ACT Alliance 2015-2018 Communications Strategy

Approved by the ACT Alliance Governing Board
May 2015

Vision, mission and objectives and function

ACT Alliance believes that the world can be changed for the better. With its roots firmly planted in strong, faith-based communities, ACT engages in quality, life-saving action and works with communities to provide accountable assistance as they recover from emergencies, rebuild their livelihoods and transform their lives. In all that we do, ACT aims to mobilise the power within individuals and communities themselves, building resilience, basing its work in a firm commitment to maintaining human dignity, and seeking sustainability.

Therefore, as churches and church-related organisations, ACT members work together for positive and sustainable change in the lives of people affected by poverty and injustice. We do this through coordinated and effective humanitarian, development and advocacy work.

Context of the 2015-2018 communications strategy

The world we seek to change is itself changing. Economic power is gradually shifting from the US and Europe to the growing economies in the global East and the South, and emerging economies are playing new roles as donors and in international trade. Therefore major changes in development and humanitarian finance are foreseen in addition to increased competition for limited financial resources. This is compounded by increased negative perceptions of non-governmental organisations across world, trends towards shrinking civil society space, and the private sector's entrance into the development arena making use of technological advancements competing on efficiency and effectiveness with NGOs. At the same time, extreme weather events are reported to intensify and cause increasing climate-induced displacement. Therefore, increased resources towards emergency response, human rights and climate justice advocacy is foreseen. It is within this changing arena that the 2015-2018 communications strategy, with its goal of increasing brand recognition to ensure ACT Alliance remains relevant and competitive, must be effectively implemented if the alliance is to bring about positive change to those most affected by poverty and injustice.

2015-2018 global strategy

The 2015-2018 global ACT Alliance strategy has significantly departed from the previous term strategy, creating the new narrative of the alliance as member-driven. Whereas the previous strategy detailed what members, forums and the secretariat should achieve, the new strategy focuses more on the creation of an overall framework direction of the alliance based on mutual ways of working that show the added value of being part of the network. The communications strategy, therefore, will support this narrative, contributing to all aims of the global strategy, and specifically the enabling aim: that of increasing brand recognition to support the growth of the 'robust alliance'. The communications strategy must enable members to work together towards increased brand recognition and reputation enhancement, and increased engagement and pride in the alliance. Therefore, the success of the communications strategy rests on setting clear stakeholder targets, working to strengths, and overcoming weaknesses to access new and existing opportunities.

ACT's stakeholders

The alliance interacts with its stakeholders[1] on different levels. In terms of communications, the stakeholders are those with whom the communications strategy must engage, communicate and inform, to achieve the enabling aim of the global ACT 2015-2018 strategy: 'increased brand recognition'. These stakeholders are listed in the table on the following page:

Stakeholders	ACT's brand promise	Outcome
ACT members (including forums, advisory groups and communities of practice)	Being part of the alliance adds tangible value to the work of the member organisation	Members appreciate the added value of being part of the alliance and increasingly cobrand
ACT secretariat	The secretariat is able to effectively facilitate networked collaboration among members	Members appreciate the added value of being part of ACT and know how the alliance can help them in better achieving their agency's work
Institutional donors, including foundations and governments	ACT is a credible, effective partner across humanitarian and advocacy arenas with accurate insight into, and implementation skills to address, the realities on the ground	ACT more effectively accesses and influences decision-making bodies regarding funding and policy
International institutions, including peer organisations and civil society groups	ACT is a credible, effective partner across humanitarian and advocacy arenas with accurate insight into, and resources to mobilise , the realities on the ground	ACT is vied for as a substantial and credible partner across peer organisations
Academic institutions	ACT is a legitimate partner with global presence therefore ability to enable access for research	ACT is vied for as a substantial and credible partner in academic circles

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[1] For the purposes of the 2015-2018 communications strategy and the specific aim of increasing brand recognition 'stakeholders' refers to 'any group or individual that can be influenced by, or can itself influence, the activities of the organisation'. Please note, in other contexts, for example, quality and accountability, the definition of stakeholders may expand to include 'any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of the organisation objectives'.

The private sector	ACT is a credible, effective partner across humanitarian and advocacy arenas with accurate insight into, and implementation skills to address, the realities on the ground	ACT is perceived as a substantial and credible partner for joint projects
Media	ACT is a valuable and reliable source, providing timely access to on-the-ground sources	Increased brand recognition both reputationally among the media, and visibly from the ground

The 2015-2018 communications strategy capitalises on the resources and capabilities within the entire alliance, working to amplify its strengths and address its weaknesses towards increased brand recognition.

ACT's strengths and weaknesses

The strengths and weaknesses across the alliance influence the focus areas of the communications strategy and ACT's ability to effectively implement it. Therefore the strategy must accommodate these in order to be successful. As an alliance the key strengths that inform the 2015-2018 communications strategy for increased brand recognition, have been identified as:

- the level of commitment among members,
- a wealth of resources and expertise within the alliance, and
- presence in every corner of the world.

As an alliance the key weaknesses in terms of the communication strategy have been identified as:

- significantly varying technical expertise in communication skills across the membership,
- irregular and inconsistent member collaboration and sharing of information and resources,
- reduced communications capacity within the ACT secretariat,
- relatively low co-branding, and as a result low external visibility globally, and
- inconsistent quality in ACT members' external materials and communication.

A successful communications strategy for increased brand recognition must therefore identify initiatives that fit the alliance's strengths, namely leveraging and increasing the level of commitment among members and the wealth of resources and expertise, and maximising the visibility potential of ACT's presence in every corner of the world. It must also overcome the alliance's weaknesses, through leveraging its strengths to reduce vulnerabilities that may hinder success.

Outline of the 2015-2018 communications strategy

The vision of 'increased brand recognition' as detailed in the global ACT Alliance 2015-2018 strategy is for ACT to:

- exert more influence,
- be seen as an opinion leader in policy discussions, and
- be vied for as a substantial partner across peer audiences

The vision is also for increased member value of being part of the alliance, with members increasingly inspired and proud to help promote the ACT brand.

Therefore, in a departure from the previous strategy which focused on external communications, the 2015-2018 communications strategy holds an additional brand promise for member-driven internal[2] as well as external communications[3]. It will focus on two strategic initiatives:

> (1) *internally* growing member pride through mutual networking and collaboration to deliver added member value, and
>
> (2) *externally* creating and identifying opportunities for ACT brand exposure across media, peer organisations and international institutions, towards increased brand recognition

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Strategic Initiative 1: Members deliver increased value to one another through collaborative working relationships, building member pride and increasing member-driven brand promotion

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Strategic initiative 1 focuses the communication strategy on engaging with and enabling primary internal stakeholders, namely ACT members and the secretariat. In line with the new global strategy, this initiative enables ACT members to more consistently build the ACT brand through fuller alignment with ACT via collaborative work, recognising the added value being part of the alliance. Structurally, the decentralisation of the ACT secretariat feeds effectively into enabling the ACT secretariat to execute the communications strategy through encouraging smooth and consistent member collaboration within and across regions. This includes collaboration across emergency response work, advocacy and development projects and consultation on key alliance-wide issues to contribute to trust-building and an increased sense of pride in the alliance. The strategy reaps *external* rewards from this *internal* strategic initiative through increased external ACT branding by members. Therefore Strategic Initiative 1 focuses on four areas:

i. Online platforms that enable member collaboration for sharing of resources, advice and expertise

Increased internal member collaboration will generate increased high quality communication material for use in external brand visibility. The strategy leverages ACT members' capacity to share with, and assist, one another across the alliance and the decentralisation of the secretariat to facilitate the sharing of information.

The secretariat will:

- Ensure a good flow of information and consultation from the Governance and the Secretariat with the membership on key governance and alliance-wide issues
- Develop and maintain a new network enhancing website that enables direct member interaction
- Facilitate private online spaces using existing online and social media tools to enable and facilitate group engagement and collaboration

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[2] For the purposes of the 2015-2018 communications strategy 'internal' refers to audiences within the entire alliance membership, and the secretariat. It is broader than just the secretariat.
[3] For the purposes of the 2015-2018 communications strategy 'external' refers to audiences outside of the entire alliance membership.

- Maintain an enhanced image library, broadened to include more forms of communication including a material bank providing members with easy access to ACT-branded external communication tools and materials
- Redraft the ACT cobranding guidelines to enable ease of use

Members will:

- Actively engage in online sharing and discussion platforms
- Share relevant content through online platforms with the alliance

Forums will:

- Collaborate using platforms created to share resources, expertise and actively work together
- Make use of ACT branded material provided in the material bank to cobrand and build awareness of the alliance
- Actively engage in online sharing and discussion platforms
- Share relevant content through online platforms with the alliance

Advisory groups will:

- Actively engage in online sharing and discussion platforms
- Share relevant content through online platforms with the alliance
- Jointly moderate relevant online engagement platforms to facilitate member engagement and collaboration

Communications, Media and Brand Advisory Group will:

- Actively engage in online sharing and discussion platforms
- Share relevant content through online platforms with the alliance
- Jointly moderate relevant online engagement platforms to facilitate member engagement and collaboration

Communities of practice will:

- Develop research, best practice guidelines and training tools that can be used across the alliance and externally publicised
- Actively engage in online sharing and discussion platforms
- Share relevant content through online platforms with the alliance
- Jointly moderate relevant online engagement platforms to facilitate member engagement and collaboration

ii. Improved emergency communications response to more effectively support one another's fundraising and donor relations

Alliance-wide emergency communications work is characterised by lack of speed, lack of visibility materials, lack of communications people on the ground and resulting lack of media visibility for the ACT response, all of which negatively impacts on the alliance's ability to effectively fundraise. Therefore, in line with the re-evaluation of the ACT response to emergencies, the communications strategy will improve the communications response to emergencies.

The secretariat will:

- Improve access to communications personnel on the ground, including integration of communication officers in ACT's regional offices, speeding up delivery of materials to assist fundraising efforts
- Develop a pool of expert voices alliance-wide as ACT media spokespeople
- Facilitate encouragement of member collaboration in emergencies
- Increase access to ACT branded material
- Find media opportunities for ACT response work on the ground

Members will:

- Actively take part in the online emergency communications resource sharing groups and contribute emergency communication materials
- Integrate communications personnel and/or a communications function within ACT forums
- Incorporate communications into Emergency Preparedness Response Plans
- Actively promote 'ACT Alliance branded' media visibility for the ACT response

Forums will:

- Develop humanitarian and advocacy messaging in collaboration with local members

Advisory groups will:

- Develop advocacy messaging to bring national contexts into the broader global agendas

Communications, Media and Brand Advisory Group will:

- Jointly moderate the ACT Communicators private Facebook Group to encourage continued member engagement and collaboration around emergencies

Communities of practice will:

- Assist in the training of spokespeople across the alliance on key areas of the ACT emergency response
- Disseminate knowledge about best practices and background information relating to specific humanitarian issues relevant to areas of work

iii.   Develop communication-related capacity building tools that address the varying needs of members towards increased quality and availability of material

The potential of ACT Alliance to deliver quality visibility material across a range of humanitarian and development initiatives is clear, given its significant presence across the globe. However, resources and capabilities across the membership vary greatly, diluting that potential. The communications strategy seeks to encourage a sustainable solution to overcome existing weaknesses. Therefore, leveraging the alliance's strengths in its member resources, the strategy will facilitating connectivity on local, regional and global levels to maximise the use of existing and/or develop tailored communication training resources across the membership, and encourage skills training among members to build the capacity not only of communicators but of all staff carrying out field visits.

The secretariat will:

- Sourced existing member capacity building resources and facilitate sharing of these
- Develop, in conjunction with members, new capacity building and training resources where needs require
- Carry out trainings and facilitate the increased use of capacity building resources

Members will:

- Identify resources and expertise within organisations to carry out trainings, such as media training for spokespeople, technical skills training (for example photography, film, social media); software training
- Together with the secretariat develop new, and facilitate the sharing of existing training toolkits and capacity building resources
- Extend organisational communication trainings to ACT members
- Identify and share information of spokespeople in emergencies
- Share stories, news and communications materials with the entire alliance
- Develop advocacy messages in protracted emergencies

Forums will:

- Identify needs for communications capacity building
- Identify resources and expertise within forums to carry out trainings, such as media training for spokespeople, technical skills training (for example photography, film, social media); software training
- Identify spokespeople in emergencies and ensure a communications presence in meetings
- Incorporate communications functions into Emergency Response Preparedness Plans
- Develop advocacy messages in protracted emergencies

Advisory groups will:

- Identify needs for communications capacity building
- Develop advocacy messages in protracted emergencies

Communications, Media and Brand Advisory Group will:

- Monitor, identify and facilitate the availability and/or creation of communications capacity building tools
- Facilitate the moderation of the private Facebook ACT Communicators group towards continued member collaboration and engagement around emergencies

Communities of Practice will:

- Identify needs for communications capacity building

iv.   Increased media visibility for projects aligned with ACT's key messages

A key message that lends credibility and legitimacy to the alliance is that the majority of ACT members live and work in the communities they serve. Therefore members are best placed to source and deliver news of interest to the media of the people whose lives are affected by ACT's

humanitarian, development and advocacy work. The communications strategy maximises on this wealth of information by focusing on bringing the voices from the ground into the global arena through the media, publicising members' work and grows ACT's reputation with the media as a reliable source.

The secretariat will:

- Identify media opportunities for member advocacy and projects
- Facilitate the coordination of media training opportunities among members
- Promote member projects on social media to attract traditional media attention

Members will:

- Identify and share newsworthy stories and communication materials with the alliance through the ACT website and with the secretariat
- Identify projects that pose good media opportunities and facilitate media interviews
- Enhance one another's communications capacities through shared trainings

Forums will:

- Identify and share newsworthy stories and communication materials with the alliance through the ACT website and with the secretariat
- Identify projects that pose good media opportunities and facilitate media interviews
- Enhance one another's communications capacities through shared trainings

Advisory groups will:

- Source media opportunities for advisory group initiatives
- Develop messaging for specific media initiatives

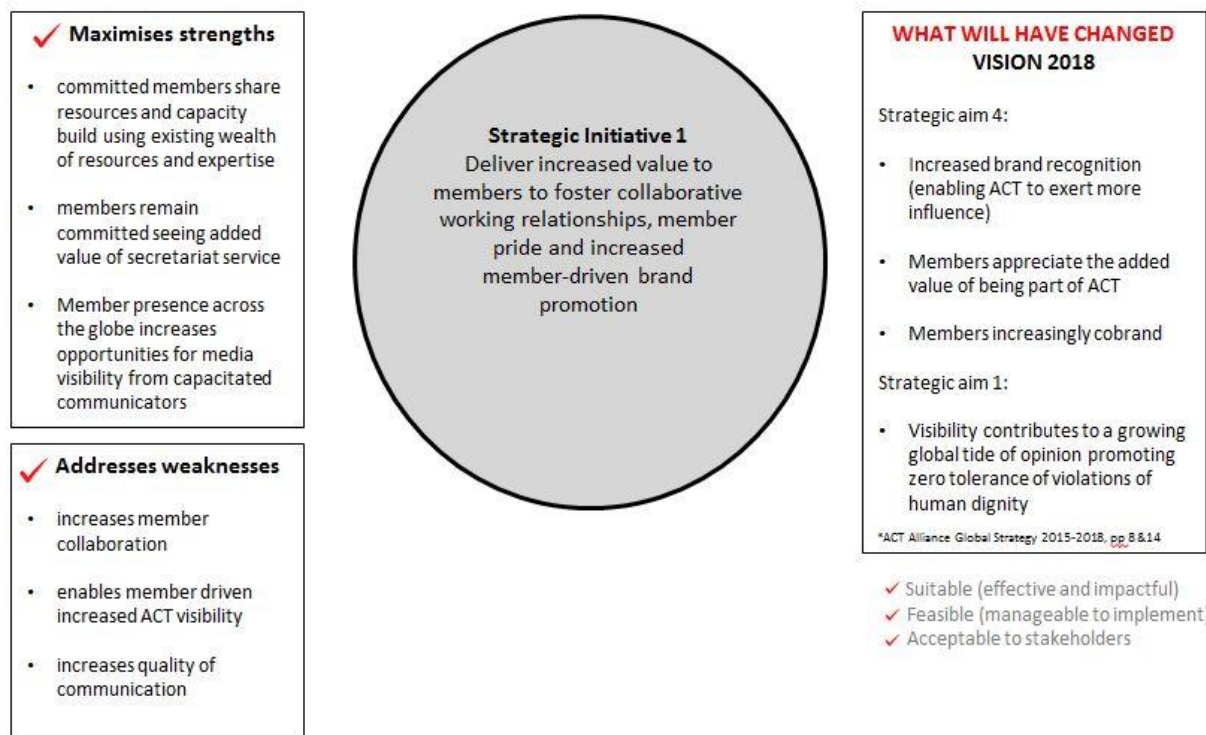*Communications, Media and Brand Advisory Group will:*

- Identify and provide communications skills trainings where possible
- Reflect on and evaluate the effectiveness of Strategic Initiative 1 as implementation progresses

Communities of Practice will:

- Source media opportunities for initiatives, events and World Days relevant to areas of work
- Develop messaging for specific media initiatives

How Strategic Initiative 1 links with the global strategic plan

✓ **Maximises strengths**

- committed members share resources and capacity build using existing wealth of resources and expertise

- members remain committed seeing added value of secretariat service

- Member presence across the globe increases opportunities for media visibility from capacitated communicators

✓ **Addresses weaknesses**

- increases member collaboration

- enables member driven increased ACT visibility

- increases quality of communication

Strategic Initiative 1
Deliver increased value to members to foster collaborative working relationships, member pride and increased member-driven brand promotion

**WHAT WILL HAVE CHANGED
VISION 2018**

Strategic aim 4:

- Increased brand recognition (enabling ACT to exert more influence)

- Members appreciate the added value of being part of ACT

- Members increasingly cobrand

Strategic aim 1:

- Visibility contributes to a growing global tide of opinion promoting zero tolerance of violations of human dignity

*ACT Alliance Global Strategy 2015-2018, pp.8 &14

✓ Suitable (effective and impactful)
✓ Feasible (manageable to implement)
✓ Acceptable to stakeholders

Through focus on these four areas within Strategic Initiative 1, the communications strategy aims to deliver increased member-driven value, collaborative working relationships and greater member pride, and as a result increased member-driven brand promotion.

> **Strategic Initiative 2:** Amplify key advocacy messages to grow ACT's reputation as an opinion leader, ensuring the alliance obtains and maintains its seat as a key player among peer and inter-governmental institutions

Strategic initiative 2 focuses the communications strategy engagement as ACT Alliance externally with the media to build the reputation of ACT's advocacy work among members, donors, peer and international organisations, and recipients of ACT projects at grassroots level. In line with the new global strategy, this external focus sees the ACT brand at the forefront as an opinion leader, identified by peers, international organisations and authorities as a key collaborator in relation to the alliance's primary advocacy areas of work. The strategy reaps the rewards of Strategic Initiative 1 in building its source credibility with the media, to enable it to be proactive in creating news and visibility on advocacy issues, raising brand visibility. Strategic Initiative 2 focuses on two areas:

i. **Reputation growth as a thought leader in the press and among key stakeholders, with the ability to influence change in relation to key advocacy areas**

The media is a tool for garnering public visibility for issues, with the aim of influencing and mobilising decision-makers towards social impact or change. The greater the brand recognition, the more legitimacy is given to the issue and its profile is raised. In our media dominated world, organisations that do not feature struggle in terms of influence and risk existing only on the fringes of relevance – a challenging place from which to drive change. Leveraging ACT's legitimacy in its established grassroots base, the communications strategy will build the alliance's reputation as a credible thought leader and strengthen its ability to influence change through media visibility in the areas of climate change, humanitarian and development policy advocacy.

The secretariat will:

- Build and maintain relationships with key media
- Profile the General Secretary and Director as advocacy opinion leaders
- Profile selected member technical experts on climate and humanitarian advocacy, development policy advocacy and on advocacy messaging as ACT spokespeople
- Source appropriate media opportunities for ACT spokespeople to reach key target audiences
- Seek opportunities to create news and visibility opportunities with media across traditional and social media channels
- Provide communications oversight over external visibility and communication cobranded materials
- Support member grassroots mobilisation efforts through traditional and online media
- Explore external partnerships for reputation building collaboration

Members will:

- Identify ACT spokespeople
- Facilitate media training opportunities for identified ACT spokespeople
- Undertake advocacy work co-promoting the ACT brand where appropriate
- Mobilise at grassroots level to support global ACT campaign work and grow brand recognition through creating media opportunities for ACT branded news and visibility
- Identify communications-specific skill sharing opportunities

Forums will:

- Identify ACT spokespeople
- Create and implement ACT branded news and visibility plans for opportunities with media across traditional and social media channels
- Identify communications-specific skill sharing opportunities to support visibility initiatives

Advisory groups will:

- Identify communications-specific skill sharing opportunities to support visibility initiatives
- Identify key potential visibility events or moments

Communications, Media and Brand Advisory Group will:

- Identify communications-specific skill sharing opportunities to support visibility initiatives

Communities of Practice will:

- Produce research content to support external communications
- Identify key potential visibility events or moments

ii.   Targeted social media strategies to support relation-building with key audiences and expand influence

Social media is a quick way of supporting lobby and advocacy efforts as it enables access and the potential to build relations with specific individuals who may be otherwise relatively inaccessible. The communications strategy will facilitate the use of selected social media tools to open dialogue and build ACT's relations with key stakeholders, including journalists, peer and international organisation individuals and policy makers.

The secretariat will:

- Develop and oversee the social media strategy of the General Secretary
- Develop and oversee the ACT social media strategy
- Identify and magnify key social media influencers across the alliance

Members will:

- Identify opportunities for broadening capacity building initiatives to engage more members within the alliance
- Interlink during campaigns and share social media campaign material

Forums will:

- Where appropriate, coordinate on social media campaigns

Advisory groups will:

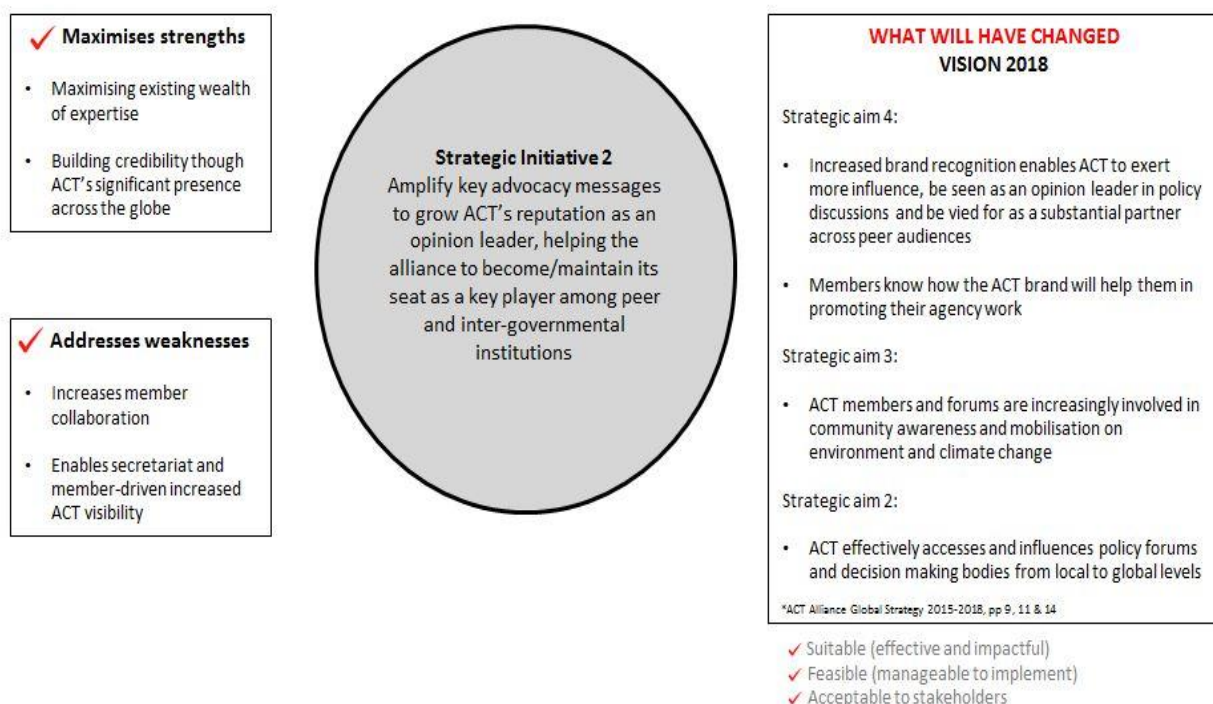- Provide key messaging and research relating to social media campaigns

Communications, Media and Brand Advisory Group will:

- Advise on the social media strategy in the face of a rapidly changing world
- Actively amplify ACT social media messages through engaging, sharing, retweeting and so forth

Communities of Practice will:

- Provide key messaging and research relating to social media campaigns

How Strategic Initiative 2 links with the global strategic plan

✓ **Maximises strengths**

- Maximising existing wealth of expertise
- Building credibility though ACT's significant presence across the globe

✓ **Addresses weaknesses**

- Increases member collaboration
- Enables secretariat and member-driven increased ACT visibility

Strategic Initiative 2
Amplify key advocacy messages to grow ACT's reputation as an opinion leader, helping the alliance to become/maintain its seat as a key player among peer and inter-governmental institutions

WHAT WILL HAVE CHANGED
VISION 2018

Strategic aim 4:

- Increased brand recognition enables ACT to exert more influence, be seen as an opinion leader in policy discussions and be vied for as a substantial partner across peer audiences
- Members know how the ACT brand will help them in promoting their agency work

Strategic aim 3:

- ACT members and forums are increasingly involved in community awareness and mobilisation on environment and climate change

Strategic aim 2:

- ACT effectively accesses and influences policy forums and decision making bodies from local to global levels

*ACT Alliance Global Strategy 2015-2018, pp 9, 11 & 14

✓ Suitable (effective and impactful)
✓ Feasible (manageable to implement)
✓ Acceptable to stakeholders

Through focus on these two areas within Strategic Initiative 2, the communications strategy aims to amplify key advocacy messages, growing ACT's reputation as an opinion leader, and enabling it to obtain/maintain its seat as a key player among peer and inter-governmental institutions.

What will have changed in 2018

ACT Alliance's increased brand recognition will enable it to exert more influence, be seen as an opinion leader in policy discussions and be vied for as a substantial partner across peer audiences. In addition, members will be increasingly proud to be part of ACT Alliance, value the network, and actively promote increased brand recognition.[4]

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[4] An overview of the 2015-2018 communication implementation timeframes of the strategy priorities over the 2015-2018 strategic period is depicted on the following page.