

NOTIFICATION OF THE UNCCD
HIGH-LEVEL POLICY DIALOGUE on the theme “Coping with Today's
Global Challenges in the Context of the Strategy of the United Nations
Convention to Combat Desertification”

Bonn, Germany, 27 May 2008

“The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification is the most powerful tool for addressing land degradation in our international arsenal. The UNCCD offers a platform for adaptation, mitigation and resilience.” (United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon)

I. BACKGROUND

1. Since the inception of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in 1994 and its coming into force in 1996, the world has changed, and not slightly. Building on the foundation laid by Parties during the first decade of the Convention, the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 8) in Madrid adopted a Ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (The Strategy). It recognizes that combating desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) is a global environmental challenge, which deserves a specific momentum and strong international mobilization.

2. Under the present scenarios of climate change and the emerging conditions of scarcity of productive natural capital such as arable land and water, The Strategy aims to rally a global coalition and expresses a call to deliver benefits for people and ecosystems at all levels. In so doing, The Strategy can assist in generating down-to-earth responses to some of the major international challenges of our time. The protection of land and soil is a necessary condition for adapting to climate change while reaching the Millennium Development Goals for stemming factors of forced migrations, for reducing the causes of conflicts and for alleviating the impact of natural disasters.

3. While the international community is testing the limits of the era of easy globalization, the multilateral system can contribute to sowing the seeds of a new paradigm that will have to pay more attention to environmental security and equality. The UNCCD, the only international treaty addressing land, is an existing instrument whose potential can now be activated to serve the necessity for collaborative innovation.

4. Pursuing the common purpose of the intergovernmental process that adopted The Strategy to maintain and enhance the commitment to, and momentum of, the Convention, the High-Level Policy Dialogue will review and advise as to how the mandate given by the Convention to the Parties, the secretariat and the Global Mechanism has been enriched by the responsibilities to be discharged under The Strategy. Guidance and views from country representatives, including on the necessary scientific assessment regarding land and soil matters shall also be conducive to an optimal preparation of the forthcoming seventh session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 7) and the ninth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 9).

II. PURPOSE OF THE HIGH-LEVEL POLICY DIALOGUE

5. The main purpose of the dialogue will be to launch an exchange among Parties on the following:

(a) What the conditions are for successfully implementing The Strategy at all levels in the context of critical global issues.

(b) What type of political commitment would be needed for this to happen.

(c) How to engage Parties to the UNCCD soon on a range of critical issues relating to the implementation of The Strategy and reforms necessitated by and flowing from it.

(d) How the UNCCD bodies and institutions could help.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

6. An eminent personality will preside/moderate the Policy Dialogue which will take place in Bonn on 27 May 2008. Ministers and other high-level participants are expected from a representative number of country Parties to the UNCCD.

7. This category of high-level decision makers is expected to give an impetus to buy-in to The Strategy and to firm up understanding in the context of the Convention's strategic orientations. To keep a genuine interactive character to the exchange, the number of participants shall be limited to around 50 people.

8. Information on the venue, final agenda and documents for the meeting will be forwarded to the participants upon confirmation of their attendance on the basis of the invitation letter covering this note.

Content of the meeting

9. To facilitate a targeted exchange from developed/affected/developing Parties on The Strategy and to foster awareness of and buy-in among relevant policy and decision makers prior to the formal consideration by Parties of new programming tools at CRIC 7, the Policy Dialogue will be divided into three segments:

(a) Presentation of UNCCD-related strategic themes in a context of climate change, related food and water scarcity and emerging geo-strategic issues;

(b) Presentation of UNCCD corporate orientations and reforms in the light of The Strategy;

(c) Indicative feedback on Parties' perspectives on the implementation of The Strategy.

A. Segment I: Policy development

10. This will contain a keynote presentation on the major global concern of combating desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD).
11. Purpose: To provide an update on the correlation between DLDD issues and present issues of major concern to the international community.
12. In the context of The Strategy the presentation shall highlight the need to promote the global importance of land and soil conservation in the context of adaptation to and mitigation of climate change. Failing to take measures (including appropriate land tenure) to address the DLDD threat to sustainable land management will have a severe impact on food and water security, on the prevention of forced migrations and conflicts and on the mitigation of natural disasters. Promoting investment in sustainable agriculture for development needs to be prioritized in this holistic context.

B. Segment II: Dialogue on mobilizing for a forward-looking strategy

13. This will contain a presentation of emerging UNCCD corporate documents and how to turn the UNCCD into a more robust and high-performance international process.
14. Purpose: To firm up understanding and collect feedback on corporate orientations, prior to the submission of programming documents to CRIC 7 in October 2008.
15. A presentation by the Executive Secretary will introduce the forthcoming proposed vision, the new programming tools and the reshaping of the secretariat. A joint presentation of orientations for the Joint Work Programme with the Managing Director of the Global Mechanism will highlight the new collegial orientation between the two entities. To achieve the four strategic objectives of The Strategy, a draft multi-year work plan will be presented as a medium-term stepping stone to be operated according to biennial operational programmes. The introduction of a new performance framework will demonstrate relevance and efficiency in providing effective services to the Parties in the light of The Strategy.
16. The following discussion on these two segments will be moderated in the light of the relationship between the critical issues presented and the proposed UNCCD Strategy implementation.

C. Segment III: Parties' views on responses to emerging challenges

17. This will focus on emerging options for implementation of The Strategy from the point of view of Parties.
18. Purpose: To elicit feedback from Parties on how the implementation of The Strategy can best meet major challenges faced by the international community.

19. Keynote speeches/presentations could highlight some important issues, including the following:

(a) Land and food security (sustainable agriculture/environment, rural poverty, land in the cooperation agenda);

(b) Land in the political agenda (land and adaptation to, and mitigation of climate change);

(c) Expectations from The Strategy and required support to it. What The Strategy aims at, what it seeks to achieve;

(d) Status of UNCCD implementation and internal changes required for meeting the objectives of The Strategy;

20. Discussions would be oriented towards suggestions for concrete actions to bring The Strategy to serve Parties and realize its potential for synergies thus meeting the recognized challenges.

IV. INTENDED OUTCOME

21. Reaffirmation of the importance of the UNCCD in the ongoing climate change debate with the recognition that investment in DLDD is a cost-effective way of adaptation to climate change, the mitigation of its effects, the strengthening of the ecosystem's resilience and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

22. A preliminary assessment of action needed in creating an enabling environment at the Party level in order to implement The Strategy could become a trigger for internal discussions within and among Parties and interest groups on what they should do in this field, and also what kind of measures are needed to support the process.

23. Documentary output. The secretariat could produce a summary of the High-Level Policy Dialogue as an information paper to be tabled at CRIC 7. A summary from the Chairperson would also be provided. The output from the deliberations will also translate into adjusted/improved emerging UNCCD documents in order to fine tune UNCCD corporate strategy and programme proposals for CRIC 7 and COP 9.

Annex

LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

1. By decision 23/COP.6, the Parties to the UNCCD decided that the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) of the United Nations would carry out a comprehensive review of the secretariat. The consequent JIU report was submitted for the consideration of the seventh session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 7), held in October 2005. The report contains 25 recommendations covering a broad range of issues critical to the UNCCD process, ranging from the strengthening of political commitment to the UNCCD to the development of human resource management policies.

2. At COP 7, the Parties decided that the detailed review of the JIU report would be carried out during the intersessional period before COP 8 that was to be held in autumn 2007. For this purpose, by decision 3/COP.7 the Parties established an intersessional intergovernmental working group (IIWG). This Group was further requested to develop a ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention by addressing, inter alia, the recommendations of the JIU report. Further, by the above-mentioned decision, the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties (COP) prepared the terms of reference of the IIWG which set the following documentary output for the Group:

(a) A report, based on the Group's review of the JIU report, including how to best address the recommendations therein; and

(b) A draft ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the UNCCD.

3. The Group met four times, and at its last meeting in May 2007 adopted the "Ten-Year Strategic Plan and Framework to Enhance Implementation of the UNCCD (2008–2018)" (The Strategy), for submission to the COP. The Strategy was adopted at COP 8. It includes a number of strategic as well as operational objectives for the UNCCD process, and the enclosed framework spells out the key roles and responsibilities of the UNCCD subsidiary bodies, the secretariat and the Global Mechanism in meeting these objectives. Together with the decision text, it gives detailed guidance for the further work of the secretariat.

4. The secretariat was requested to translate the provisions of The Strategy and framework into a four-year work plan (the secretariat's strategic plan), complemented by a costed biennial programme of work taking a results-based management (RBM) approach.

5. As the concept of RBM implies changes to working processes within the secretariat in order to be effective, the introduction of these new planning tools will have to be sustained by a strong commitment and consensus on how to structure working processes among the secretariat's staff.

6. Moreover, given the fact that the approved budget for the biennium 2008–2009 did not anticipate the programmatic implications of The Strategy, it would be imperative to formulate

elements for the 2008–2009 programme so as to enable a resource mobilization strategy in the immediate aftermath of the COP.

7. At COP 8, decision 3/COP.8 adopting The Strategy called on the organization of a policy dialogue. The language in decision 3/COP.8 reads as follows:

“ Invites the Executive Secretary to consider engaging in policy dialogue on The Strategy to foster awareness of and buy-in to The Strategy among relevant policy decision makers, making use, inter alia, of the opportunities provided by the sixteenth and the seventeenth sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development.”
