



**SAHARA  
AND SAHEL  
OBSERVATORY**

# **COMMUNICATION POLICY**

May 2023

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## ACRONYMS

<b>AWPB</b>	Annual Work Plan and Budget
<b>CMC/SEP</b>	Comprehensive Mechanism for Claims and Social and Environmental Protection
<b>CDI</b>	Communication and Information Department
<b>EO</b>	Earth Observation
<b>ESP</b>	Environmental and Social Policy
<b>GCGHU</b>	Governance Compliance and Grievance Handling Unit
<b>GP</b>	Gender Policy
<b>IDC</b>	Information Disseminating Committee
<b>GDI</b>	Guide to Disseminating Information
<b>OSS</b>	Sahara and Sahel Observatory
<b>SDC</b>	Strategic Direction Committee
<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

## DEFINITIONS<sup>1,2,3</sup>

**Board:** Board of Administration of the OSS.

**Communication:** Act of conveying information or knowledge to others. It is also defined as all the techniques and means that allow an organization to present its products, services and activities. The communication chain is made up of senders, receivers, messages, codes (e.g. language), transmission channels (voice, telephone, etc.) and contexts.

**Comprehensive Mechanism for Claims, and Social and Environmental Protection (CMC/SEP):** It is a mechanism that encompasses all the processing and management of grievance and claims, as well as safeguards related to social and environmental issues. It serves as a procedural document outlining the steps and guidelines to be followed in accordance with relevant policies, including the Involuntary Displacement Policy and the Resettlement Policy.

**Counterparty:** Any individual, organization, institution or other entity involved in OSS activities.

**Covered Individual:** Any individual working at any level or grade, within the OSS.

**Governance Compliance and Grievance Handling Unit (GCGHU):** Independent body within the OSS that reports directly to the Executive Secretary. It is responsible for ensuring adherence to governance principles and regulations. It oversees the implementation of OSS' policies and procedures, and addresses grievances, claims, or complaints raised by Stakeholders, Partners or any individual or entity working or involved in OSS activities. This unit plays a critical role in promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct, while effectively managing and resolving any grievances or disputes that may arise within the Observatory.

**Information Disseminating Committee (IDC):** A body that is part of the appeal mechanism for failure or refusal to release information.

**Information:** News, information, documentation about something or someone, brought to someone's attention.

**Media:** Refers to the means, techniques and media for massive dissemination of information (press, radio, television, cinema, etc.).

**Strategic Direction Committee (SDC):** Advisory body whose mission is to propose strategic decisions that can support OSS programs..

**Technical and Financial Partners:** Partners with whom the OSS works or collaborates in its various fields of activity, including technical and financial.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/C.40.08\\_Branding\\_the\\_GEF\\_final\\_0.pdf](https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/C.40.08_Branding_the_GEF_final_0.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.greenclimate.fund/sites/default/files/document/gcf-b20-14.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.oss-online.org/fr/gouvernance>

# 1- INTRODUCTION

The Sahara and Sahel Observatory (hereinafter referred to as OSS or Observatory) recognizes the importance of information dissemination, and the need to ensure access to information for Technical and Financial Partners, Stakeholders and the general public. OSS reaffirms its commitment to the principles of good governance, particularly transparency, accountability and information sharing in all aspects of its activities.

This Policy determines the information that OSS makes available to the public, either on a regular basis or upon request. To that end, OSS will ensure the effective dissemination of all information in its possession unless it is on a restricted list. The Policy aims to maximize the dissemination and facilitate access to information about OSS activities, improve the implementation efficiency, and better coordinate information dissemination processes. It also seeks to raise awareness of the Observatory's mission, strategies and activities as well as those of its Partners, in the context of project and program development, implementation and execution..

The optimal dissemination advocated by this document will enable OSS partners and the general public to have a better understanding of the Observatory's activities, and foster an enhanced dialog with all Stakeholders.

The Communication Policy (hereinafter referred to as the Policy or CP) will enable OSS to strengthen Stakeholder consultation, including engagement with local communities, throughout the project development and implementation process. This consultation puts the potential beneficiaries of the projects at the center of the Observatory's concerns and aims to help them better understand the scope of the projects, their objectives and the risks associated with the implementation of the activities. This process results in gaining the commitment of local authorities and beneficiaries and their ownership of the projects.

# 2- RATIONALE

The policy serves as a strategic foundation for the OSS to strengthen and improve the dissemination of information about its activities to the public, mainly to African countries. By adopting such a Communication Policy, the OSS contributes to enhancing the transparency of its interventions, which is essential to the fulfillment of its obligation of accountability to its Partners. As a beneficiary of various international climate funds, the Observatory also reinforces public trust and the trust of its member countries. Additionally, it ensures the compliance of its actions with international standards.

By ensuring transparency and maximizing dissemination, the policy seeks to balance the benefits of openness with the need to preserve: deliberative processes; communications involving contribution of the President and the Administrators; legal, disciplinary or investigative matters; information provided in confidence; some administrative and financial institutional data; and personal and security-related data.



There will also be a mechanism for appeal with regard to the level of dissemination by the Observatory.

The Communication policy is in line with the OSS Strategy 2030, in particular with the cross-cutting program on "Information and Communication", which aims to increase the value of OSS knowledge and achievements to Member States, and to inform and raise awareness about its four areas of activity which are Water, Land, Climate and Biological diversity.

### 3- OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of this communication policy is to create a climate of trust with its counterparts, while at the same time meeting international communication requirements and standards.

More specifically, the CP objectives are to:

- Increase the identity-driven visibility of the Observatory by effectively communicating its mission, strategies, activities, projects, programs, and initiatives;
- Retain OSS Partners by providing them with regular updates;
- Position the Observatory in the African sphere, among the main leaders in its fields of activity, which are Water, Earth, Climate and Biodiversity;
- Improve the dissemination of information while limiting the exclusion list, thereby demonstrating OSS's commitment to making the information it holds available to the public;
- Improve access to Observatory information for as many local, regional and national stakeholders as possible;
- Support the OSS advisory process in the development and implementation of its projects and programs, involving all Stakeholders, including beneficiaries, indigenous peoples and marginalized groups;
- Consolidate the Governance Compliance and Grievance Handling Unit (GCGHU) in its role of handling grievances to ensure better management of counterparty claims;
- Promote good governance, transparency, and responsibility;
- Leverage best practices and lessons learned from the Observatory.
- Improve the process of creating, storing, coordinating, and sharing information.
- Help harmonize information dissemination with other development organizations with similar missions.

## 4- SCOPE

According to its statutes, the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS) is an international and intergovernmental organization that, among other things, serves as an instrument of liaison, and an international framework for partnership and consultation in its various fields of action. As such, it must communicate about its activities both with its partners and with the general public. This CP is in line with this vision and can therefore be applied to the following areas:

### 4.1- Courtesy Visits

As an intergovernmental organization, and given the nature of its activities in countries, the OSS must pay courtesy visits to the authorities of member countries and regions, as well as to its Partners, on all occasions during its missions or events. These visits strengthen the bonds of cooperation, partnership and collaboration with the Observatory and contribute to the success of its mission in the short, medium and long term. Depending on the circumstances of each visit, the authorities visited could be presidents, ministers, prefects, governors, mayors, delegates, tribal leaders, etc.

### 4.2- Attending and organizing events

To fulfill its mission and in addition to its daily activities, the OSS organizes and participates in various meetings where it communicates on topics of interest, considering the context, target audience, and challenges. Meetings and statutory events are organized for the sessions of OSS-related bodies including the General Assembly, the Board, and the Strategic Orientation Committee (SOC). The Observatory also participates in several regional and international events and meetings on various topics, including those of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the World Water Forum, etc.

The OSS attends several events and meetings at regional and international level on various topics, including among others those of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention on the Fight against Desertification, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the World Water Forum, etc.

### 4.3 Project and Program Development Process

As with other institutions and organizations, the process of developing projects and programs within the OSS takes place during several meetings organized around national or regional projects.

These meetings generally follow the requirements of the Technical and Financial Partners and focus on environmental, social, and gender issues. The various meetings focus on visits to the potential activity sites for projects, beneficiary populations, and workshops to validate thematic study reports.

## 4.4 Project and program implementation process

The OSS is responsible for ensuring the successful implementation of project and program activities, it its capacity as an implementing or accredited body for international funding mechanisms. Direct and indirect beneficiaries are specifically targeted in this delivery process to ensure that their needs are met as specified in project and program documents. Several bodies are set up, including management units and steering committees (at national and/or regional level, depending on the project).

Thus, the Observatory monitors the communication of the various meetings held by these bodies. In addition to these meetings, it also regularly (usually once a year) carries out monitoring missions during which several meetings are held with direct and indirect beneficiaries, and field visits are sometimes made to assess the results.

## 5- CONTEXT AND LESSONS LEARNED

The OSS 2030 Strategy has identified "Communication and Information" as a critical cross-cutting axis to promote its knowledge and achievements in the service of Member States, to inform and raise awareness about its areas of intervention (Water, Land, Climate and Biodiversity), to make its interventions more visible and better understood by all Stakeholders, and to strengthen the capacity of the media to contribute to youth environmental education. This program is supported by "Watch and Prospective", a program aiming to develop products that synthesize and capitalize on acquired knowledge which contribute to a wider dissemination of knowledge and facilitate interactions between scientists and non-scientists.

In addition and on a complementary basis, a shorter-term strategy and project-based communication strategies, fully integrated with the Observatory's strategy, are developed and adopted by the Department of Communication and Information (DCI). They aim to establish the African vocation of the OSS as a body at the service of the development and sustainable management of natural resources in Africa, in the context of climate change.

The OSS has made a qualitative leap forward in terms of publishing information, in particular by revamping its Website and reinvigorating its social media presence.

A new, more user-friendly and interactive version of the website was launched in 2021. The current version and its responsive interface offer optimal and more intuitive navigation, adapted to different media (tablets, smartphones, PCs, etc.). Its use is quite simple and easy, and with a minimum of clicks it allows you to access a large amount of information, especially about the projects and their achievements. The range and content of the information have been expanded, in particular through the publication of thematic articles that illustrate the OSS's vision on the most important environmental issues.



The Observatory's website continues to attract more and more visitors, which promotes greater awareness and generates a higher number of intervention requests to the OSS.

The social networks (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube) have also seen a significant increase in interaction rates through more frequent and regular content updates and the creation of customized visuals that follow the trend.

The full collaboration with the technical departments (Water, Land and Climate) on the products offered and the main messages of the Observatory has allowed the CID to coordinate and enhance the participation of the OSS in major environmental events.

This has been made possible by increasing the human resources available to the DCI and by allocating a specific budget for communication activities, in addition to those planned within the projects implemented or carried out by the OSS and its Partners.

## **6- GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The OSS is accountable for the sound management of its financial resources as an international organization with an African vocation, accredited to the Climate Funds and entrusted with financial resources to implement sustainable natural resource management projects in Africa. As a result, the Observatory is expected to provide and improve access to information.

The Communication Policy aims to optimize access to the information it produces by disseminating what is not on the exclusion list. Most information will be systematically released.

This policy is based on six (6) guiding principles: i) increased access to information, ii) bilingual dissemination, iii) limited exclusion list, iv) proactive disclosure, v) Right of appeals, and vi) consultative approach.

### **6.1- Increased access to information**

The OSS must ensure to provide more information to countries, capitalizing on its African character and on-the-ground presence, and maximizing the use of existing communication channels. It will also leverage international forums in which it regularly participates, particularly the United Nations Climate Change Conferences, the World Water Forum, as well as all regional and international meetings focused on these topics.

## 6.2- Bilingual dissemination

Unless the nature of the activity or its geographical location requires otherwise, the OSS undertakes to disseminate information in its two official languages, French and English.

## 6.3- Limited list of exclusion

As OSS is committed to maximizing the dissemination of information, the restrictions listed below are limited.

The Policy must ensure the confidentiality of all documents, requests, information or data received by the OSS, to protect its relationships with Counterparties and ensure its operational effectiveness.

There are some types of information that the OSS cannot disclose, which are:

- Private information of all Covered individuals, including members of the General Assembly (GA), the Board, the Strategic Direction Committee (SDC), the Executive Secretariat (ES), etc.;
- Appointment and selection processes for Covered Individuals;
- Information provided confidentially by member countries and Partners, such as water resource data, as OSS processes and analyzes raw national data with national experts to develop and provide useful information to policy makers. Therefore, access to this data is only possible through the country concerned;
- OSS documents that share copyright may be made available for consultation. However, their reproduction or redistribution may be restricted by copyright;
- Bid evaluation processes prior to the publication of the contract award.

## 6.4- Proactive dissemination of information

Recognizing that the credibility, effectiveness and sustainability of its projects and programs in the Member States and with partners depend to a large extent on proactive communication of information to the affected populations and beneficiaries in general, the OSS is committed to proactively disseminate all documents that may be publicly available through a variety of communication channels. This will increase the amount of information available to the public, in particular, information about projects that are underway or being implemented.

## 6.5- Right of appeals

The Observatory has an appeals mechanism that allows for recourse against a denial of access to information<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> See the OSS' Communication Procedure

## 6.6- Consultative approach

The consultative approach is an approach generally used in the formulation and implementation of projects and programs supported by international financial mechanisms. Its main goal is to develop and implement projects with the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders and actors. It also contributes to the physical identification of the involved Counterparties, and their interests. This also enables potential beneficiaries to better understand the project's scope, objectives, and the risks associated with carrying out the activities. This process facilitates obtaining the commitment of local authorities and beneficiaries and their ownership of the project.

# 7- OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE POLICY

## 7.1- Areas of activity

In order to achieve the objectives set out in the Policy, three areas of activity are envisaged:

### **Area 1: Strengthen collaboration within the OSS structures**

In this sense, close cooperation between the CID and the technical divisions (Land, Water, and Climate) must be intensified in order to:

- Coordinate the participation in various international environmental meetings (conferences of the parties, water forums, etc.), agree on the products to develop and the campaigns to carry out, determine key messages, and set a budget for participation;
- and implement project communications strategies, plan events, outreach and education materials, define targeted messages;
- Assign responsibilities for internal and external communication and information dissemination, to the various departments.

### **Area 2: Maintain and strengthen the visibility of the OSS**

Building on the results achieved during the 30th anniversary of the OSS in 2022, and the increased visibility of the Observatory in focus on this occasion, it is planned to continue to promote and communicate the effectiveness of OSS activities. It is therefore planned to revitalize the OSS website, develop a new range of visuals, communicate on current issues by adapting to the programs of international events, and launch a digital communications plan with more focus on African environmental news.

### **Area 3: OSS communication media update**

The testimonies and success stories on the ground will be presented by the OSS to the communities and will be part of the main support it plans to reach to publicize the success of its activities. This includes systematically integrating communication into project Annual Work plan and Budgets (AWPB) and ensuring that dissemination of information in the field, is the baseline.

Mobilizing African media in this niche, and making greater use of Council and SDC members and international personalities involved with the environment in Africa as OSS "ambassadors" are all avenues to be explored.



## 7.2- Success drivers

Dissemination of information should be the responsibility of each Covered Individual and should be systematically integrated into all activities of the Observatory. All departments, including technical and administrative, and each Covered Individual must disseminate information in their daily work.

Better cooperation between departments and the Communications/Information Department, as well as team capacity building, are essential for the successful implementation of the Policy.

To implement the CP, it is necessary to develop an information dissemination process and an internal communication guide for use by OSS experts.

The Observatory's effectiveness in disseminating information to its Stakeholders, particularly its Technical and Financial Partners and its member countries and organizations, will also be critical to the success of this Policy.

The OSS relies on its African vocation, its presence in Africa, and its Counterparts to reach its target audience. In order to disseminate information efficiently, the Observatory, in collaboration with its technical and financial partners, will develop approaches that take advantage of the diversity of channels available. This includes, but is not limited to, holding briefings/training sessions with the press, establishing information relays and links with partner websites and other relevant sites, and promoting information/awareness activities for the local community.

## 7.3- Answer to information requests

The 2017 information dissemination procedure will be substantially revised to integrate the OSS operational information to be disseminated. It will detail the measures to be taken to make operational information available to the public and will ensure that information dissemination is systematically integrated into all OSS activities.

It will integrate the procedures for disseminating, classifying, and declassifying of "blacklist" information, as well as document archiving.

## 7.4- Appeals Mechanism

An appeals mechanism has been established to address any denial or failure of the OSS to disseminate information, in accordance with the CP. It consists of the Governance Compliance and Grievance Handling Unit (UCGTD) and the Information Disseminating Committee (IDC):

- The GCGHU is responsible for receiving complaints and verifying their validity before forwarding them to the Information Disseminating Committee (IDC).
- The Information Disseminating Committee (IDC) is responsible for reviewing and handling legitimate appeals of failures or denials to disseminate "eligible" information

## 7.5- Document management systems

To facilitate access to information, the OSS has established a system for the management of documents that needs to be improved, in order to provide mechanisms and procedures for filing and archiving documents. System terms are defined in the Guide to Disseminating Information (IDG).

A project monitoring and financial reporting platform allows for the collection of all project documentation and helps facilitate internal access to financial information, thus meeting the Observatory's good governance standards.

## 7.6- Dissemination of Partners' information

The OSS does not share documents prepared jointly with member countries, documents prepared by the OSS in consultation with member countries or concerned partners, stakeholders and major development partners, highlighting the country's strategic objectives, challenges, development prospects and priority areas for OSS intervention.

Documents prepared or commissioned by member countries as part of the submissions to the climate funds, are also available to the OSS who will disseminate them upon request by the climate funds, as appropriate.

## 7.7- Consultative approach mechanism

The consultation process is part of the climate funds' compliance requirements in implementing their Environmental and Social Policy (ESP) and Gender Policy (GP). This consultative process ensures the informed participation of all stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of projects during the development of environmental and social impact studies. As the implementing body of the Climate Fund, the OSS is responsible for identifying all relevant players and involving them in the project planning. The results of environmental and social impact studies and environmental and social management plans are made available for public consultation, and are organized in an inclusive, effective and appropriate manner for the communities directly affected by project activities. There are standard principles on environment in this mechanism, which must be considered such as respect for the law, equity, marginalized and vulnerable groups, indigenous peoples, and protection of natural habitats, public health, physical and cultural heritage, among others.

This consultation process also takes into account the gender dimension. Therefore, the Observatory needs to consult players at all stages of the project cycle in a gender-sensitive approach and consideration of gender parity. Gender-sensitive participatory methods are used to ensure that there is no under-representation of women or men in the process. The OSS needs to maintain good relations with the affected communities, as their acceptance and adherence to the project is of great benefit to both parties.

The consultation process also focuses on the Comprehensive Mechanism for Claims and Social and Environmental Protection (MCM/SEP). In this regard, the OSS has established an accessible, fair, transparent, and efficient process for receiving, investigating, and

processing claims from affected persons/populations regarding gender-related incidents. The MCM/SEP may exist at the regional, national or local level, as well as at the institutional and project levels. The Observatory must ensure that concerned people are aware of this mechanism and the way to use it.

The OSS makes use of good Stakeholder mapping, which helps identify subgroups within their categories such as women, men, fishermen, farmers, youth, the elderly and the disabled. It identifies their specific issues/interests, how they might be affected differently, and how their participation should be shaped to meet their specific needs.

## **7.8- Strengthening of the information technology system**

At the internal level, the information technology system needs to be improved to accommodate classification and document archiving updates.

At the external level, the OSS needs to ensure a more user-friendly website to publish and update timely information, and to provide a funny way for the public to submit requests for information.

Besides, the Observatory should explore other avenues to develop and strengthen synergies and cross-fertilization activities for a more optimal and operational use of digital communications, in particular with Earth Observation (EO). For example, EO platforms can be used to monitor land degradation in Africa. The challenge is to establish systems to disseminate information in a timely and systematic manner.

Local partners and country performing entities must be increasingly called upon to ensure the widest possible dissemination of information, in order supplement the website and social networks which have become the most used networks.

## **7.9- Policy alignment**

In order to create an environment conducive to the implementation of the Policy, the OSS must ensure that its administrative and financial procedures, policies and strategies, including those relating to Covered Individuals, are consistent with this Policy.

## **7.10- Guide to Dissemination Information**

The Guide to Disseminating Information (GDI) is the precise framework for the effective implementation of the CP. It provides clear guidance to stakeholders on how to disseminate information. The processes and procedures for classifying and declassifying documents, as well as the Appeals Mechanism, are specified therein and are therefore available to Covered Individuals and Counterparties. GDI also describes and details best practices for the systematic and timely dissemination of information. The OSS Communication Department therefore plays an important role in the implementation process in cooperation with other departments and units. In addition, information dissemination is systematically integrated into the work programs.

## 8- EFFECTIVENESS AND REVISION

The Communication Policy will come into effect upon its adoption by the OSS Board. It will apply to all OSS activities to the extent reasonably possible, and to those that will be approved after the effective date of this Policy.

This Policy will remain in effect until amended or superseded. It will be reviewed and updated as necessary.