tweet is a message sent out on Twitter.

- content for the next set of AFF newsletters.
- Produce a compelling AFF brochure that conveys why AFF matters.
- Provide a copy edit for AFF's programme-written publications.

Events

AFF has a strong events programme at international, regional and national levels. It should seek to increase the publicity, networking and dialogue benefits that it derives from such events.

The website should flag in advance all events that AFF plans to attend, the nature of its involvement there (organizer, speaker, poster, booth or participant) and how to arrange a meeting there. Twitter should be used both to build anticipation of events and to provide live feedback from them.

AFF should consider events that have press offices as possible venues for launching publications or press releases. AFF should inform its members of the outcomes of relevant events, including non-AFF events, and carry event write-ups in the newsletter and on the website. It should encourage members to contribute such write-ups. AFF should also consider new events to reach out to the agricultural and private sectors.

Priority actions to complete in-house

- Use the website and social media to build anticipation of an AFF presence at events and increase networking and dialogue.
- Disseminate event outcomes by live tweeting, event write-ups and member contributions.
- Participate in agricultural or trade events.

Table 2: AFF communication activities mapped against objectives

Communication activities	Communication objectives*				
	1	2	3	4	5
Website					
Major AFF website upgrade	●	●	●	●	●
Provide information on wider developments in the sector	●	●			
Add content that promotes AFF's reputation			●		
Add pages for policy makers, researchers and the media	●		●	●	●
Add member-generated content	●	●			
Publications					
Fact sheets	●			●	●
Policy briefs	●			●	●
Newsletters	●	●			
Reports and working papers	●			●	
Books	●			●	
Brochure			●		
Case histories	●		●		
Coverage in the publications of others	●	●	●	●	
Social media					
Tweet regularly and build a Twitter following	●	●	●	●	
Develop a LinkedIn presence	●	●	●	●	
Media					
Invite specialist journalists to be members	●		●	●	●
Proactively seek mainstream media coverage	●		●	●	●
Provide spokespeople with media training			●		
Seek coverage in the trade press	●		●	●	
Provide journalists with access to experts			●	●	
Events					
Conferences	●	●	●	●	●
Governing council meetings		●	●		
Capacity-building workshops	●	●	●		
Member forums	●	●			
Trade fairs or agriculture events	●	●	●		

*Communication objectives are to:

- 1) Share AFF findings and other developments in the sector
- 2) Facilitate networking and dialogue on forest issues
- 3) Increase AFF's profile, reputation and membership
- 4) Raise awareness of threats and opportunities for African forests
- 5) Support evidence-based policy making for African Forestry issues

Table 3: AFF communication activities mapped against target audiences

Communication activities	Target audiences*				
	1	2	3	4	5
Website					
Major AFF website upgrade	●	●	●	●	●
Provide information on wider developments in the sector	●	●	●		
Add content that promotes AFF's reputation			●		●
Add pages for policy makers, researchers and the media	●		●	●	
Add member-generated content	●				
Publications					
Fact sheets	●	●	●		
Policy briefs	●			●	
Newsletters	●				
Reports and working papers	●	●		●	
Books	●		●		
Brochure	●		●		●
Case histories	●		●		●
Coverage in the publications of others	●	●	●		
Social media					
Tweet regularly and build a Twitter following	●	●	●		●
Develop a LinkedIn presence		●			
Media					
Invite specialist journalists to be members	●				
Proactively seek mainstream media coverage	●	●	●	●	●
Provide spokespeople with media training	●	●	●	●	●
Seek coverage in the trade press	●	●	●		
Provide journalists with access to experts	●	●	●	●	●
Events					
Conferences	●	●	●	●	●
Governing council meetings	●		●		
Capacity-building workshops	●				
Member forums	●				
Trade fairs or agriculture events	●	●			

*Target audiences:
 1) AFF membership
 2) The private sector
 3) Partners
 4) Policy makers
 5) Donors

Appendix 1: Results of the AFF communication survey

Overview

The survey shows that the AFF membership is diverse in what it seeks from AFF and its communications. It shows the relative importance of different communication channels and the success of AFF's communications when using these channels. The website seems to be the most important communication channel, and social media the least.

AFF's communications ranked highly for usefulness but there were plenty of suggestions for new topics and activities. The survey identified new communication outlets (e.g. events and networks) to engage with. The survey also provided baseline data on awareness and perceptions of AFF, against which AFF can seek to improve. There was a relatively high response rate (over 18% of the membership). It is important that the results of the survey are made available to members (e.g. as a newsletter item).

Participants

The online survey was publicized to the membership and tweeted from the Green Ink website. There were 118 respondents. All but six of the respondents were AFF members. Participation by different stakeholder sections was roughly representative of the membership.

Membership

Most members first heard of AFF through colleagues and meetings. The others discovered it via the AFF website. When asked why they joined AFF and what they valued most about membership, respondents referred to: receiving information (43 respondents); dialogue/sharing (35); networking (28); participation/contribution (27); jobs and other opportunities (11); and professional development/ affiliation (6).



Target audiences

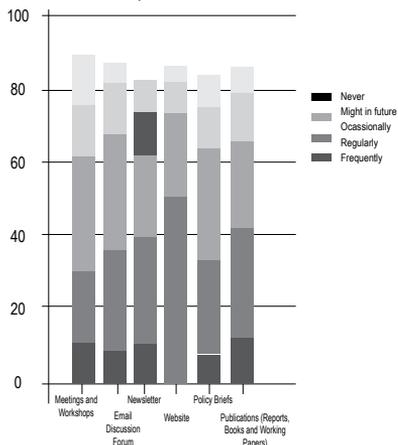
When asked 'Who are the most important organisations, groups or communities for you to communicate with?', respondents cited; research institutes (19); forestry practitioners (8); government departments or ministries (8); NGOs (7); forest communities (5); private sector (4); conservation bodies (3); policy makers (2); funders (2); climate change groups (2); farmers (2); development agencies (1); and the general public (1).

Communication channels

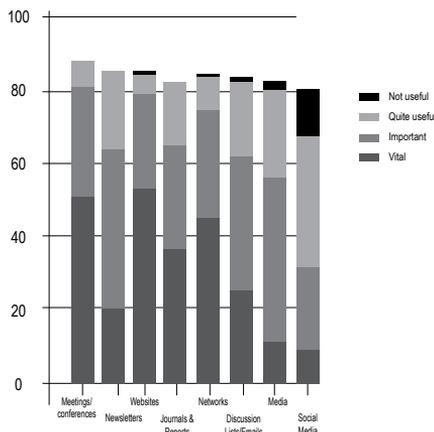
Respondents ranked the Internet as the most important way of staying up-to-date with developments in their sector, followed by meetings/conferences and networks. More than half the respondents found websites, meetings and networks to be vital for keeping up with developments. Social media ranked lowest in importance, although it still had almost 40% of respondents ranking it as 'vital' or 'important'. When asked to name specific communication channels, most respondents mentioned specific websites or events. Only three respondents mentioned social media (one mention each for Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter). Specific communication channels mentioned were:

- **Websites:** ANAFE, CIFOR, COFO, ECOWAS, FAO, FAO-TECA (bee keeping), ICRAF, INBAR, IUFRO, UEMOA, UFF, UN bodies (UN Agency task forces, UNCCD, UNEP, UNESCO UNFCCC, UNFF, UN-REDD) Unisyla, USAID.
- **Events:** ATBC, COFO, COPs, IUFRO

How often do you use AFF's communication materials



How do you stay up-to-date with developments in your sector? Please rate the usefulness of the following channels



congress, KEFRI biennial conference, KLSA, SCB, UNFF. Relevant conferences focused not just on forestry, but also the environment, climate change, food security and the annual conferences of professionals associations.

- **Networks:** FISNA, Participatory GIS (PPGIS) network, ANEW, ecosystem service market places.
- **Aggregators, news services and publications:** CIFOR newsletter, East African Journal of Ecology, Google Scholar, IISD reporting services, Science Direct, Swara magazine.

Perceptions of AFF

61% of respondents said that some of their colleagues knew of AFF, while other colleagues did not. Only 3% said that AFF was widely known and regularly mentioned. 9% said that few or none of their colleagues had heard of it. Respondents described AFF as an information platform, discussion forum or network. A few also described it as an advocacy organisation, action group or professional association. Three said they were unclear as to its nature.

When asked about the purpose of AFF, respondents said its role was to: support the forestry profession (17); protect forests and forest livelihoods (12); provide African cohesion (4); or support policy making (3). Three said they were unclear on its purpose. 28% felt that other organisations were operating in a similar space to AFF. However, most of the organisations cited operate with a different geographical remit or in a different world region. Exceptions were ANAFE, ANEW and ICRAF.

Communications from AFF

51% of the respondents use the AFF website regularly or frequently; publications and newsletters were the second-most used communication resources. Each existing communication channel seemed useful to a subset of members, with only 8-11 respondents saying they never used a given category.

Over 60% of respondents used AFF's communications for technical advice, training, advocacy or general information. AFF communications were also used in policy making, setting research agendas and job hunting. When asked to suggest new communication activities or events, a range of responses were received, including: training manuals; more member participation; a social media presence; and side events at conferences. Other suggestions were to increase the number of meetings and events; to send email alerts of new developments; to host Skype conferences; to give more notice of events; and to add more information to the website.

Appendix 2: New channels for AFF engagement

LinkedIn discussion groups

- Ethiopia Forest Forum
- Forest and Carbon Association
- Forest and Wood Products Consulting marketplace
- FSC Supporters Group
- Global Forest Policy Networking Group
- International Forest Products Transport Association
- International Timber, Sawmills and Lumber
- Making REDD work in Africa
- Tropical Forest Supporters
- Tropical Timber Import and Export.

Twitter hashtags for subjects and events

- #Forest#Conservation
- #ALLforest
- #deforestation
- # Rioplus20
- #UNFCCC or #COP

Journalist associations

- Uganda Science Journalists Association
- Media for Science Uganda
- Rwanda Association of Science Journalists
- South African Scientists Association
- Media for Environment, Science, Health and Agriculture in Kenya

Newsletters and blogs

- CIFOR blog: <http://blog.cifor.org/>
- Agroforestry World blog: <http://blog.worldagroforestry.org/index.php/tag/icraf-rio/>
- UN-REDD blog: <http://unredd.wordpress.com/>
- EFRN newsletter: www.etfrn.org/etfrn/resource/news.html
- Teaknet newsletter: www.teaknet.org/newsletterlist
- INBAR newsletter: www.inbar.int/news-media

Appendix 3: acronyms and abbreviations

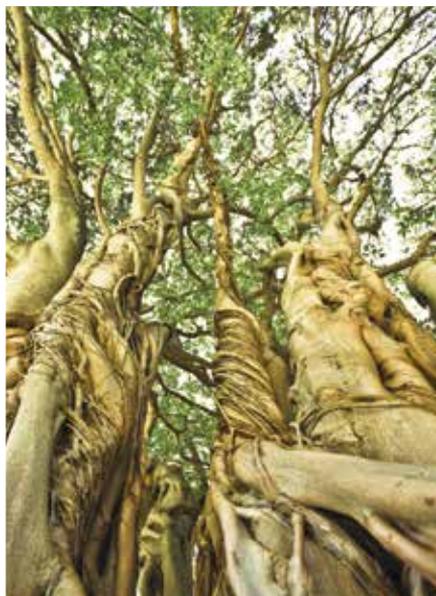
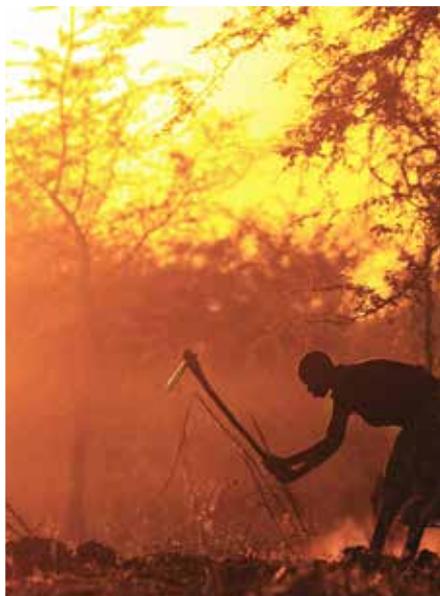
AAS	African Academy of Sciences	FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
AfDB	African Development Bank	FARA	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa
AFF	African Forest Forum	FISNA	Forest Invasive Species Network for Africa
AFWC	African Forestry and Wildlife Commission	FLEGT	Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade
AMCEN	African Ministerial Conference on Environment	FORNESSA	Forestry Research Network for Sub-Saharan Africa,
ANAFE	African Network for Agriculture, Agroforestry and Natural Resources Education	FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
ANEW	African Civil Society Network on Water and Sanitation	GGWSSI	Great Green Wall for the Sahel and the Sahara Initiative
ASB	Alternatives to Slash-and-Burn Programme	GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
ATBC	Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation	ICRAF	World Agroforestry Centre
AUC	African Union Commission	IISD	International Institute for Sustainable Development
CAADP	Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme	INBAR	International Network for Bamboo and Rattan
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity	ITTO	International Tropical Timber Organization
CIFOR	Center for International Forestry Research	IUFRO	International Union of Forest Research Organizations
CILSS	Comité Permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel	KEFRI	Kenya Forestry Research Institute
CIRAD	Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement	KLSA	Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry
COFO	Committee on Forestry	NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa	NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
COMIFAC	Commission des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale	PPGIS	Public Participation Geographic Information Systems
COP	Conference of the Parties	REDD	Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
DfID	Department for International Development	Rio +20	United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development
EAC	East African Community	SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
ECOWAS	Economic Community Of West African States	SCB	Society for Conservation Biology
ETFRN	European Tropical Forest Network	SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency	UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
SIFI	Secretariat for International Forestry Issues	UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
SIG	Science Initiative Group	UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UEMOA	Union économique et monétaire ouest-africaine	UNFF	United Nations Forum on Forests
UFWG	Uganda Forest Working Group	UN-REDD	United Nations Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation Programme
UNCCD	United Nations Convention on Combating Drought and Desertification	USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme	WFC	World Forestry Congress
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa	WWF	World Wildlife Fund



African Forest Forum

A platform for stakeholders in African forestry



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