E-Learning: The UNCCD Process
Introduction

Desertification is a major economic, social and environmental problem of concern to many countries in all regions of the world. It is a type of land degradation where dry land regions become increasingly arid, typically losing bodies of water as well as vegetation and wildlife. One of the main causes of development of desert-like conditions is human disturbance such as deforestation, overgrazing or poorly managed agriculture.


The objective of UNCCD is to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought in countries experiencing serious drought particularly in Africa. It is supported by international cooperation and partnership arrangements. Some of the general approaches used to facilitate its implementation include:

- Adopting an integrated approach to address the physical, biological and socio-economic aspects of desertification and drought.
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- Integrating strategies for poverty eradication
- Promoting cooperation among affected country Parties in the field of environmental protection and conservation of land and water resources.

This section provides information about the main processes within the UNCCD and their role in the effective implementation of the Convention. It will first discuss the decision making process of the UNCCD, the National Action Programmes (NAPs), the reporting process and other UNCCD processes as we move beyond the 2015.

The decision making process of UNCCD

The Conference of the Parties (COP) meets biennially to review the progress of implementation of the Convention and to discuss emerging issues that needs to be addressed through the UNCCD process. It is the supreme body of the Convention and has the power to make all decisions concerning the UNCCD process. It also has the authority to establish subsidiary bodies to help with its work.

In between the session of the COP its Bureau takes on the responsibility of managing the UNCCD process in general. This Bureau is elected at the beginning of the first meeting of each ordinary session and is standardly comprised of a President and nine Vice-Presidents one of which act as Rapporteur of the Bureau. The members of the Bureau are elected from among the representatives of the Parties present at that session in a manner that each geographical region i.e. from the five Annexes of the Convention shall be represented by at least two members.

This Bureau is especially responsible for overseeing the organization of the biennial meetings of the COP. The members of the Bureau serve for the biennium i.e. until the next session of the COP when a new Bureau is elected. As regards the President, his/her role includes declaring the opening and closing of the session; presiding at the meetings of the session; and ensuring the observance of the rules. The President has complete control of the proceedings as regard the maintenance of order and proper conduct.

The Bureau is responsible inter alia for overseeing the organization of sessions of the COP. It plays an important role in ensuring the follow-up of the decisions taken by the COP and carries
out other tasks as mandated by the COP. In short it is the body that oversees the entire UNCCD process between sessions of the COP.

Extraordinary sessions of the COP may be organized at such times as may be decided either by the Conference of the Parties in ordinary session or at the written request of any Party, as outlined in paragraph 5 of Article 22 of the UNCCD.

The decision making process of UNCCD involves all of its institutional levels including the ad hoc working groups that may be set up to deal with drafting and negotiating these decisions. For example the process of decision making as regards scientific and technical or technological issues may start with the initial recommendations, produced by the Advisory Group of Technical Experts (AGTE). These are then sent to the CST which reviews the recommendations and may maintain them as recommendations or prepare them as draft decisions. The CST passes on the recommendations and/or draft decisions to CRIC for its review, after which they are sent on to the COP for final consideration. There are usually contact groups which provide support to CST and CRIC in carrying out this work.

A simple diagram of the UNCCD decision making process is shown below.
Negotiations on key issues are usually conducted in contact groups, ad-hoc working groups or “friends of the Chair” meetings. These groups are set-up on agreement of Parties by the respective Presidents or Chairpersons of the COP / CST / CRIC / CoW to address particular issue(s) on the agenda of these bodies. In the case of the CoW it issues are determined by the COP when it is set up. The President of the COP and the Chairpersons of the subsidiary bodies inform their respective bodies of the presiding officers selected to chair/facilitate the various contact groups and informal consultations. The outcomes expected from the negotiations conducted in these contact groups, ad-hoc working groups or friends of the Chair meetings could be:

- The Chair’s summary
- Draft resolutions, recommendations, declarations, conclusions and decisions.

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

- The Chair of the body that established the contact group who may decide that there is need for further consultations, or
- Conduct bilateral consultations with interested delegations, until a compromise is reached.

It must be noted that most decisions taken by the COP within the UNCCD process are by consensus, that is to say without the matter being formally put to the vote once no Party objects to the decision being taken. Reaching agreement by consensus is therefore the practice in the UNCCD process.

**Action programmes process**

Article 9 of the Convention stipulate that Action Programmes are the main instrument for implementation of the Convention. They are designed from the bottom up and consider both ecological and societal factors. The National Action Programmes together with the Sub-regional Action Programmes (SRAPs) and the Regional Action Programmes (RAPs) are to ensure effective implementation which address, in a concerted manner, poverty reduction and
vulnerability to climate change in developing countries, as well as the specific societal factors and conditions that make poor people vulnerable. This leads to identification of the factors contributing to desertification, practical measures necessary to combat it, and measures to mitigate the effects of drought, thereby contributing inter alia to adaptation efforts.

The overall strategy of Action Programmes shall emphasize integrated local development programmes for affected areas, based on a participatory approach and on integration of strategies for poverty eradication into efforts to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought. The programmes shall aim at strengthening the capacity of local authorities and ensuring the active involvement of local populations, communities and groups, with emphasis on education and training, mobilization of non-governmental organizations with proven expertise and strengthening of decentralized governmental structures.

Action Programmes shall, as appropriate, include the following general features:

a. The use, in developing and implementing national action programmes, of past experiences in combating desertification and/or mitigating the effects of drought, taking into account social, economic and ecological conditions;

b. The identification of factors contributing to desertification and/or drought and the resources and capacities available and required, and the setting up of appropriate policies and institutional and other responses and measures necessary to combat those phenomena and/or mitigate their effects; and

c. The increase in participation of local populations and communities, including women, farmers and pastoralists, and delegation to them of more responsibility for management

In decision 3/COP.8, affected country parties are urged "…to align their action programmes and other relevant implementation activities relating to the Convention with the Strategy by, inter alia, addressing the outcomes under the five operational objectives (paragraph 5)”. Since the adoption of the 10 year Strategy in 2007, many affected countries have started the process of national action programmes, in addition the alignment process of the sub-regional and regional action programmes has also been initiated.
The Conference of the Parties adopted (Decision 3/COP.8), the ten-year strategic plan and framework for the UNCCD. The ten-year plan sets out strategic and operational objectives on issues of desertification, land degradation and drought. The strategic objectives are; to improve the living conditions of affected populations, to improve the condition of affected ecosystems, to generate global benefits through effective implementation of the UNCCD and to mobilize resources to support implementation of the Convention. The operational objectives include awareness-raising, policy framework, science and technology and capacity-building.

The reason for the alignment of the National Action Programmes to the 10 years strategy is the need for effective implementation of the Convention and the said Strategy. This in turn could only be determined if there are specific objective to be achieved, specific actions to be taken and specific yardsticks by which these achievements are measured; hence, the importance of alignment of the Action Programmes to the Strategic.

With the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in particular SGG 15 which aims to “Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss”, At cop 12 the UNCCD Parties gave serious consideration to the role of the Convention in helping to achieve this SDG.

Particular attention was pay to the question of achieving land degradation neutrality as outline in outcome area 15.3 of this goal. Accordingly, the COP agreed to invite affected country Parties, to establish baselines and national-level voluntary land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets within their NAPs. Based on this decision the NAP is now the key policy tool countries will use to help achieve LDN.
The reporting process

According to article 26 of the Convention “each Party shall communicate to the Conference of the Parties for consideration at its ordinary sessions, through the permanent Secretariat, reports on the measures which it has taken for the implementation of the Convention.”

Based on that Article reporting is an essential part of the whole implementation process of the UNCCD. Regularly, the Parties to the UNCCD report on the measures they have taken to implement the Convention and the Ten-Year Strategy. These reports are submitted via the online reporting tool PRAIS (Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System). They include information on new projects and programmes put in place to combat desertification, financial commitments and investments, awareness raising, political initiatives and decisions on the promotion of sustainable land use. The countries are also requested to provide examples of technologies and approaches that have proven successful in promoting sustainable land use. These reports are then made available to all the Parties via a central database maintained by the Secretariat, and they form the basis on which the Parties make decisions on how to proceed with the implementing the Convention.

Up until COP 11 the reporting process was centered on reporting against the strategic and operational objectives of the 10 years strategic plan of the Convention. However, with the adoption of Decision 2/COP12., Affected country Parties are called upon to include voluntary national LDN targets in their national reports, as appropriate.

The reporting entities include parties to the Convention, regional and sub-regional reporting entities, the Secretariat, the GEF and other stakeholder organizations. The use of agreed indicators is also central to the reporting process. These indicators are provided in templates provided via the Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System (PRAIS). Reports are sent to the Secretariat which then sends them on to the CRIC (the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention). The CRIC reviews the reports and makes suggestions/recommendations to the COP as to what should be done to further facilitate the implementation of the Convention. This part of the review process is completed with the CRIC preparing a final report to be considered at it next sessional session. At this later session draft
decisions for the further consideration by the Conference of the Parties (COP) are prepared after consideration of the aforementioned final report.

**Synergies among the RIO Conventions**

Synergetic action for implementation of the three Rio conventions has been a guiding principle that has been translated in coordinated action at the local, national and global levels. The synergy approach results from the evident need to strengthen and sustainably address the current challenges posed by the intricate relationships of climate change, biological diversity loss, drought and desertification on the social, economic and environmental fronts.

There is clear convergence of objectives among the three Rio Conventions i.e. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and Convention on Biological Diversity. Parties to these conventions have repeatedly called for a firmer convergence of strategic approaches particularly at the country level. Moreover, they have also recognized the need to focus on a broader framework that targets a set of issues, among others desertification / land degradation, protection of biological diversity, climate change and socio-economic development. In order to address the intertwined issues of poverty eradication, sustainable development and environmental security, the three Rio Conventions have expressly been joining efforts to try and address these issues.

Thematically, the main crosscutting issues under the three conventions refer to scientific development, global, regional and national action, awareness and outreach, climate neutral policies and economic and trade policies of goods and services generated in drylands; these are envisaged to be addressed jointly, taking into account the respective scopes and differentiated mandates.

Some of the areas of synergies between climate change, biodiversity conservation and combating desertification included:

1. Forestry, such as reforestation programmes, avoiding deforestation and promoting sustainable forest management, sustainable land management (SLM), rural
development, other land use sectors and agricultural production; REDD+, dry forests;

2. Benefiting from mitigation action under the Kyoto Protocol. This includes community non-forest fuel-related / energy efficiency, and bio-fuels;

3. Adaptation through ecosystem approach, resilience capacities, Sustainable Land Management (SLM); and

4. Training and education, awareness raising, information and science.

Action at the national level on the design and implementation of the priorities set forth in these policy tools represent an important opportunity to establish synergy, coherent policy instruments and cost-effective ways for implementation.

The Secretariats of the Rio conventions are moving forward on practical ways and strategies for implementation of the respective decisions related (directly and indirectly) to drylands, by addressing common thematic implementation issues, according to their respective mandates and programmes of work.

**UNCCD and the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals**

Global trends such as population dynamics and the increasing demands for energy, food, and water are expected to dramatically increase pressure on the land. By 2030 – as compared to present levels – the demand for food, energy and water will increase at least by 50%, 45% and 30% respectively (High-level Panel on Global Sustainability, March 2012). Meeting those demands would require 175 million to 220 million hectares of additional cropland (McKinsey Global Institute, Nov 2011). These needs will not be met unless we preserve our land. Poverty is largely rural and land is the main, if not the sole asset of the poor. If we do not take bold action to protect, restore and manage land and soils sustainably, we will not achieve our commitments for climate change adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity conservation, and MDG targets; we will not alleviate rural poverty and hunger, ensure long-term food security or build resilience to drought and water stress.
In that regard, The UN General Assembly following upon the Rio+20 Conference (United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development), where it was “recognized the need for urgent action to reverse land degradation adopted Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) as a target of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 15. Since then the Parties to the UNCCD have agreed that it should be the lead institution/process to help them in their efforts to achieve ldn.

**Conclusion**

The main objective of this section was to outline and give a brief introduction to some of the main process within the UNCCD. The document introduced the decision making process of the UNCCD, the Action programme process, the reporting process, the synergy among the Rio Conventions and UNCCD process in the context of the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals.

**Additional reading information**

- [The text of the Convention](#)
- [National Action programs and alignment process](#)
- [The reporting process](#)
- [The Final Report of the COP 12](#)
- [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)