



UNCCD United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

SHORT GUIDE FOR CHAIRS

Introduction

This guideline may be useful for participants, who may be selected as chairmen in a UNCCD meeting for the first time.

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I. About the UNCCD

Desertification, along with climate change and the loss of biodiversity, was identified as the greatest challenges to sustainable development during the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Established in 1994, UNCCD is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management. The Convention addresses specifically the arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, known as the dry lands, where some of the most vulnerable ecosystems and peoples can be found. In the 10-Year Strategy of the UNCCD (2008-2018) that was adopted in 2007, Parties to the Convention further specified their goals: "to forge a global partnership to reverse and prevent desertification/land degradation and to mitigate the effects of drought in affected areas in order to support poverty reduction and environmental sustainability".



1.1. Institutional structure

The standard institutional arrangements for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) intergovernmental process are established as follows:

1. The Conference of the Parties (COP) – the supreme decision-making body

Within its mandate, the COP takes the necessary decisions to promote effective implementation of the Convention. In particular, it is responsible for regularly reviewing the implementation of the Convention and the functioning of its institutional arrangements. One of the main functions of the COP is to review reports submitted by the Parties detailing how they are carrying out their commitments; the COP makes recommendations on the basis of these reports. It also has the power to make amendments to the Convention or to adopt new annexes, such as additional regional implementation annexes. In this way, the COP can guide the Convention as global circumstances and national needs change. Usually, to assist the COP, the Convention can provide subsidiary bodies and allows the COP to establish additional ones if necessary.

2. The Subsidiary Bodies

Two subsidiary bodies of the COP are established: The Committee of Science and Technology (CST) and the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC).

- The **CST** provides the COP with information and advice on scientific and technological matters relating to combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought. The CST meets in conjunction with the ordinary sessions of the COP. It is meant to be multidisciplinary, open to the participation of all Parties, and composed of government representatives competent in the relevant fields of expertise.
- The **CRIC** assists the COP in the review of the implementation of the Convention under the authority and guidance of the COP.

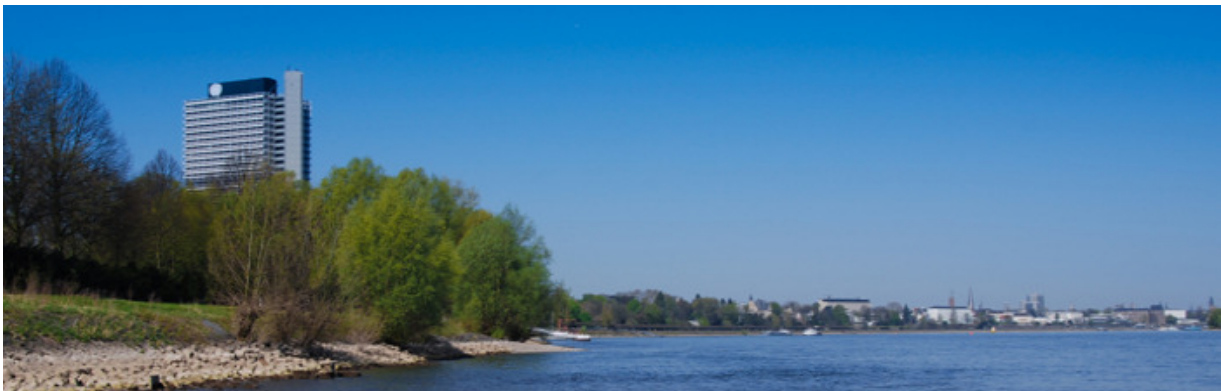
Some issues that are difficult or complex usually are referred to the Committee of the Whole (CoW), which is an ad hoc subsidiary body of the COP. The CoW has the task of recommending decisions on matters delegated to it by the COP, for adoption by the Conference.

3. The Secretariat

The secretariat, located in Bonn, Germany since January 1999, services the COP, its subsidiary bodies and their Bureaus, as established under the Convention. This includes a multitude of tasks, ranging from the preparation of substantive documentation to logistical arrangements for the sessions.

4. The Global Mechanism

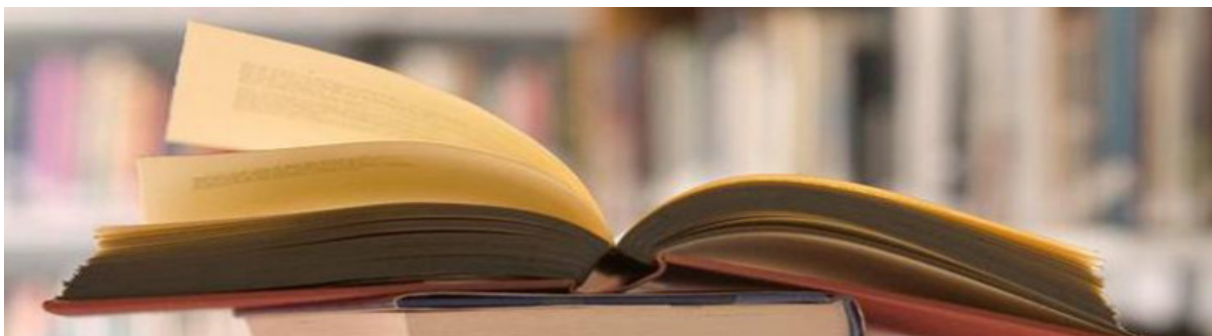
Serves the UNCCD process by promoting actions leading to the mobilization and channelling of substantial financial resources, including for the transfer of technology, on a grant basis, and/or on concessional or other terms, to affected developing country Parties, is hereby established



II. Useful documents

All the official documents of all the sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) and its subsidiary bodies, the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) and the Committee on Science and Technology (CST), are available at the UNCCD website under official documents:

<http://www.unccd.int/en/about-the-convention/official-documents/Pages/default.aspx>



2.1. COP, CST and CRIC official documents

If you have limited time, the most important documents to read usually include:

- Provisional agenda and annotations for upcoming and previous COP, CRIC or CST
- Report of the Conference of the Parties. Part one: proceedings
- Report of the Conference of the Parties. Part two: Action taken by the Conference of the Parties

2.2. Other useful documents

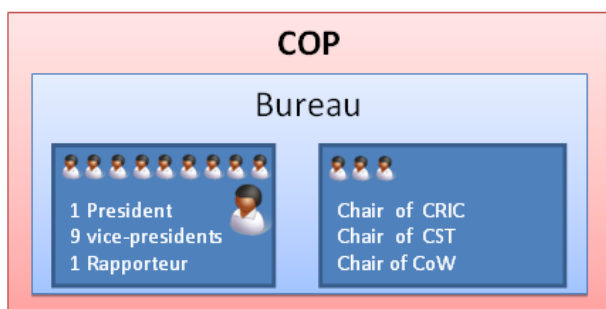
One of the key factors of negotiating is to know the people (Please see 3.3 below for more information about the competency of the Chair). The following documents provide a complete list of participants on the Conference of the Parties:

- List of science and technology correspondents
- List of participants

III. During the Meeting

3.1. The Bureaus

Usually, at the beginning of the first meeting of each ordinary session of the COP, a President and nine Vice-Presidents (one of them shall act as *Rapporteur*) are elected from among the representatives of the Parties present at the session in a manner that every geographical region shall be represented by at least two members. Together with the Chairpersons of the Committee of the Whole (CoW), the Committee of Science and Technology (CST) and the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), they make up the **Bureau of the COP**.



Each of these subsidiary bodies established by the COP elect a Bureau, conformed by one chairperson and four vice-chairpersons. In each case, one of the Vice-Chairpersons shall act as *Rapporteur*.



The COP is the only body that can make final and binding decisions.

As mentioned in the chapter 1.1 of this guide, an *ad hoc* subsidiary body called the CoW is established at the plenary meeting of the COP. It is open to the participation of all delegations. Its Chairperson has the authority to delegate work, as appropriate, to drafting groups and acts as ex-officio member of the COP Bureau.



3.2. Roles of Chair and Facilitators



The roles of the Chairmen and the facilitators usually include:

- Opening and closing meeting;
- Call for the adoption of the agenda and organization of work;
- Calling for short breaks as required;
- Introducing the draft texts to be negotiated;
- Seeking agreement with delegates on a schedule for negotiation of the draft texts;
- Recognizing and giving the floor to delegates;
- Determining whether a matter is substantive or procedural in nature and calling a speaker to order when remarks are irrelevant;
- Ruling on points of order;
- Reporting back to the Chair of the body, or to the plenary session of the body if so requested by the Chair, on the status and outcome of the consultations.

A skilful Chair or facilitator is often a **key factor in a timely and successful conclusion of a negotiation**. He/she can, for example, encourage representatives to focus on key issues, ask representatives to clarify complex positions, and probe in a balanced and objective way positions for opportunities and compromises.

Some key characteristics of an effective Chair or facilitator include being:

- Impartial/objective/fair/unbiased;
- Clear;
- Consistent;
- A good listener;
- Pragmatically diplomatic and polite;
- Conscious of limitations, such as time;
- A good communicator with delegates, the Secretariat and other interested Parties.

3.3. Competency of the Chair



It is a common practice in the UNCCD process for decisions and resolutions to be adopted by consensus, without calling for a vote in plenary sessions.

...what happens when there is no consensus?

Even though it is expected that the texts are agreed upon through consensus, the negotiations sometimes fail in achieving this.

In such cases, the facilitator usually:

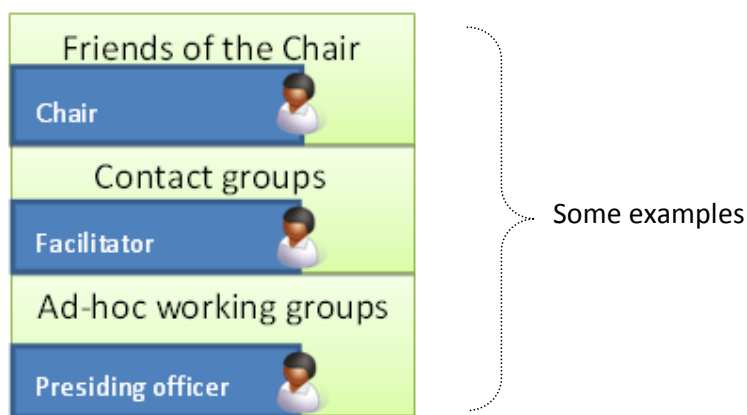
- Reports to the Chair of the body that established the contact group who may decide to conduct further consultations in smaller group, or...
- Conduct bilateral consultations with interested delegations, until a compromise is reached.

The same procedures apply to the permanent subsidiary bodies of the COP, the CST and the CRIC, which would establish one or more contact groups to address complex matters in their respective agendas.

3.4. Procedures in Negotiating Forums

Negotiations on key issues rarely take place in plenary meetings. **These are usually conducted in other forums, including contact groups, informal consultations and “Friends of the Chair” meetings.** These groups are set-up by the respective Presidents or Chairpersons of the COP/CRIC/CST/COW on the basis of the agenda requirement. For the duration of the session the Presiding officers of these forums may be invited to specific sessions of the Bureaus.

Similarly, the subsidiary bodies usually allocate specific agenda items to contact groups or informal consultations, or request the chairpersons of the subsidiary bodies to consult further with Parties. The President of the COP and the chairpersons of the subsidiary bodies inform the meeting of the presiding officers selected to chair the various contact groups and informal consultations.



3.2.1. Functions of the Presiding Officer

A cardinal principle in the exercise of the powers conferred on the presiding officer is the obligation of impartiality.

The general powers of the presiding officer include:

- Declare the opening and closing of the session;
- Preside at the meetings of the session;
- Ensure the observance of the rules of procedure;
- Accord the right to speak;
- Seeking consensus;
- Put questions to the vote where there is no consensus;
- Announce decisions;
- Rule on points of order;
- Control the proceedings and maintain order.

Usually, the presiding officer proposes to the meeting:

- The closure of the list of speakers;
- A limitation of the time to be allowed to speakers;
- The number of times a representative may speak on a question;
- The adjournment or the closure of debate;
- The suspension or adjournment of a meeting.

During the last plenary meetings, the presiding officers report on the outcome of their work in the contact groups and informal consultations, and on whether the negotiations were completed successfully. The presiding officer will also inform the President or Chairpersons of the subsidiary bodies of any documents containing decisions or conclusions forwarded for consideration and adoption by the COP.

3.2.1. Guidelines for facilitators of informal consultations and contact group negotiations at sessions of the COP and of its subsidiary bodies

Texts, such as “draft for consultations” or “preliminary draft decisions” are usually introduced in contact groups and are subject to negotiations. The objective of the contact group is that at the end of its deliberations, the text will have been agreed upon and may be brought back to the plenary for formal adoption by all parties.

Consultations among Parties at sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) may result in several different outcomes – a Chair’s summary, resolutions, conclusions, recommendations or formal decisions.

The outcomes expected from the negotiating sessions are:

- **A Chair’s summary**, or a statement by the Chair, usually results when certain issues cannot be resolved, and remain on the table for negotiation.
- Resolutions can take the form of **declarations, conclusions and recommendations**. They do not create rights or obligations, but they do reflect a consensus or majority opinion.
- **Recommendations** usually represent the outcomes of subsidiary body negotiations and are adopted by consensus.
- **Decisions** are legally binding agreements, entered into by the Parties that, in the UNCCD process, can only be taken by the COP as the main governing body of the Convention.
- **Draft conclusions**, that shall be considered by all parties for final adoption.

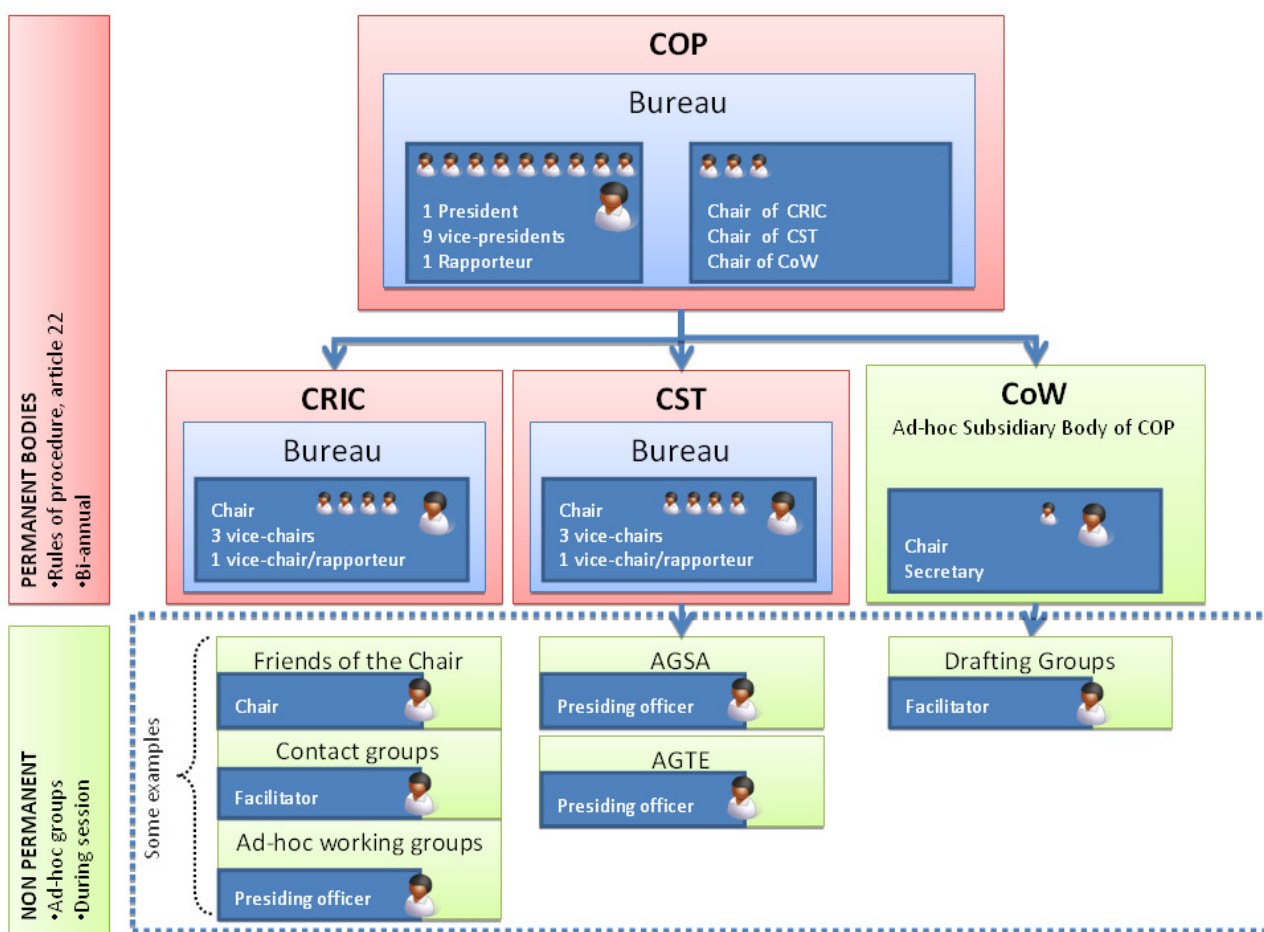
All conclusion, recommendations, declarations and draft decisions must be finally considered by and receive the assent of the COP.

IV. Structure of UNCCD bodies and meetings

This chapter provides a graphical overview related to the structure of bodies of the UNCCD, its members, relevant COP decisions and structure of a meeting.

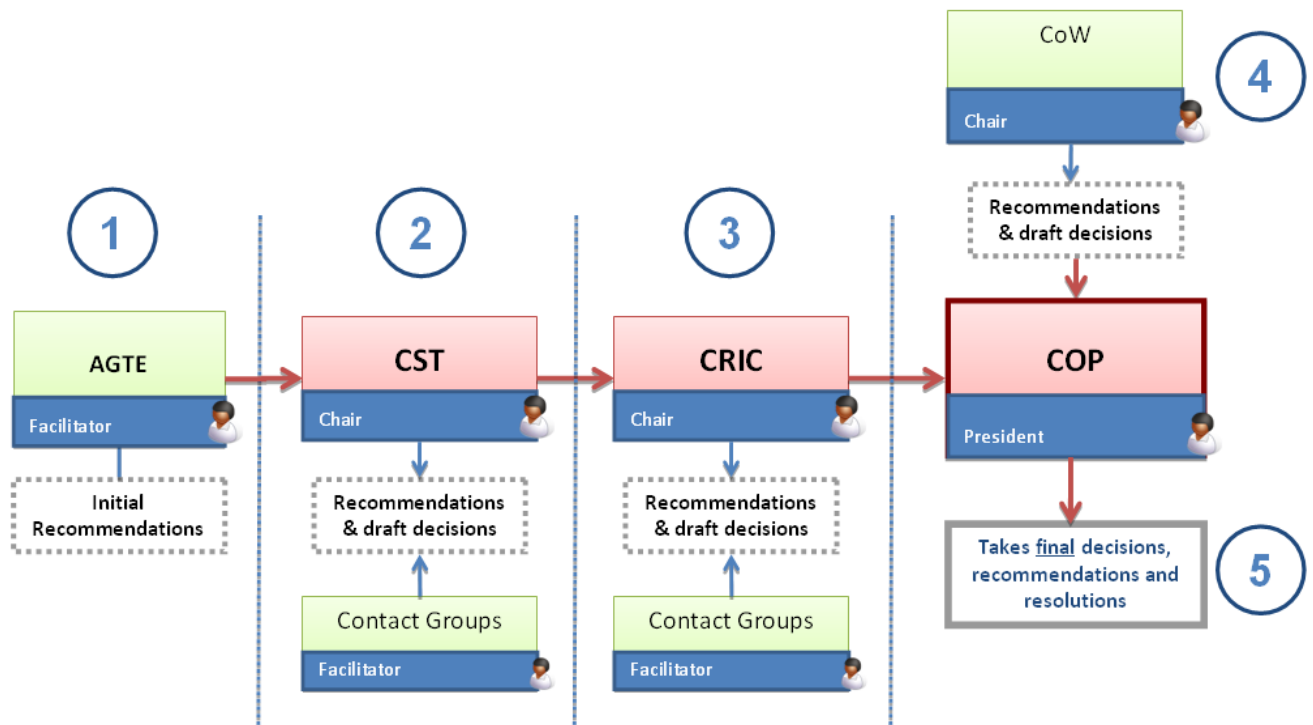
4.1. Structure of bodies of the UNCCD

The following structure shows the relation between the “permanent bodies” (COP and Subsidiary Bodies) and the “temporary groups” (usually ad hoc Contact Groups, Informal Consultation or Friends of the Chair), as well as the structure of its members.

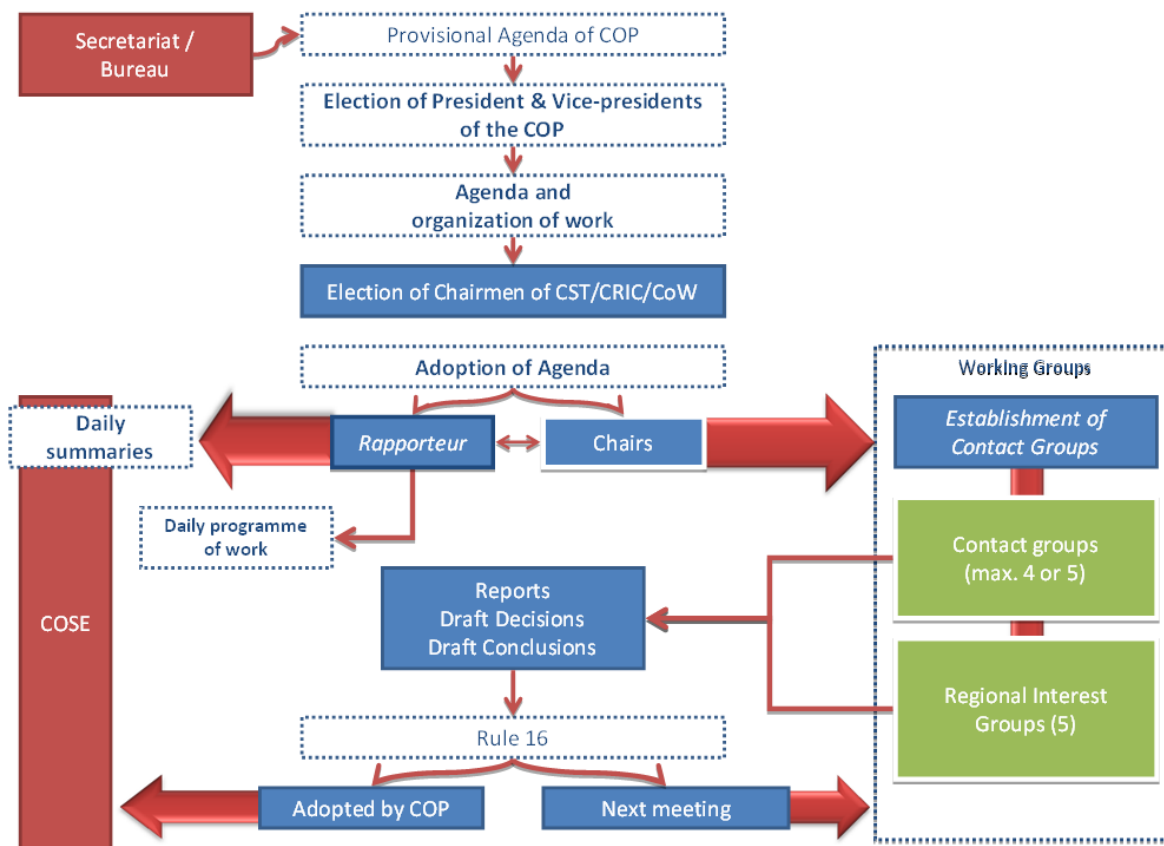


4.2. Relevant COP decisions

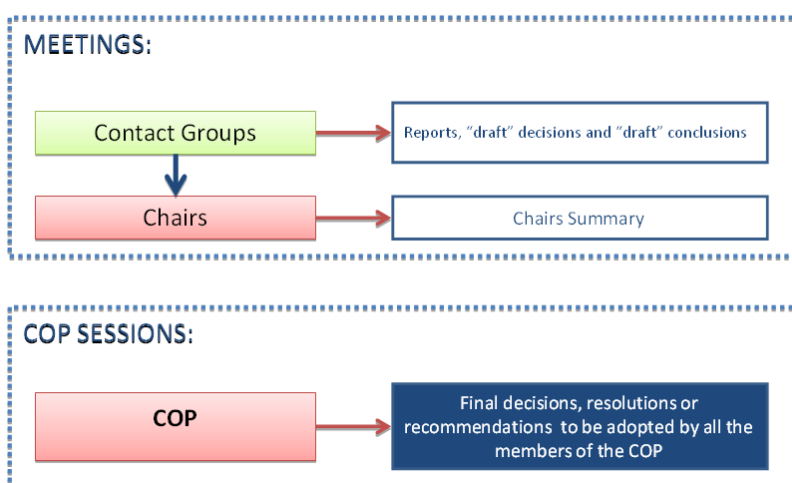
The COP within its mandate takes the decisions necessary to promote effective implementation of the Convention. In particular, it is responsible for regularly reviewing the implementation of the Convention and the functioning of its institutional arrangements. The following decision structure helps to understand the relevant decisions taken during the COP.



4.3. Structure of a COP session

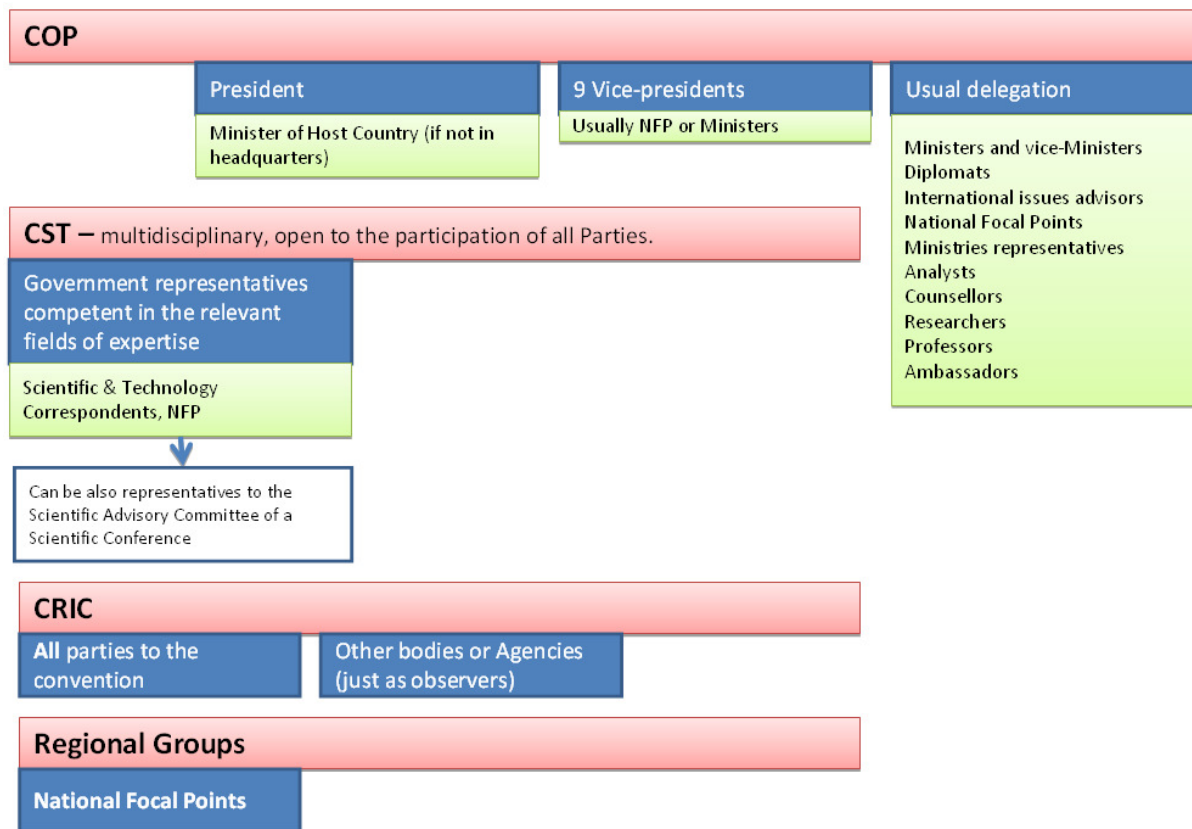


4.3. Possible outcomes of a session



4.4. Who are the members?

Knowing the people is a key factor to successfully conclude a negotiation. The following structure shows the type of members included on each group.



V. Mini Legal Glossary

- **Conference of the Parties (COP)** - The governing body and supreme decision-making authority for the Parties to the Convention. The first session of the COP to the UNCCD took place in Rome, Italy, on 29 September - 10 October 1997; there have been nine other regular COPs.
- **Ad hoc panel** - The Conference of the Parties may appoint ad hoc panels whose function is to provide advice and information on specific issues. Its members depend on the nature of the issue being examined. These panels must generally however confirm to the basic principle of equitable geographical representation.
- **Bureau** - Structure responsible for directing the work of the COP. Its members are delegates elected by each of the five regional groups. The Bureau is composed of the President, 9 Vice Presidents, and the Chairs of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention, the Committee on Science and Technology and the Committee of the Whole (this latter Chair only participates for the life of the COP during the COP session).
- **Agenda** - A programme of work that the Conference of the Parties adopts and uses to guide its work; the annotated agenda contains a more detailed explanation of each agenda item.
- **Agenda Item** - Specific issue listed in the Agenda to be addressed by a given meeting.
- **Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC)** - Established by COP 5 in 2001 as a subsidiary body, it reviews and analyzes national reports submitted to the COP that describe the status of the Convention's implementation by Parties and observers with a view to improve the coherence, impact and effectiveness of policies and programmes. It meets annually since 2002. The CRIC elects its own Bureau.
- **Committee on Science and Technology (CST)** - A subsidiary body of the Convention whose function is to advise the Conference of the Parties on scientific and technical matters regarding the combat of desertification, land degradation and drought. It elects its own Bureau.
- **Committee of the Whole** - A working group set up by the Conference of the Parties to facilitate discussions on specific issues. It is open to all delegates, hence its name. When the Committee finishes its work it turns the resulting texts over to the COP to finalise and adopt them in the plenary.

- **Consensus** - An agreement on a specific issue can be adopted by consensus rather than by vote when there are no stated objections from delegations.
- **Decision** - A formal agreement adopted at the plenary.
- **Focal Point** – The officially designated contact of a country Party to maintain all official communication between that country and the Convention’s institutions.
- **Headquarters** – Since 1999, the headquarters of the Permanent Secretariat of the UNCCD is in Bonn, Germany.
- **Meetings and sessions** - Each session of the COP is divided into a number of meetings. Each meeting is scheduled from 10:00 a.m. to 01:00 p.m. and from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Sessions normally last 10 working days.
- **Parties** – States/Nations that have signed and ratified the Convention.
- **Plenary** - An open meeting of the entire Conference of the Parties where all formal decisions are taken.
- **President** - The delegates at each regular session of the COP formally elect the President of the COP. This is usually the Chief Representative of the host country for that Session.
- **Regional Annexes** - The Convention contains five Regional Annexes on the implementation of the treaty in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Northern Mediterranean, and Central and Eastern Europe.
- **Regional groups** - In the UNCCD context, five regional groups in accordance with the five regional Annexes. They meet in closed sessions to discuss issues of common interest to the region. They also nominate Bureau members and other officials.
- **Session** - Any ordinary or extraordinary meeting of the COP convened in accordance with article 22 of the Convention.