

# **Communicating SDGS In the Land Sector: Gaps and Opportunities for Action in Southern Africa.**

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## **Abstract**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, represent a global commitment to address diverse challenges in social, economic, and environmental realms by 2030. Within this framework, Goal 15, focusing on Life on Land, encounters distinctive challenges in Southern Africa due to the unique dynamics of the region. Despite increased awareness and ongoing efforts, achieving Goal 15 in Southern Africa requires a nuanced exploration of the intricate relationship between human activities and the natural environment.

This paper intends to improve SDG communication strategies with a particular focus on Goal 15 and its link to the land sector in Southern Africa. This paper aims to address the challenges in sustainable development within the region, by outlining existing gaps in the current communication strategy and highlighting potential opportunities.

The investigation of communication techniques goes beyond identifying weaknesses; it actively proposes actions to enhance the effectiveness of achieving SDG Goal 15 in Southern Africa's district environmental and socioeconomic context. The purpose of this analysis is to provide significant insights into tackling regional difficulties and capitalising on possibilities for sustainable development.

**Keywords:**

Communication, SDG's, United Nations, Goal 15, Land, Land use planning

## 1. Introduction

The United Nations established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 as a comprehensive framework of objectives aimed at solving a wide range of issues, including poverty, hunger, sickness, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and gender inequality (United Nations, 2015). These goals, which are expected to be reached by 2030, include the entire developmental spectrum, including both developing and industrialized countries. At their core, the SDGs represent a commitment to meeting future generations' needs while navigating the complexity of the present, assuring a delicate balance between socioeconomic advancement, social inclusion, and environmental preservation (United Nations, 2015). They represent a concerted effort to align global efforts, promoting a comprehensive approach to economic growth, community integration, and environmental conservation (United Nations, 2015). In essence, the SDGs represent a visionary commitment to global well-being and sustainability. They go beyond immediate concerns, inviting a collaborative journey towards peaceful cohabitation between humans and the environment. This academic paradigm aims to drive revolutionary change by acknowledging the interdependence of various concerns and the need to create a future that resonates with both current and future generations (United Nations, 2015).



**Figure 1: The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.**

Sustainable Development Goal 15 (SDG 15), named "Life on Land," aims to protect, restore, and promote the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems. Its multifarious objectives include responsible forest management, desertification reduction, land degradation reversal, and biodiversity conservation (United Nations, 2015). SDG 15 includes several specific targets, all of which are expected to be met by 2030. These specified targets encompass:

- Conservation and restoration of terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems,
- The cessation of deforestation and the reclamation of degraded forests,

- The cessation of desertification and the rehabilitation of degraded land,
- The preservation of mountain ecosystems,
- The safeguarding of biodiversity and natural habitats,
- The facilitation of access to genetic resources along with equitable benefit-sharing,
- The eradication of poaching and trafficking of protected species,
- The prevention of invasive alien species in both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems,
- The integration of ecosystems and biodiversity into governmental planning processes,
- The augmentation of financial resources allocated for the conservation and sustainable utilization of ecosystems and biodiversity,
- The promotion and incentivization of sustainable forest management, and
- The concerted efforts to combat global poaching and trafficking, (United Nations, 2015).

The goal of these efforts is to create a durable, harmonious cohabitation between humanity and the terrestrial environment (United Nations, 2015). SDG 15 demands significant development, involving the use of newly untapped tools. Prioritising the transmission of the United Nations' 2030 objectives, particularly Goal 15, to the land sector, as well as translating and disseminating these goals to specific regions and countries within the sector, is critical. This method not only helps to fulfil Goal 15, but it also accelerates progress towards other SDGs.

Significant progress in SDG 15, which focuses on Life on Land, necessitates a balanced approach. To realise this goal, it is necessary to investigate and implement alternative tools that have yet to be completely utilised. This needs a strategic concentration on effective communication specific to the land industry/ sector. Specifically, a specific communication plan for Goal 15 should be established in accordance with the United Nations' overall vision for 2030. The goal is to translate these global objectives into actionable activities that resonate with specific regions and countries. By focusing on Goal 15 and communicating its value and goals, we may instil a feeling of urgency in the land sector. This deliberate focus not only pulls Goal 15 forward but also catalyses momentum across the SDGs.

This narrative paper sets out on an odyssey to highlight the critical role of communication in narrating the story of SDG targets within the specific context of Southern Africa's land sector. By highlighting both the progress gained and the problems encountered, to identify current gaps and, more significantly, provide practical options and approaches that may be implemented to effectively bridge these gaps. The importance of investigating land issues in Southern Africa goes beyond geographical relevance; it is a critical component in accelerating the overall achievement of the SDGs. Understanding the complexities of communication in this region allows us to address difficulties while also illuminating avenues to sustainable development that are appropriate for the different populations and landscapes of Southern Africa.

The quest for good communication as a key driver of sustainable development in the Southern African land sector. This investigation is more than just an intellectual exercise; it is a call to action, pushing stakeholders to engage in discourse, identify gaps, and develop a narrative that promotes actual progress towards the SDGs in Southern Africa.

Southern Africa is enriched with vast land and diverse landscapes that have been identified in the United Nations 2023 report as ‘deteriorated’ as most of Africa, is behind on reaching the goals (United Nations, 2023). Forests stand as crucial reservoirs of biodiversity, offering sustenance and vital resources essential for human and environmental survival. Despite their paramount significance, nearly 100 million hectares of forest area have dwindled over the past two decades. This decline is notable, with the forest coverage diminishing from 4.2 million hectares in 2000 to 4.1 million hectares in 2020, marking a 0.7 percent reduction over the span of 20 years (United Nations, 2023)

The drivers of this global deforestation crisis are varied, with agriculture and the harvesting of oil palm emerging as predominant contributors. This concerning trend underscores the urgent need for comprehensive measures to address the root causes and mitigate the impact on our invaluable ecosystems. In essence, safeguarding our forests demands immediate attention and concerted efforts to ensure the continued well-being of humanity and the diverse array of life supported by these vital habitats (United Nations, 2023).

In Section 2, we will dig into the complex world of communication, examining its critical role not just in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but also in conveying critical information to persons working in the land sector. It is critical that individuals involved understand the essence of the SDGs and, more crucially, be prepared to translate these goals into actionable steps, notably through the establishment and execution of effective policies. The communication process is more than just information dissemination; it is a two-way street. This means reporting results, accomplishments, and challenges to the United Nations, so creating a continuous feedback loop for a thorough and detailed annual report. By bridging the identified gaps in the SDGs report and tying them to the land sector, we want to successfully communicate these findings. This communication approach aims not only to highlight current issues but also to turn them into opportunities, hence pushing the attainment of SDGs, with a particular emphasis on SDG 14. This method combines academic rigour with a human-cantered viewpoint, recognising the importance of communication in accelerating sustainable development activities.

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In summary, this approach acknowledges the interconnection of the SDGs and emphasises the critical role of good communication in promoting sustainable practices in the land sector. By prioritising Goal 15 and promoting a thorough awareness of its implications, we can develop a shared commitment to sustainable land management, greatly contributing to the broader SDG agenda.

## 2. Understanding Communicating of SDG Linking Specific Goals to The Land Sector.

### 2.1 Communication

To simply define communication, it is the act of transferring information from one place to another and always involves a sender a message and a receiver. This sounds simple, but communication is a complex topic, the transmission of a message from sender to receiver can be affected by numerous things (Skills You Need, 2024).



**Figure 2: The Communication Model.**

To extend the definition of communication in marketing terms, Marketing communications, or marcom, refers to a combination of promotional tools, marketing channels, messages, and media that marketers use strategically to communicate with their target audience. Communication channels and the marketing mix are critical

components in marketing. The user or sender is entrusted with designing a marketing communication strategy built around the 4 Ps of the marketing mix, including Product, Price, Promotion, Place, People, Process, Packaging, among others. This purposeful method seeks to develop or increase brand awareness, build demand, and facilitate customer understanding of the product by ensuring that the message reaches the intended target. Marketers strive to develop meaningful connections with their target clients by seamlessly integrating these aspects ("What are Marketing Communications?" University of Lincoln, 2022).



**Figure 3: The Marketing Mix.**

## 2.2 Land Use Planning

Land use planning is a comprehensive orchestration of activities and decisions intended at guiding, allocating, and shaping land use in ways that benefit people and the environment (Chigbu & Kalashyan, 2015, p. 8). The goals of land use planning produce a variety of outputs, including the strategic allocation and zoning of land for specified purposes, the regulation of usage intensity, and the development of legislative and administrative instruments to support the plan. These plans differ across urban, rural, and regional contexts (World Bank, 2010: pp. 108-9).

In the delicate dance of land use, many outcomes develop because of pursuing specific objectives. This includes delineating and zoning land for certain uses, controlling usage intensity, and developing legal and administrative frameworks that support the plan (World Bank, 2010: pp. 108-9). The multifaceted nature of land use planning is evident in both urban and rural settings, as well as across regions.

However, the effects of insufficient land usage, along with tenure insecurity and unclear property rights, present practical issues. Poorly planned agricultural and industrial land uses contribute to air and water pollution, according to an analytical analysis conducted by (UN-Habitat, 2008). This emphasises the importance of careful land use planning in reducing environmental problems and promoting sustainable development.

Land degradation has accelerated in Sub-Saharan Africa, Western Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Southern Asia, outpacing global trends. If the current trajectory continues, the effort to establish a world free of soil degradation would necessitate the restoration of 1.5 billion hectares of land by 2030. An alternate approach entails not only putting an end to further land degradation but also accelerating efforts to meet existing commitments, resulting in the restoration of 1 billion hectares, exceeding the neutral aim (United Nations, 2023). Collaborative efforts among governments, businesses, and communities to devise effective solutions for mitigating land degradation and deterioration have the potential to yield cost-effective strategies addressing climate change, food security, and other disaster impacts. Ultimately, fostering a collective commitment to conserving natural resources stands as a pivotal step in this multifaceted pursuit.

It is commonly known in history that colonial settlers and political elites benefited disproportionately from land allocation and security throughout the colonial era. This resulted in the alienation of land from the grip of ordinary people, with colonial rulers using laws and legislation as tools in this unequal distribution. The consequences of this historical heritage have created a significant divide for many indigenous people in Southern African countries.

The debate over land redistribution has endured throughout the colonial period and later years. However, the rate of policy change and tangible advances in these countries has been noticeably slow. This long-standing dilemma highlights the intricate interplay of past injustices, legal frameworks, and the continued pursuit of equitable land access and security for marginalised people (Quan, 1997).

A notable component of the land policy discourse in the 1990s was the World Bank's recognition of the relative inefficiency of big commercial land holdings. These vast qualities are frequently underutilised, a problem observed in numerous situations, including work (Binswanger & Deininger, 1993). This insight provides an economic justification for rejecting large commercial farms as the primary model of agricultural production in the region. While commercial farmers maintain their validity as essential partners, there is a compelling justification for some degree of redistribution. Such steps are necessary to address obvious discrepancies in land allocation and the political aspirations of the black majority, as seen in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Furthermore, the requirement for redistribution is consistent with the goals of improving smallholder food security and promoting improved land use efficiency. This comprehensive viewpoint emphasises the complex interplay between economic factors, political imperatives, and the pursuit of equitable and effective land management techniques in the region.

This demonstrates the World Bank's view that empowering smallholder or small commercial farmers is more effective in improving food security and increasing land use efficiency. The persistent desire for increased redistribution of commercial land reflects popular recognition that current imbalances are unsustainable in the long run. However, donors are hesitant to fund a second wave of government-led land acquisitions, fearing that the land will be funnelled into the hands of the black political elite, raising concerns about potential negative consequences for agricultural performance. This phenomenon is also evident in the SDG 2023 report, which demonstrates donors' unwillingness to support the new strategy.

## Mozambique

Mozambique faced severe hurdles, including a 17-year civil war, economic liberalisation, and a post-war land grab when hostilities ended in 1994. In reaction to the subsequent confusion and conflicts over land, Mozambique established a new land legislation in September 1997. This act attempted to resolve conflicts, safeguard rural inhabitants' land rights and livelihoods, and promote private investment. The law resulted from significant stakeholder consultations and public debates, but further policy clarity and implementation measures are required to assure smallholder land security.

The historical context demonstrates that following Mozambique's independence in 1975, land was nationalised, and vast state farms were formed. The lack of a land market and the limited recognition of customary law hampered land access. Internal conflict and economic challenges impacted both smallholder and commercial farms during the 1980s. Structural changes in the late 1980s resulted in the dissolution of state farms, allowing for private investment. The rush to acquire land accelerated during the early 1990s peace talks, with political figures and corporate elites purchasing land for capital security. The transition to peace had both beneficial and negative consequences, with contradictory outcomes in the political and economic arenas.

While economic liberalisation improved trade networks and producer prices, it also drew outside investors, undermining local control over rural resources, particularly land. The government's authoritarian approach to smallholders, as well as its disrespect for customary land management, exacerbated the situation. The war-displaced farming family had obstacles upon returning, as their former areas were typically occupied. The complicated situation in Mozambique, characterised by various and competitive land claims, demands detailed policy execution and settlement of lingering concerns concerning tenure security for rural populations.

## South Africa

South Africa confronts the huge burden of rectifying past injustices resulting from the apartheid era, which was defined by substantial racial disparities in land ownership. Over 80% of land was reserved for or held by Europeans, who made up 12.6% of the population, while 3.5 million black South Africans lost their customary rights due to forced removals. The vast bulk of the population, primarily in former homelands, lives in overcrowded conditions with scarce resources and inadequate amenities. The government, through the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), is committing to an extraordinary land reform project, with three pillars: land tenure reform, land redistribution, and land restitution.

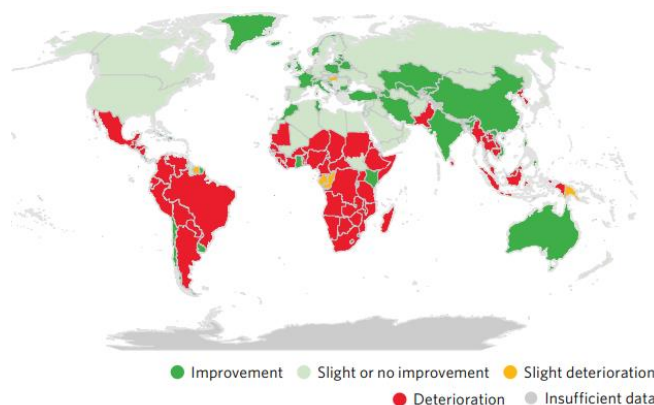
The RDP aims to redistribute land from white commercial reserves to black farmers, strengthen land rights, and replace the insecure permit system. The problems of national land policy change in South Africa stem from geographical and cultural diversity, which is exacerbated by various, overlapping, and competing land claims. The policy seeks to resolve conflicts, eliminate chaotic overlapping rights, and address underlying concerns of insecurity and inequality in land ownership. Despite South Africa's early stage of development and specific obstacles, the policy process provides useful lessons for the entire Southern African region.



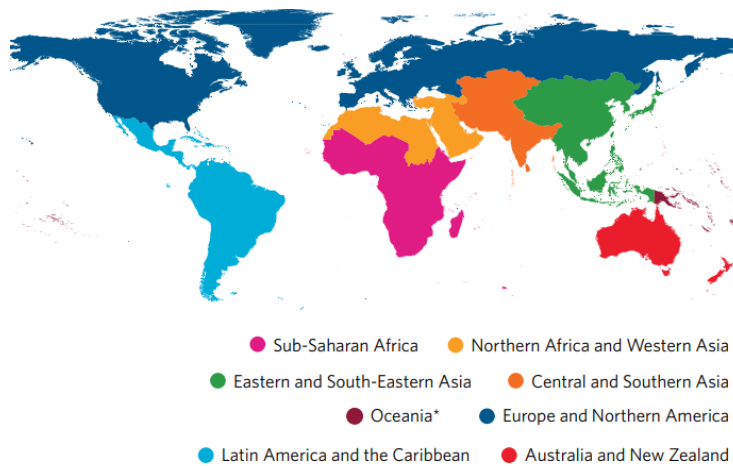
Within the RDP, the Department of Land Affairs' Land Reform Pilot Programme (LRPP), funded by DFID, DANIDA, and the EU, is important to land redistribution and institutional building for effective land reform. The LRPP focuses on districts with significant land concerns across the country's provinces, providing grant aid and credit for community-led land acquisition and basic services. It focuses on assisting priority groups, such as women and the dispossessed, in developing, negotiating, and executing settlement plans. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation help with programme administration and thorough policy creation.

### Namibia

The examination of African land policy issues conducted by Quan (1997, pp. 38-40) provides valuable insights into experiences from Southern Africa, where Namibia during the colonial times, greater part of the land was reserved for white settlers and farmers and indigenous people were in communal lands. Namibia's geography and land known to be of arid climate, make it impossible for the achievement of food security as Indigenous people in these areas had large production of agriculture and livestock and mixed farming only possible in the northern areas of the country. Most of these indigenous people survived off migrant labour and welfare payments.



**Figure 4: Trend in forest areas as a proportion of total land area, 2015- 2020 (United Nations, 2023).**



**Figure 4: Regional Groupings by the United Nations (United Nations, 2023).**

A clear issue or gap identified in the United Nations Southern Africa's 2023 study is the broad categorization of challenges across Sub-Saharan Africa. Given the size of the African continent, collecting data presents a huge problem. Despite the unique biodiversity of Southern African countries, the all-encompassing category complicated the task of identifying specific problems, gathering relevant data, and developing effective solutions.

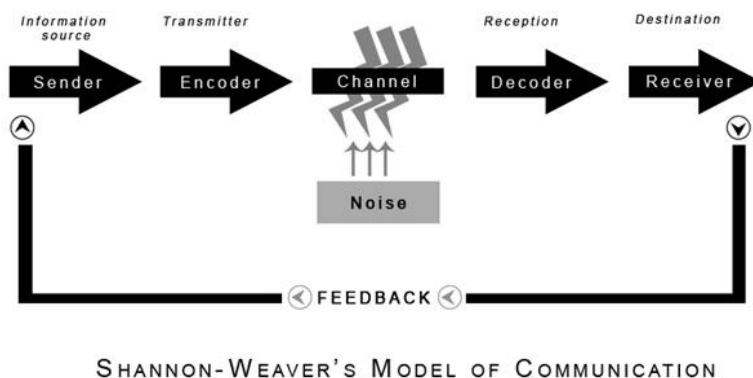
Furthermore, one noteworthy flaw in the study is the lack of explicit reference to policies or techniques used to address the highlighted concerns. This absence limits the ability to develop new techniques and use a variety of tactics to address the difficulties at hand. To promote effective problem-solving and strategic implementation, future reports could benefit from providing a more comprehensive overview of the specific policies and measures implemented to address the highlighted issues in the Southern African context.

## Identified Gaps of The SDGs And Land Sector

## Identified Opportunities Effective Communication in the SDGs

## 4. Results:

## 5. Discussion:



**Figure 5: Shannon Weaver's Model of Communication**

Shannon Weaver's communication model is critical in comprehending the complex dynamics of communication systems. The model defines the sender-message-channel-receiver framework, which provides a thorough foundation for dissecting the many components involved in information transmission. This helps to discover potential sources of interference or noise that may obstruct the effective exchange of signals. Furthermore, the model highlights the importance of feedback in communication. Feedback is a tool for confirming message comprehension and ensuring that the intended meaning is correctly received by the audience. In the sphere of human contact, feedback offers a dynamic and responsive communication loop, fostering mutual understanding and allowing for adjustments in expression to fit with the participants' changing needs and perceptions.

In short, Shannon Weaver's model provides not only a conceptual framework for analysing communication processes, but also emphasises the importance of feedback in improving and optimising the effectiveness of human communication. Its use extends beyond theoretical realms, acting as a practical guide for improving clarity, understanding, and meaningful involvement in interpersonal and organisational communication settings.

## 6. Conclusion:

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