



Nile Basin Discourse

Communications Strategy

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Executive Summary

The Nile Basin Discourse (NBD) is a Regional Network of civil society organizations established to facilitate and support civil society involvement and participation in the planning, implementing and monitoring of developments in the Nile Basin Region. Its primary focus is on the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) and the sustainable socio-economic developments in the Region.

In this communications strategy, we map out the NBD (including Nile Discourse Forums (NDF)) communication priorities towards achieving the overall organisational objectives. It is also designed to link very closely with the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) strategy and Outcome Mapping (OM) strategies. This strategy has been developed through an incremental process, starting with a focus group, through to a network wide, consultative process, in conjunction with the current NBD Communication Officer. This strategy is being developed with the support of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI).

The strategy has been designed to support NBDs two programme objectives which look at increased awareness of the benefits and cost of Nile **cooperation**; and **better informed** NBI policy, planning, design and implementation of programmes.

Communication objectives have been outlined to focus activities towards achieving the overall programme objectives. This strategy is set to provide broad guidelines for developing and implementing activity plans to tie in with communication objectives; and highlight how activities link with M&E and OM strategies. These communication objectives are:

1. **Build on knowledge management within the NBD**
2. **Engage with boundary partners¹ and key audiences**

At present, consultations have been had at the NBD level and, to some extent, with NDFs also. The next stages towards finalising this document will aspire to include input from boundary partners and developed NDF- and NBD-level **activity plans** around communications. Consequently, the final document strives to be a holistic strategy that generates effective communication activities for impact.

This document should be seen as a working document that is referred to and continuously amended and updated throughout the life span of the NBD.

Please note: Budgets and resource allocation will have to be tied to NBD and NDF activity plans, which will be developed in conjunction with NBD staff, based on resource and context.

About the Nile Basin Discourse

The Nile Basin Discourse (NBD) is a Regional Network of civil society organizations established to facilitate and support civil society involvement and participation in the planning, implementing and

¹ *Boundary partners:* Those individuals, groups, and organisations with whom the programme interacts directly and with whom the programme anticipates opportunities for influence. Most activities will involve multiple outcomes because they have multiple boundary partners. (Taken from http://www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Tools/Toolkits/Communication/Outcome_mapping.html)

monitoring of developments in the Nile Basin Region. Its primary focus is on the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) and the sustainable socio-economic developments in the Region.

NBD Vision: *“A Nile Basin, which is secure, where resources are equitably and sustainably developed and managed, benefiting all its inhabitants.”*

NBD Mission: *“To ensure that a fully informed and basin-wide civil society develops and plays a key role in achieving the vision, through pro-active and critical influencing of projects, programmes and policies of the Nile Basin Initiative and other development processes”.*

NBD Purpose: *“To promote and add value to Nile cooperation and development processes that will ultimately reduce poverty in the region”.*

NBD Objectives:

- *Increased awareness of the benefits and cost of Nile cooperation;*
- *Better informed NBI policy, planning, design and implementation of programmes*

The NBD works through a decentralized system, (NBD General Assembly - NBD Board - NBD Regional Secretariat – National Discourse Forums – Local Discourse Forums), and is both a Non-Governmental Organization with a Secretariat based in Entebbe, and a network of affiliated organizations. Since its launch in 2003, 10 National Discourse Forums have developed considerably; seven out of ten are now legally registered as autonomous network of NGOs in their respective countries. These Forums have established critical national-level relations with NBI projects as they emerged at country level, whilst the NBD Secretariat (‘Desk’ as it is sometimes known) based in Entebbe is mandated to drive the work of the NBD at regional level.

In many ways the NDFs are heterogeneous, reflecting the different social, political and institutional environments shaping civil society in their respective countries. This is a challenge for the NBD, but also a strength: it can truly be said that it reflects a very broad constituency of civil society across the basin.

Strong governance of the different NBD organ structures and processes is accorded the highest priority. The basic principle is one of bottom-up governance, based on membership of the different NDFs at national level. Three members from each NDF form part of the regional General Assembly of the NBD which is its highest decision making body. According to the NBD Constitution, the Board functions under the General Assembly and is composed of one member from each NDF chosen by that country, and has liberty to co-opt up to five non-voting members as need may arise from International Organizations, Regional organizations or specialized groups with particular skills. The co-opted members are intended to challenge and influence the Board deliberations in advisory capacity. The Regional Manager sits with the Board as an ex-officio. Further detail on the roles and functions of these organs is provided in the NBD Constitution and governance manual.

Overseas Development Institute (ODI)

This strategy has been developed by ODI’s Water Policy Programme (WPP), in conjunction with the NBD. ODI is Britain's leading independent think tank on international development and humanitarian issues. Our mission is to inspire and inform policy and practice which lead to the reduction of poverty, the alleviation of suffering and the achievement of sustainable livelihoods in developing countries. We do this by locking together high quality applied research, practical policy



advice, and policy-focused dissemination and debate. We work with partners in the public and private sectors, in both developing and developed countries. ODI has provided technical support to the NBD since 2005 focusing on institutional development, communications and policy engagement.

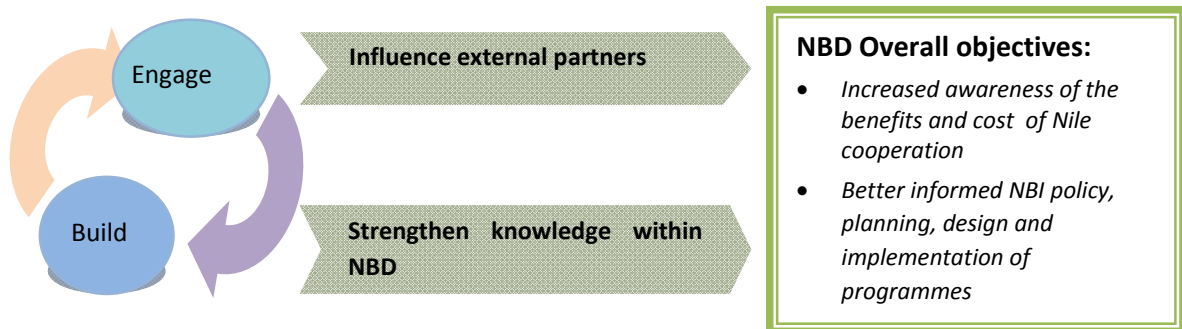
Communications objectives and principles

Based on the NBD objectives, communication objectives have been set with activities that cross-cut these objectives. This section maps out how communication can help the NBD take these objectives forward in practical terms. It goes further to map out key audiences, relationships, proposed solutions to challenges, roles and responsibilities and verifiable outputs that feed into the monitoring and evaluation and outcome mapping strategies of the NBD.

The communication objectives have been summarised as follows:

1. **Build on internal knowledge management:** In order to better enable NBD to support its external processes, there needs to be better communication processes internally. Part of these activities would feed into engaging externally, whilst others would be towards more effective resource allocation internally.
2. **Engage with boundary partners and key audiences:** This aspect considers how information is received, processed, packaged and disseminated. It will combine providing information, advocating for change and promoting dialogue between boundary partners.

The diagram below visualises how communication objectives interact as mechanisms that feed into efforts to achieve NBD’s overarching objectives:



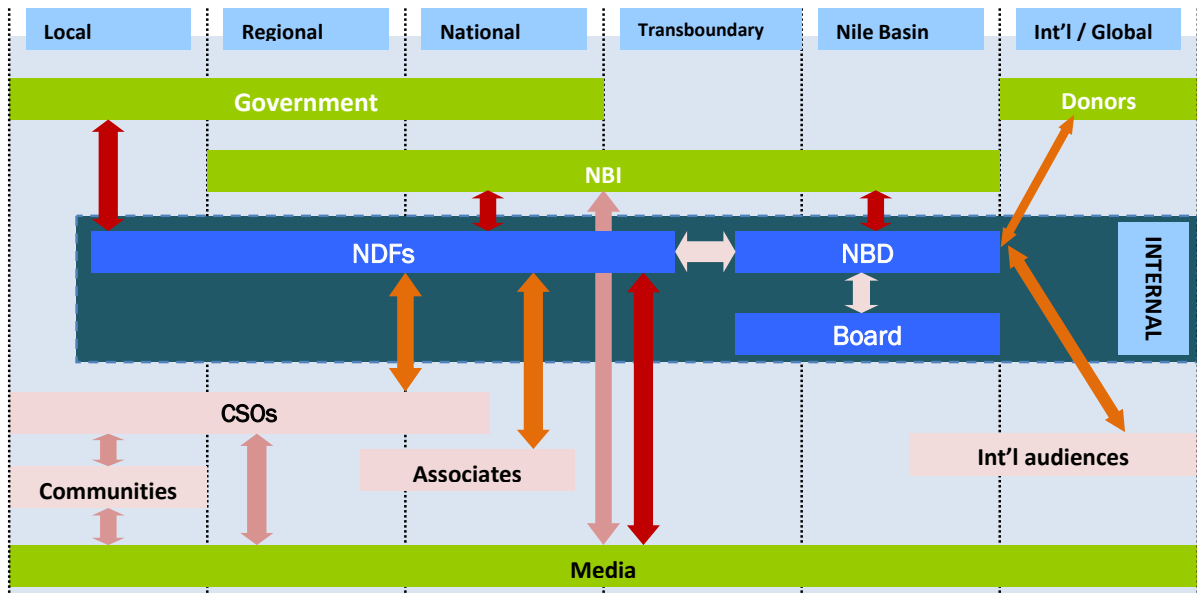
To develop the communication strategy and guide activities, the NBD needs to adopt three key principles:

- **Communication should be done by all, for all and always:** It should be a constant activity between all organs of the NBD and partners. Information gathered should be utilised towards enhancing knowledge, both internally and externally.
- **Communications should be effective:** Through better planning and targeted communication activities, effective and efficient engagement and influence can happen.
- **Communications supports efforts to achieve sustainability:** Through good communications, the relevance of the NBD is highlighted. Monitoring and evaluating NBD communications activities for bringing about improved efforts also improves effectiveness and sustainability.

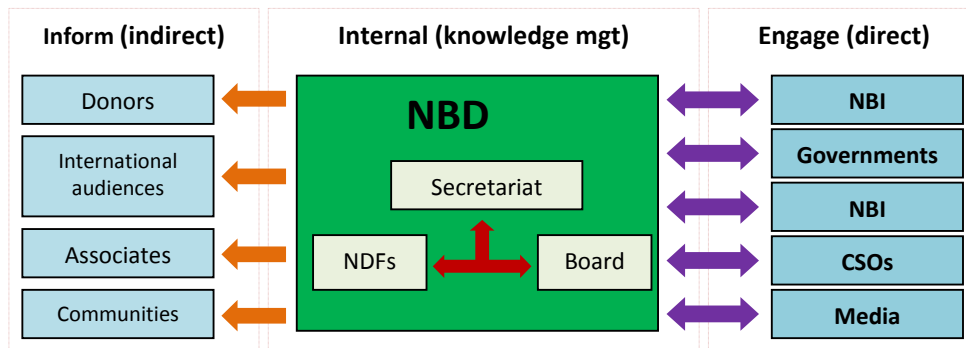
Mapping communications

Communication in the NBD is complex, crossing borders and levels and interacting with a range of boundary partners. With limited resources, a better use of resources would be to target specific audiences and aim to use multiplier effects to further communicate messages.

The following diagram attempts to lay out the relationships for communications between different groups, across different levels and in different ways.



To understand how this translates to communications activities, the diagram identifies how the communication activities need to be grouped:



Operationalising communication objectives

This section looks at how the communication objectives can be broken down in practical terms. The examples given are for illustrative purposes and are by no means an exhaustive list of what activities should be undertaken.

Build on knowledge management within the NBD (internal):

Generally, internal communications within the NBD is a challenge, particularly with the default dispersed nature of the NDFs. Currently, there is no clear internal strategy to make the most of existing internal knowledge and resources. There is a need to formalise certain activities and processes for better use of available resources. The sub-categories for building knowledge:

- **Strengthening interactions within NBD:** This is central to elevating the voices of civil society at all levels. To do this, communication efforts need to focus on increased interaction between NDFs and also between NDFs and the NBD.
- **Encouraging knowledge gathering:** Through its members, NDFs should aim to become nodes of communication, as they interface between their members and NBD. By gathering country-relevant information, these could then be analysed and synthesised at regional levels and used to provide useful key messages for advocacy. Storing and transferring knowledge at both NBD and NDF level is fundamental to supporting this.
- **Continuous learning:** By fostering a knowledge sharing culture, the NBD can continuously grow and evolve. Experience sharing is particularly useful for this, in developing better practice for the organisation.
- **Building internal capacity in communication:** Providing training and tips on communication for National Programme Coordinators and Assistants should be a catalyst for building up on a communications culture. Simple online tips and guides could be a step towards building internal capacity.

In order to achieve a climate within NBD that fosters collaboration, respect and efficiency across the NBD, specific activities should include:

- Developing an intranet as a document repository and for alerting NBD staff to ongoing activities (for example, internal processes, procedures, policies, articles of interest, upcoming or past activities and events),
- Sending out bi-weekly updates summarising latest activities of members of the NBD,
- Hosting regular internal meetings and workshops around learning and sharing of experiences,
- Undertaking background research to build on the knowledge base of the NBD,
- Writing activity reports to share with other team members.

Engage with boundary partners and key audiences (external):

The success of NBD relies on how effectively it can inform and influence its boundary partners. The ability to influence for positive change, particularly with several conflicting messages, relies on effective communication. Disseminating key messages that are relevant to targeted audiences must be strategic as well as, responsive.

- **Disseminating to an external audience:** NBD has wide-ranging and complex audiences that process information differently. Appropriate outputs, that are timely, available and accessible by audiences is key and requires resources. Targeting boundary partners with the right outputs (i.e. right tone, message, format etc) and methods are part and parcel of being strategic about communication.
- **Hosting and engaging with forums to promote dialogue:** With a focus on advocacy and promoting dialogue and cooperation, NBD is perfectly placed to create space for stakeholders to network, and work cooperatively. In addition, by building links with key agencies, NBD can amplify their efforts by linking up and strengthening existing networks and forums.

- **Developing a strong identity:** Strengthening an identity and a reputation for the NBD supports longevity and legitimacy. The NBD and NDFs should be seen as a unified sum of parts, moving from individual identities to a recognised collective. One way of doing this is to brand the NBD and NDFs so that any material and output is associated with the collective. National identities are equally as important as regional ones, so national and regional differences can be tailored to context, but not compete with the collective identity.

Effectively engaging with external audiences is essential for successfully advocating for change and promoting dialogue. Specific activities should include:

- Reworking and repackaging existing materials for new audiences, particularly easily translatable material,
- Production of print and web-based outputs targeted at a wide range of audiences,
- Engagement with and use of NBD material by national and regional media,
- Collaboration with existing national and regional networks,
- Hosting or supporting key workshops and events between countries within the region,
- Developing and maintaining relationships with key decision-makers,
- Building a consistent, visual identity that is both recognisable and viable.

In order to gauge the impact of the strategy and continually improve effectiveness, there must be a focus on tracking communications activities and monitoring impact. Specific activities should include:

- Regular feedback from stakeholders (e.g. surveys from workshops attendants),
- Monitoring statistical information about web hits and downloads,
- Monitoring and recording appearances in newspapers and other media outlets,
- Documenting internal processes and building on a library of information for internal use,
- Maintaining an extensive database of Nile-region stakeholders,
- Securing invitations to participate in relevant regional events and decision-making meetings.

Opportunities, challenges and solutions

Communication was generally recognised as both a crucial and weak component within the NBD. Opportunities for utilising communication to further goals were acknowledged, and challenges to each of these highlighted. The session in Dar Es Salaam went on further to suggest potential solutions for overcoming challenges in order to maximise benefits that effective communication can bring. The table below brings together the inputs on these discussions² – the full list of these issues is listed in Annex 2:

Opportunities	Challenges	Solutions
• Learning and sharing	• Language barriers	• Tap into partner resources

² These are outputs solely from the Dar Es Salaam workshop, which was just 30 minutes of brainstorming and groupwork, and should not be taken as exhaustive or conclusive. It is hoped that this is taken as the first attempt to consolidate participatory approaches to developing the communications strategy.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase NBDs relevance • Effective use of resources • Supports fundraising • Builds capacity • Goes towards achieving objectives • Supports growth and development • Increases visibility, credibility and accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited resources and difficulty accessing them • Inconsistent information delivery • Lack of technical expertise • Poor planning • Shallow capacity within NBD • No clear set policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic about planning and implementing • Develop resources internally • Capitalise on internal knowledge • Use multipliers to spread messages • Develop key messages for broad appeal • Engage with media • Allocate resources and prioritise communications
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Generally, participants recognised the opportunities, challenges and solutions that effective communication brought to light. To overcome challenges and make the most of opportunities, the solutions suggested focused on being tactical and developing resources. Solutions fit quite neatly into NBD’s overarching objectives, as they combined knowledge management internally, effective communication externally and building capacity both internally and externally. In addition, members recognised the benefits of working with each other, as well as, partnering with other organisations. Combining findings from the Cairo brainstorming session (Annex 1) and the Dar Es Salaam (Annex 2), led to a better picture of what NBD felt they needed to focus on, over their next phase. This will be elaborated on in the next sections.

Overall, there are three crucial things to add or highlight:

1. **Regionalisation of the NBD:** A need for coherence at a regional-level resonates through NBD self-evaluations, and this depends on a strong triangular relationship of NBD–NDF, and NDF–NDF.
2. **Visibility of NBD:** Having a single, recognisable and visible brand to unify and strengthen the NBD.
3. **Tackling language barriers:** Language has been identified as an obvious and significant obstacle for the NBD. Simple and clear messages for easy translation should underpin internal and external communication outputs.

Breaking it down: Key audiences, objectives and outputs

From identifying key audiences and elaborating on how to meet objectives, it is vital to ensure that the two fit together. The table³ below matches audiences and activities to objectives. This table should be elaborated on and connected to indicators, roles and responsibilities outlined in the M&E strategy and job descriptions.

Objective	Audience	Activities	Type of outputs
<i>Build on knowledge</i>	NBD NDF	Using the Intranet Sending Bi-weekly updates	Reporting: Activity summaries, back to office reports, meeting notes etc.

³ Based on outcomes of the brainstorming sessions in Cairo and Dar Es Salaam (see Annexes).

<i>management within the NBD</i>	Board	Hosting workshops and other meetings for internal learning Exchange visits	Official documents: Strategies; Policies; Procedures; Templates Outputs: Presentations, Reports, Workshop summaries, Regular updates
<i>Engage with boundary partners and key audiences</i>	Direct: NBI Governments NGOs/CSOs Donors Media	Meetings Workshops Public debates Radio/TV shows Website Forums	Publications: Policy briefs, Research reports, Event summaries Online: Blogs, Event updates, News updates, Documents Interactive: Audio-visuals ⁴ , Roadshows Promotional material: Posters, Flyers, Brochures, Newsletters Pamphlets
	Indirect: Communities Associates International orgs	Films	

Managing and implementing communications – outlining roles and responsibilities

Implementing the communications strategy should be a concerted effort of all organs of the NBD. Internal communications, in particular, ties in strongly with the monitoring and evaluation strategies, and should be part of a daily routine.

Below is a matrix showing activities with key responsibility and support roles and anticipated activity cycles. This is a generic outline, with further details laid out in activity plans for both regional and national-levels.

The communications strategy should be owned by both National Programme Coordinators and by the NBD secretariat, in particular, the communications and knowledge management officers. Technical support that is not available in-house should be sourced externally, with a capacity building aspect where possible to ensure that internal capacity is continually built upon.

This section will tie in with the NBD log-frame and consolidate those indicators that relate or link with the communication strategy directly. It will be completed when the M&E strategy and log frames are set out. In agreement, of future phases of the project, activity plans set out will include monitoring and evaluation milestones and indicators.

The table is merely indicative of what should be considered in terms of audiences, targets, planning and roles necessary for various activities recommended:

Activities/ Channels	Target audiences	Done by	Activity cycle
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⁴ Includes radio and TV shows, films, documentaries



have a database of key contacts at the main newspapers and magazines, the free press, the local radio and TV programmes. This database should be maintained by both the national Programme Assistants and the Communications Officer.

NDF and NBD Activity Plans

This section will be further developed once activity plans have been discussed at both NBD and NDF-levels. **Budgeting and resource allocation** will have to be based around generic activity plans and will be set at this stage. This is because costs and resources vary from country to country, and the activity plans would be more achievable if tied to country-contexts.

Annex 1: Cairo brainstorming session

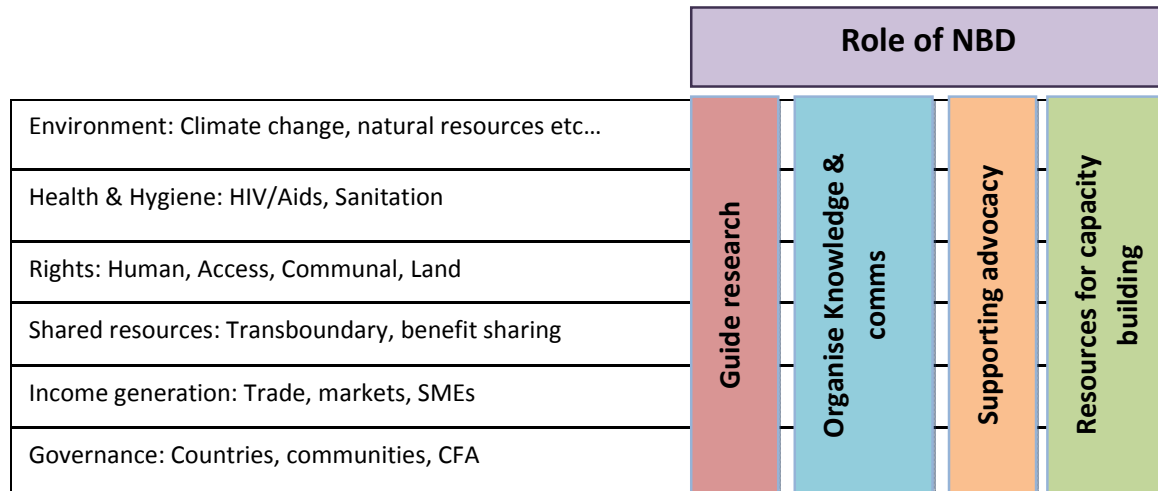
The main aim of the Cairo brainstorming session was to gather a sense of what is currently happening with the NBD? What are the current challenges? How can we better organise information to make it useful? Who are the key audiences and boundary partners? What key actions and limitations do we currently face? Below is a detailed summary of the days' discussions.

A mini-review of what is currently happening within the NBD reflected that due to complications and challenges, not a lot was able to be achieved. This identified how relationships within the NBD currently worked, in terms of communications, with NDFs being the connecting body between the NBD and the CSOs, media, general public at the national level. Some communication activities such as workshops, debates, radio talk shows, newsletters, brochures, briefs from NBD and films, had been done.

The current challenges were identified as:

- Incomplete information coming in from NDFs
- Limited resources
- Language barriers
- Lack of synergy which led to a lack of good analysis
- Poor internet access
- Lack of relevant information

An attempt to organise the information from the NBD into themes, to gain some structure and an overview. This exercise was merely a starting point for further development at future discussions and linking in with research strategies with the wider organisation:



Key audiences, why we want to engage and how?

Audience	Why	How
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NBI (regional and national)	Build partnership Enhance exchange, sharing and learning	Meetings and consultations
Governments (regional and national)	Open up dialogue with CSOs	Policy briefs, meetings, forums
Media	Key to holding NBI accountable Garner membership and support for NBD	Newsworthy stories Forums, Radio, TV, Marketing
Civil Society Organisations (Wide spectrum and most constraints)	Influence change Build capacity Strengthen their voice	Real-time and interactive methods Brochures, newsletters, briefs, radio, exchanges, training sessions
Communities	Improve lives Strengthen voice	Oral and visual tools, like radio, TV, dramatisations, posters Practical examples Local languages Highly visual, oral and instant
International institutions	Sharing knowledge Garnering support	Websites, existing networks, films, international events, email campaigns.

Action and limitations

Time, resources, financing are limited. The communication strategy and activity plans need to recognise the need to prioritise and allocate resources wisely, by providing guidelines.

There is a need to improve internal communications, in order to improve external communications. Some clarity is lacking with internal knowledge management and external communications and with the new roles (Knowledge Management Officer and Communications Officer) of the Secretariat, these should be made explicit.

Tools for Internal communications: NBD, NDFs, Board and possibly Partners.

Intranet: Online resource for documents, updates and process documentation, as well as regular bi-annual evaluations → would require technical support, perhaps local support, and international hosting.

Email updates: Sent round fortnightly/monthly

Activity reports: Set templates and guidelines so information collected is relevant and complete.

Forums: NDFs and NBD to share lessons, experience and knowledge.

Tools for external communications: CSOs, NBI, Governments, Media, Communities, International Institutions

Radio & TV: talkshows, public debates, engagement:

- Need to map out national media for targeting

- Clusters of radio shows for small sub-regions
- Freedom of expressions vary for different countries
- Punctual attendance has proved a challenge

Posters/flyers/brochures: very simple, clear messages

- Space to display → libraries, offices, schools
- Public events and forums
- Printing costs

Roadshows, dramatisation and filmshows: Oral & visual

- Resource-intensive
- Tag onto existing implementers
- Gain local authority buy-in

Tools for both internal and external audiences: narrow, specialist focus to broader, informal outlook

Publications: identify gaps; policy briefs or longer pieces of research; inform policy-makers and more informal outputs to a wider audience

- Complex, expensive, narrow audience: Briefing papers, research reports, website
- Wider, more informal audience: Stories of change, posters, brochures, leaflets, newsletters etc...

Website: provides a store of general as well as specific materials – it allows for better monitoring and evaluation; feedback; resource for others; adding links for networks to connect to resources.

Annex 1: Feedback from the Dar Es Salaam workshop

The group activity was based on the concept of the World Café, which was called the Nile Café for the purpose of this exercise.

Opportunities:

What are the benefits of good communication for your organisation? Who should be doing communication? Who are the audiences?

Benefits	Who	Audiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning • Makes NBD relevant • Disseminating and informing • Saves money and time • Influencing and changing • Limited distortion of information • Support to programmes fundraising efforts • Enhancing expertise/ Builds capacity • Better planning – communicating strategies and activity plans for better outputs and greater impact • Define communication needs both internally and externally • Ties to the vision, mission and objectives • Supports growth and development • Increases visibility, credibility and accountability • Prevent conflicts 	<p>Everybody within the NBD but in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications experts (KCO) • Member organisations • Executive Manager • Board members • NDFs (NPCs/NPAs) • Partners • Research and advocacy officer <p>These should work in partnership with, in order to become effective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media • Academic institutions • Religious leaders • Community leaders • NBI • Governments • Researchers • Cultural groups • Artists/Entertainers • CSOs (added to include all other mentioned organisations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members of the NBD and NDF • Governments • Donors • NBI • Media • General public • Partners • Politicians • Private sector • Academic institutions • Religious institutions • Intergovernmental institutions • National communities • Beneficiaries

Challenges

What problems are faced internally and externally? How can we overcome them?

- **Language** barriers between countries (English, French and Arabic, as well as local languages)
- Non-responsive audience

- **Access to internet resources**, particularly for CSOs/NGOs boundary partners
- Poor information flow within the NBD.
- Low awareness of local communities of water issues related to the Nile
- Lack of knowledge on inter use
- **Limited financial resources**
- High costs of producing material which can be used
- Required frequent visits to assess effectiveness
- **Inconsistent information delivery**
- **Lack of technical expertise**
- Uncertainty and confusion within the NBD
- Collision in the allocation of duties
- **Limited planning strategies**
- **Shallow capacity** to engage the media, the poor and different audiences
- Personal attitudes – inherently poor communication skills
- Under staffing
- **No internal communications policy**

Solutions

Communication tools are plenty, however resources are limited – what can we do, and how can we achieve our goals?

- Work with **partners** to share costs
- Select the most important targets (**be strategic**)
- **Share experiences** internally, so we build on what others have done
- **Be strategic** with utilising tools (plan): What will reach the widest audience? When are people most receptive?
- Select less expensive tools where possible, for example, in targeting communities, radio is cheaper than television
- **Develop resources centrally** if the message is the relevant for more than one country (use the intranet!)
- Define messages for each target group, that are consistent and specific
- **Use the intranet regularly and often**, particularly for planning
- Train and advocate to **multipliers** (e.g. teachers, religious leaders, NGO networks)
- **Short messages** on a range of mediums: T-shirts, emails, stationary etc...
- **Engage the media** with interesting stories – they can provide free publicity.
- Garner invitations to speak as an expert
- **Host public meetings** in communities and latch onto other ongoing activities – be strategic, use a market day for example when more people are around; or advertise at gatherings

- Posters are visual and can be cost-effective
- **Plan, prioritise and strategise** e.g. 1 year plans, 5 year plans etc
- Partner with communication institutions
- **KISS** – keep messages short and simple, they are usually more cost-effective and translate better.
- Use striking messages, materials and catch phrases
- Target private sector to **sponsor** multimedia campaigns
- Build up a **branding identity**