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

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SUMMURY

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, represent a global commitment to address diverse social, economic, and environmental challenges by 2030. Within this framework, the achievement of Goal 15 which focuses on Life on Land, is confronted with 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 relationship between human activities and the natural environment.

This study aims to assist effective communication of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to stakeholders in the land sector, with a focus on SDG 15. It aims to identify shortcomings in the Southern African land sector and use strategic communication tactics to provide chances for SDG 15 implementation. The goal of resolving these gaps and implementing focused communication methods is to increase the likelihood of accomplishing SDG 15 targets. Furthermore, this project aims to raise awareness of the larger relevance of the land sector in the Southern African region, so contributing to a better understanding and involvement with sustainable development activities.

The investigation of communication techniques goes beyond identifying weaknesses; it actively proposes actions to enhance the productiveness 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.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations (UN) 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 developed 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. (United Nations, 2015)

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,

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- 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.

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.

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 15. 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 Communication of SDG Linkages with Specific Goals to The Land Sector.

2.1 Communication

Communication is an essential part of our daily interactions, acting as a critical tool for increasing engagement and comprehension among individuals and organisations. Effective communication not only improves satisfaction across a variety of issues, but it also supports in the pursuit of common goals. (Hughes & Fill, 2006-2007) defines marketing communications as, 'a strategic management process by which organisations interact with a variety of audiences. Organisations that understand their audiences' communication environments can create tailored messages for different stakeholder groups, evaluate responses, and take appropriate action based on feedback.' By conveying messages that are encouraged to offer attitudinal and behavioural responses.' (De Pelsmacker et al., 2004) further explains marketing communication as a 'plan that recognises the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines, e.g. general advertising direct response, sales promotion and public relations and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communication impact.
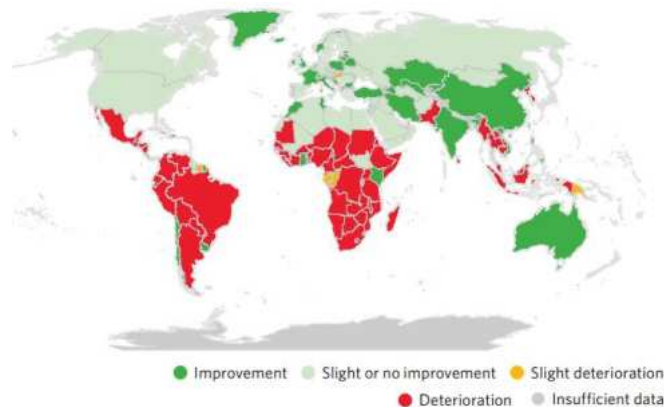

Figure 2: A linear of the communication process. (Shannon & Weaver, 1963)

Figure 2 illustrates the linear communication process from sender to receiver, which appears to be a simple message transfer. However, this concept is more complex than it appears, specifically when used to successfully convey Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to specific sectors, such as SDG 15 in the land sector. It displays the processes that information must take to get from sender to receiver, while accounting for potential disturbances or "noise" at each stage. Below I will explain each step of the communication process explained by (Shannon & Weaver, 1963):

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Sender: initiates the communication process by creating a message to be transmitted to the receiver. The sender's/ organisations' role is to encode the message into a form that can be transmitted through a channel.

- Encoding (message): the information or content that the sender wishes to communicate to the receiver. This could be in the form of words, images, signals, or any other meaningful units of information.
- Channel: a medium through which the message is transmitted from the sender to the receiver. This could be a physical channel(traditional) e.g., air, wire, optical fibre) or a digital channel (e.g., internet, wireless network).
- Decoding: understanding of encoded messages through the various channels using different symbols transmitted.
- Receiver: the intended recipient or target audience the message was intended. The receiver decodes the message to understand its meaning and significance.
- Noise: refers to any interference or distortion that affects the making it difficult for the receiver to interpret and understand and respond to the message accordingly.
- The United Nations needs to implement a systematic strategy to effectively communicate its goals, particularly SDG 15, to stakeholders in the land sector. Organisations that use a well-defined communication approach can improve their understanding, engagement, and reaction to crucial sustainability projects.

2.2. Identification of Gaps in Land Sector in Southern Africa.

Legend: ● Improvement ○ Slight or no improvement ● Slight deterioration ● Deterioration ○ Insufficient data

Figure 3: Trend in forest areas as a proportion of total land area, 2015- 2020 (United Nations, 2023).

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) shown in Figure 3. 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

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ensure the continued well-being of humanity and the diverse array of life supported by these vital habitats (United Nations, 2023). This report highlights the entire Sub-Saharan region and that constitutes as a huge gap and a smaller grouping of these regions can help in the implementation of SDG15 and its acceleration in smaller grouped regions for the implementation of communication strategies in each.

Figure 3 also indicates nations in red on the African continent that are struggling or falling behind in meeting the SDGs by 2030, as compared to other global regions (United Nations, 2023). This emphasises the need for specialised initiatives and improved communication tactics to address unique difficulties in Sub-Saharan Africa specifically Southern Africa to accelerate progress towards SDG15. The continent has been categorised by the UN Sub-Saharan Africa as illustrated in Figure 4 below.

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.

2.2.1. Land Tenure Insecurity and Lack of Access to Land

Land tenure insecurity and limited access to land are prevalent issues in Southern Africa, particularly among vulnerable groups such as women, indigenous communities, and smallholder farmers. These challenges are exacerbated by unequal land distribution, unclear land rights, and land grabbing. Secure land tenure is crucial for the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems. Achieving secure land tenure and equitable access to land aligns with Target 15.1 of SDG15, which aims to ensure the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems (Nakanwagi, 2022). Communities with secure land rights are more likely to invest in natural resource conservation, ecosystem restoration, and climate-resilient agriculture, thereby reducing vulnerability to extreme weather events and environmental degradation (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2020). Furthermore, secure land rights empower marginalized groups, including indigenous peoples, women, and smallholder farmers, to access resources, participate in decision-making processes, and benefit equitably from climate adaptation and mitigation initiatives (Werner & Odendaal, 2020). By ensuring inclusive land governance systems, policymakers can foster social cohesion and reduce conflicts over land and natural resources exacerbated by climate change.

2.2.2 Inadequate Land Use Planning and Management

Inadequate land use planning and management contribute to inefficient use of land resources, unplanned urbanization, and conflicts over land use in Southern Africa (Enoguanbhor, Gollnow, Walker, Nielsen & Lakes, 2021). The absence of comprehensive land use plans and policies hampers sustainable development and environmental conservation. Target 15.9 of SDG15 aims to integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies, and accounts. Strengthening land use planning and management practices is essential for achieving this target and fostering sustainable land use in the region (Mclain, 2020). By integrating ecosystem and biodiversity considerations into development planning, we can better support sustainable development goals while mitigating environmental degradation and promoting efficient land use. This approach also helps in minimizing conflicts over land use and ensures that land resources are utilized in a manner that benefits both people and the environment.

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2.3. Identified Gaps in the Sustainable Development Goals

Languages are sometimes overlooked in communication, especially among people from different continents, countries, and regions. This highlights a significant gap that requires more investigation in the field of communication technologies. For example, looking at the UN websites for annual reports on the SDGs gives updates on progress towards these goals in various regions as classified by the UN. While these reports provide useful insights into achievements and issues, they notably fail to address the language barrier as a critical issue in the SDGs' communication plan for 2030. Furthermore, they fail to address how the goals' successes are conveyed in the languages spoken in various regions, as shown in Figure 4.

The SDGs are officially communicated in six languages—Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish (United Nations, 2015). However, this language set does not cater adequately to the linguistic diversity of regions categorized under Sub-Saharan Africa by the UN. Countries in Southern Africa, where several indigenous languages are spoken, may have difficulty understanding or interpreting SDG material. Nigeria is a linguistic hub in Sub-Saharan Africa, home to three of the region's most spoken languages: Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo, each with at least ten million speakers (Berglee, 2024). Swahili, Lingala, and Zulu are also important languages in the region, contributing significantly to its linguistic diversity and cultural complexity. In addition, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has officially recognised English, Portuguese, French, and, most recently, Kiswahili as official languages. Despite this institutional framework, the region is linguistically varied, with a variety of languages spoken in its member countries ("SADC adopts Kiswahili as 4th working language," 2019).

This multilingual landscape highlights the limitations of effectively communicating SDG 15 and other goals across multiple linguistic situations. The lack of representation of regional languages in SDG communications emphasises the need for a more inclusive approach that recognises and addresses linguistic variety to promote meaningful engagement and comprehension of the SDGs' objectives.

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

Figure 4 shows how the UN has segmented the African continent into 2 regions Northern Africa and Western Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Notably, Southern Africa is in the Sub-Saharan Africa area. However, this form of categorization can be difficult, especially given the variety of ecosystems and climates present between countries in this region.

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The grouping of countries into broad areas may result in inequalities in how they are evaluated in terms of progress towards specific Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as SDG 15, as seen in Figure 4. Some countries may appear to be making great progress, whereas others seem to be lagging. An obvious issue raised in the United Nations Southern Africa's 2023 report is the oversimplified description of challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa. Given the immense geographical extent of the African continent, data collection becomes a daunting activity. Furthermore, the many biodiversity of Southern African countries complicates problems. The overall category makes it difficult to identify specific difficulties, acquire relevant data, and develop effective solutions customised to each country's particular circumstances.

3. Identified Opportunities for Effective Communication in the SDGs to the Land Sector.

3.1. Regional Segmentation of the African Continent

Figure 5: African Regions, (Onambele et al., 2022)

Figure 5 (Onambele et al., 2022) illustrates the African continent's regional segmentation, which provides a more detailed picture of the ecosystems and climatic diversity observed throughout many countries. This approach differs from larger categorizations in that it provides insights into the unique characteristics and challenges of specific locations, such as those connected to SDG 15. Figure 5 further shows the 10 countries that make up Southern Africa. This regional split allows for focused actions that can be adapted to each country's unique needs and contexts. Using these regional types, plans may be designed to address local ecosystems, communication patterns, and land-related challenges relevant to SDG 15 targets.

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Furthermore, using a regionally segmented strategy allows for better data collecting and more targeted communication methods. Recognising the commonalities in ecosystems, climates, behaviours, and communication styles within each region makes it possible to build tailored treatments that effectively reach local populations.

This shift towards finer regional segmentation not only fills gaps in the United Nations' broader regional groups (United Nations, 2023) but also promotes a deeper comprehension of the challenges and opportunities for sustainable development on the African continent. Using these insights, stakeholders may better mobilise resources, prioritise actions, and support real progress towards SDG 15 and related goals. This approach emphasises the importance of context-specific tactics in attaining regional sustainable development goals.

3.2. Opportunities derived from Gaps in The Land Sector in the Land Sector (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 are to 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. These include 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.

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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.

3.3. Communication Strategy for Implementation in Southern Africa

To extend the definition of communication marketing terms. Marketing communication or marcom refers to the combination of promotional tools, marketing channels, messages, and media that marketers use strategically to communicate with target audiences' communication channels and the marketing mix are critical components of marketing. The user or sender is entrusted with designing a marketing communication strategy built around the 4Ps of the marketing mix, including product, price, promotion, and Place. You could further expand it to the 7 Ps that would include people, package and process to further understanding and break down amongst others. This mix 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 always strive to develop meaningful connections with their target clients by seamlessly integrating these aspects.

The marketing mix must be tailored to each geographic location to correspond with their information consumption patterns and effectively express the desired objectives through appropriate marketing strategies, supplemented by the Shannon-Weaver communication model. However, attaining communication goals is dependent not just on the marketing mix and the Shannon-Weaver model, but also on knowing the demands of message recipients in their individual circumstances. Using the most appropriate communication mix (including advertising, promotions, campaigns, internet-based approaches, and direct marketing communications) is critical for addressing challenges and fully understanding the fundamental reasons of the problem. This strategy is crucial for accelerating progress towards the SDGs, particularly those relating to the land sector (SDG 15).

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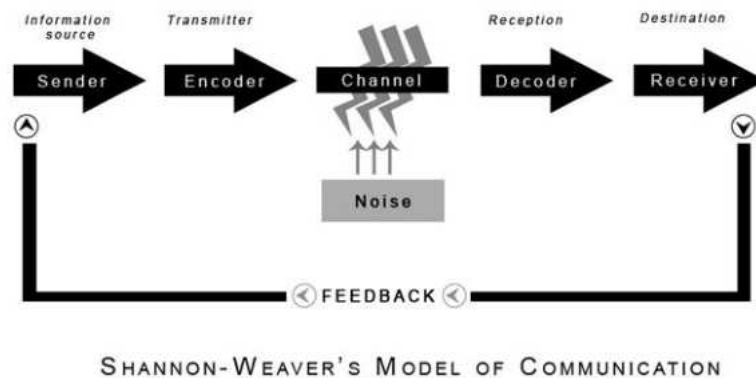*Figure 6: The 4Ps of the Marketing Mix (Zineldin & Philipson, 2007)*

Figure 7: 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

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practical guide for improving clarity, understanding, and meaningful involvement in interpersonal and organisational communication settings.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

This narrative paper emphasises the importance of good communication in accomplishing the SDGs, specifically in Southern Africa's land sector. By investigating communication strategies, finding gaps, and offering actionable options, this study recommends a complete approach that combines sustainable practices with effective communication approaches.

The SDGs, established by the UN, represent a forward-thinking commitment to global well-being and sustainability. Among these goals, SDG 15 ("Life on Land") is critical for safeguarding and rebuilding terrestrial ecosystems. Achieving this goal involves not only technical skills but also Southern Africa-specific communication methods.

Our research into communication strategies in the land sector reveals the complexities of communicating SDG aims and priorities. By exploiting geographical segmentation and understanding linguistic variation, we can create tailored communication programmes that appeal with local audiences. Integrating marketing communication ideas, such as the 4Ps of the Marketing Mix, into SDG communication initiatives emphasises the significance of audience-centric messaging. These technologies increase involvement, raise awareness, and develop meaningful relationships, accelerating progress towards SDG 15 and beyond.

Shannon Weaver's communication model provides useful insights into information transmission, emphasising the importance of clear messaging and responsive feedback loops. This model guides our communication strategy, assuring effectiveness and adaptation to varied audiences. This paper calls for a comprehensive strategy to sustainable development that combines effective communication tactics with practical solutions. By addressing communication barriers and embracing inclusive practices, we may accelerate progress towards SDG 15, which promotes harmonious cohabitation between humankind and the terrestrial environment in Southern Africa.

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