



United Nations

ICCD/COP(15)/11



Convention to Combat Desertification

Distr.: General
23 February 2022

Original: English

Conference of the Parties

Fifteenth session

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 9–20 May 2022

Item 6 (c) of the provisional agenda

Programme and budget

Report of the Evaluation Office

Report of the Evaluation Office

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The systematic evaluation of activities carried out under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) started in 2014 with the aim to strengthen the external credibility and accountability of the secretariat and the Global Mechanism and enhance their internal culture of learning.

This document presents an overview of the main findings and recommendations of the UNCCD evaluations commissioned since the previous Conference of the Parties in September 2019. It also provides information on the follow-up actions concerning the recommendations of earlier evaluations. Furthermore, this document presents the proposed work programme for the UNCCD Evaluation Office for the biennium 2022–2023, accompanied by an indication of the estimated costs.



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I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation indicate that all programmed activities shall be evaluated over a fixed time period, with the objectives to (a) determine as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the organization's activities in relation to their objectives; (b) enable the secretariat and Member States to engage in systematic reflection with a view to increasing the effectiveness of the main programmes of the organization by altering their content and, if necessary, (c) reviewing their objectives. The evaluation findings are requested to be communicated to Member States through intergovernmental bodies.¹

2. The systematic evaluation of activities carried out under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) started in 2014, with the aim to strengthen the external credibility and accountability of the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) and enhance their internal culture of learning. The evaluations are usually prepared by independent professional evaluators and planned and supervised by the UNCCD Evaluation Office. This office also arranges for knowledge-sharing of the evaluation outcomes and follows up on the implementation of evaluation recommendations. Most UNCCD evaluations apply the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) standard evaluation criteria² of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability, which are complemented by an additional criterium of gender responsiveness.

3. The evaluation reports and related management responses are openly accessible to Parties and other stakeholders through the UNCCD Evaluation Office web page.³ They are presented at meetings of the Conference of the Parties (COP) in the context of the agenda item on programme and budget and represent an important aspect of informing Parties of progress made toward the objectives of the UNCCD workplan, following a results-based management approach. The workplan of the Evaluation Office for the forthcoming biennium is also presented at each COP.

4. At its fourteenth session, the COP considered the recommendations of the independent evaluations and assessments that had been carried out during the biennium 2018–2019, and requested the secretariat and the GM to use these recommendations in planning and conducting their work. The COP also noted the proposed 2020–2021 workplan of the Evaluation Office and requested the Executive Secretary to report to the COP at its fifteenth session (COP 15) on the outcomes of the evaluations that will be conducted in 2020–2021 and on the action taken to meet the pending recommendations of earlier evaluations, as appropriate.

5. This document presents an overview of the main findings and recommendations of those UNCCD evaluations that were commissioned during the biennium 2020–2021. It also provides information on the follow-up actions of earlier evaluations. Furthermore, this document presents the proposed work programme for the Evaluation Office for the biennium 2022–2023, accompanied by an indication of the estimated costs that would be covered from the UNCCD core budget.

¹ United Nations Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation. ST/SGB/2018/3, 1 June 2018.

² For more information about the OECD/DAC evaluation standards, please see <<https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>>.

³ <www2.unccd.int/about-us/evaluation-office>.

II. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification evaluations in 2020–2021

6. Since COP 14, five evaluations were commissioned by the UNCCD Evaluation Office; one of which was a broader study on business sector engagement, including also potential elements for a new business sector strategy. In addition, the Evaluation Office completed a participant satisfaction survey immediately after COP 14 and carried out an internal participatory gender audit. An overview of the findings and recommendations of these evaluations and studies, starting with the most recent, is presented in the following chapters, while the full reports can be accessed on the Evaluation Office web page. The internal gender audit report is not publicly available as it contains information that may be connected with specific staff members of the UNCCD, but more details of that report may be provided to Parties at request.

A. Evaluation of the Drought Initiative (March 2022)

7. The mitigation of the effects of drought has always been an important driver and objective for the UNCCD ever since the Convention's establishment in 1994. However, the centrality of drought to the UNCCD's work has increased significantly in recent years, not least through the adoption of the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework and its strategic objective 3 that focuses exclusively on drought. In 2018, the COP launched a Drought Initiative, providing up to EUR 1.8 million of funding to increase the resources and momentum behind the UNCCD's drought-focused work, further deepen coordination and collaboration with institutional partners such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Meteorological Organization, and shift regional and national drought management approaches from being reactive (responding to drought) towards being proactive (preparing for drought).

8. As the Drought Initiative closed at the end of 2021, an external evaluation was commissioned in January 2022 to provide an overall independent assessment of the Initiative, paying particular attention to the results achieved and their contribution to the priorities of the UNCCD and the aims set for the Initiative, and to identify key lessons and recommendations in order to guide current and future actions. The evaluation will be completed in March 2022, and its provisional findings are presented below.

9. The evaluation findings indicate that the Drought Initiative was a timely, relevant, effective and efficiently managed intervention. It has helped to raise the profile and understanding of drought preparedness at national and regional levels, in some instances helping to bring together institutions that did not previously cooperate or even recognize their shared interest in drought mitigation and management. For the UNCCD, the Initiative has increased awareness of the Convention's mandate and work on drought preparedness. Equally, the Initiative has served to build the UNCCD's credibility amongst other multilateral partners that work on drought preparedness.

10. The evaluation findings also indicate that the Initiative's core activities – supporting the development of national drought plans, building an online Drought Toolbox, facilitating regional planning – have been highly valued by participating institutions and countries. Particularly welcomed has been the Initiative's work to strengthen foundations for drought preparedness through the consolidation of existing knowledge. The Drought Toolbox has brought together previously separate resources into a single package that is well-gearred towards countries that are at an early stage in their drought planning process. Similarly, the facilitation of national drought plans has helped countries to identify and recognize the linkages between relevant but previously disparate policies and activities.

11. Most stakeholders that were contacted for the evaluation felt that the national drought planning process would have benefitted from development over a longer timeframe, and with more resources to support broader, deeper consultation with national stakeholders. The plans vary in quality and depth, but there is a general consensus among the participating country respondents that – at the very least – they all provide a previously unavailable foundation and reference point upon which to build national drought

preparedness. But there is also a general consensus that there is now a pressing need to mobilize resources and ensure that these plans move from paper to implementation. While implementation of the plans will always be a multi-partner effort, many stakeholders that participated in the evaluation indicated that they are looking towards the UNCCD for guidance and support during this next, critical phase for countries and regions alike.

B. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification participatory gender audit (May 2021)

12. Within the frameworks of the UNCCD Gender Action Plan and the United Nations system-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (SWAP), the secretariat and the GM have implemented several measures and initiatives to mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment into their operations and functioning. In 2020–2021, they focused on assessing the extent to which their internal capacities, policies and practices are adequate to support the inclusion of gender equality in their activities. As part of that process, a gender audit in accordance with the International Labour Organization participatory gender audit (PGA) methodology was carried out. This gender audit included a desk review of key documents and unit-specific questionnaires.⁴ All UNCCD staff were informed of and invited to contribute to the gender audit information collection process through the unit questionnaires and, should they prefer, confidential private messages.

13. The gender audit questions and analysis were built around five key areas identified in the PGA, with some adjustments to better fit the functioning, resources and mandate of the secretariat and the GM. These five areas were as follows:

- (a) Gender issues in the context of the UNCCD, and existing gender expertise, competence and capacity-building in the secretariat and the GM;
- (b) Gender mainstreaming in the objectives, programming, activities and budgets of the secretariat and the GM; instruments in use for accountability, evaluating and monitoring on gender equality; selection of partner organizations;
- (c) Information and knowledge management in the secretariat and the GM, and reflection of a gender equality policy in their products and public image;
- (d) Decision-making, staffing and human resources, and organizational culture and its effects on gender equality;
- (e) The secretariat and GM's perception of achievement on gender equality.

14. In addition, the aspects covered in the 17 SWAP performance indicators were integrated into the audit questions where feasible.

15. The findings of the gender audit indicate that the secretariat and the GM have most of the key requirements for gender responsiveness in place or under development, including the following:

- (a) The UNCCD is actively using available United Nations system support, mechanisms and practices as well as fully capable partners for mainstreaming gender in their functioning;
- (b) The UNCCD has made good progress in planning, developing and delivering gender-responsive policies, products and services for both external and internal purposes. For example, gender mainstreaming is among the work programme priorities; related content and/or guidance is being included in all main activity areas; and new gender posts and a gender team have been created to increase internal expertise and coordination;

⁴ The gender audit process did not include participatory workshops to consider the audit findings and potential response strategies, which is one of the key components of the PGA. These workshops were conducted later on as part of the corporate gender policy development process.

(c) The organizational culture is assessed as gender responsive: management proactively promotes gender equality and staff performance; positions or assignments are not perceived to be dependent of gender;

(d) The UNCCD human resource management and related policies are gender-responsive; its staff structure has achieved gender parity;

(e) The UNCCD allocates funding for gender mainstreaming and gender activities from both core budget and voluntary funding.

16. While most findings are positive, the gender audit also indicates a need for major improvements in the tracking of resources allocated to gender equality and building staff capacity in gender-responsive budgeting. These results correspond with the UNCCD SWAP report results in the same areas, and the secretariat, in collaboration with UN Women, has started to take measures to address these capacity gaps.

17. As the next step in enhancing their internal gender responsiveness, the secretariat and the GM have started the preparation of their gender policy, building on the findings of the gender audit. This policy will be aligned with existing frameworks within the United Nations, while acknowledging the specificity of the secretariat and the GM.

C. Second evaluation of the Changwon Initiative (April 2021)

18. The Changwon Initiative was launched by the Republic of Korea in 2011, with the objective of complementing existing UNCCD processes through target-setting and strengthening partnerships to enhance the implementation of the Convention. Its current strategic approach, The Changwon Initiative 2030, focuses on consolidating partnerships, facilitating scientific advice and synergies, as well as promoting knowledge-sharing and public mobilization to support the implementation and integration of land degradation neutrality (LDN) in broader sustainable development policies and processes at the national and international levels.

19. The second evaluation of the Changwon Initiative, covering the period 2016–2020, was completed in April 2021. It provides the Government of the Republic of Korea and the Korea Forest Service as its representative, and the UNCCD secretariat and the GM, with an overall independent assessment of the results achieved and guidance for future action.

20. The main findings and conclusion of the second evaluation of the Changwon Initiative included the following:

(a) The Changwon Initiative has catalysed the emergence, recognition and stabilization of the UNCCD as a leading global institution addressing desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD) and enabled it to support the majority of its partner countries in formulating approaches and increasingly policies to move towards LDN. This process has played an important role in raising the recognition of global land issues among international stakeholders;

(b) It has played a vital role in enabling the UNCCD to get closer to the field and to respond to the pressing needs of partner countries. Through its promotion of LDN target-setting and later the development of land degradation neutrality transformative projects and programmes (LDN TPPs), it has greatly contributed to early processes of national and sometimes regional activities to improve the situation on the ground;

(c) It has helped to facilitate the UNCCD contributions to key scientific knowledge and the dissemination and use of said knowledge through knowledge management and capacity-building;

(d) Expenditure by the UNCCD of the funds provided by the Changwon Initiative has been inconsistent due to complex and varied reasons;

(e) The achievement of impact will depend on the substantial implementation of sustainable land management (SLM) practices at national and regional level through scaled up partnerships with a broad range of national and international bodies. The Changwon Initiative can continue to play an important role in this process, both as an instigator of new

approaches and as a tester of these through pilot-level initiatives with country and regional partners;

(f) The UNCCD's contribution towards impact will build upon a set of underlying core 'products' developed in the areas of scientific understanding and its translation into policy support, knowledge management and capacity development, which will need to be adequately and consistently supported;

(g) It will be important for the Changwon Initiative to ensure that all of its activities apply a gender lens.

21. Building on the findings and conclusions, the evaluation recommended that the Changwon Initiative be continued beyond the current five year agreement, which expires in 2023, with a focus on (i) activities that can have maximum effects at country and regional level; and (ii) the underlying processes of knowledge generation/dissemination and capacity-building that will be essential to enable and promote the success of these activities. Developing further pilot innovative approaches, promoting science-policy interlinkages, and using gender-focused approaches were identified by the evaluation as potential areas for increased support.

22. To address the inconsistencies in expenditures, the evaluation recommended a better analysis of human resource availability in the planning for future contributions. In the same context, the evaluation also recommended a detailed review of the outstanding Changwon Initiative balances, accompanied by a scheduled plan to use these balances.

23. In their management response, the secretariat and the GM appreciated the generally positive evaluation findings and outlook concerning the Changwon Initiative – notably that the Changwon Initiative has been broadly effective and that the basic conditions for the sustainability of its results have been established. They considered the recommendations of the evaluation report as practical ways forward in planning and organizing the implementation of the Changwon Initiative and welcomed them as valuable guidance for the next steps. All recommendations were either fully or partially accepted, and related measures have already started in close consultation with the Korea Forest Service.

D. Evaluation report and elements of a new strategy: Enhancing business sector engagement (January 2021)

24. The growing interest of the private sector in engaging with the UNCCD and numerous potentially beneficial interactions prompted the UNCCD to assess and reflect on its business sector collaboration. A study of the UNCCD business sector engagement was commissioned by the Evaluation Office in 2020–2021, including an evaluation of the business sector engagement and, building on the findings of the evaluation, the development of elements for a new business sector engagement strategy. A theory of engagement that spelled out the potential contribution of the private sector to the UNCCD objectives and related assumptions was established, tested and further developed during the evaluation process.

25. The evaluation found that the critical and diverse roles of the business sector in advancing the objectives of the UNCCD, most notably in terms of LDN, is widely recognized, according to the views of the UNCCD staff and business sector representatives, as well as the relevant literature. Similarly evident was the need to further develop and refine the UNCCD approach to business sector engagement at all levels to make it more strategic and coherent while being aligned with the limited resources and mandate of the UNCCD.

26. Against this setting, the evaluation found that the first UNCCD business engagement strategy has been a commendable attempt to provide a structure involving businesses, and the secretariat and the GM have undertaken important foundational work in advancing multiple types of engagement. Promising strides have been made, although tangible LDN results are yet to be detected, and there is potential for further effective action and results. For that to materialize, a new business sector engagement strategy would benefit from a more strategic approach that goes beyond case-by-case partnerships and spells out clear

aims for such engagement for the UNCCD, for both the short/medium term and the long term.

27. Based on the data collected for the evaluation, important success factors of business sector engagement were noted: (i) the economic sustainability perspective of the business sector and its growing interest in LDN; and (ii) opportunities to collaborate around high-profile international cooperation processes such as the Great Green Wall of the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative (GGWSSI). On the other hand, business sector collaboration with the secretariat and the GM so far had mostly been around general policy and advocacy work (with a few exceptions), with little implementation in the field.

28. Many findings of this evaluation further specify the challenges in engaging the business sector with UNCCD implementation and LDN, including the following key points:

(a) There is a general perception of a mismatch between UNCCD country priorities (such as the LDN targets) and business sector interests. More effort could be invested in supporting the identification of shared interests, particularly through further guidance and capacity-building targeting country-level stakeholders, and in supporting the creation of an enabling environment for investments that contribute to LDN;

(b) UNCCD as an intergovernmental treaty body is a complex structure, and its operational modalities and requirements differ significantly from those of the business sector. Private companies will need backstopping that “speaks their language” for integrating UNCCD priorities into their operations.

29. Business sector stakeholders that participated in this evaluation appreciated the enthusiasm and openness of the UNCCD staff to work with business entities. However, some also noted that the secretariat and the GM have very limited staff and other resources for partnering with the business sector. More active collaboration with other United Nations entities in business sector partnerships could compensate for the limited resources of the UNCCD and increase the likelihood of achieving results at scale.

30. The evaluation also found that the secretariat and the GM have adequately assessed and managed most risks related to business sector engagement as part of accreditation and procurement processes. The due diligence process is considered to be overall satisfactory, while it could be reviewed to fully cover the risks associated with more innovative business sector partnerships. Systematic monitoring, evaluation and learning focusing on business sector engagement (e.g. tracking investments and results achieved from activities to outcomes) could be developed.

31. The evaluation noted that gender inclusion has been integrated into the UNCCD support to the design of transformative projects and programmes, in accordance with the UNCCD Gender Action Plan, but has otherwise been a rather minor part of business sector engagement.

32. In the light of the findings, the evaluation recommended the following to the secretariat and the GM:

(a) Development of a long-term vision for business sector engagement with the UNCCD, identifying key strategic aims and priorities, expected results and associated modalities of collaboration. The strategy could also specify main thematic areas of engagement;

(b) Further analysis, guidance and support targeting both country Parties and the business sector, with the aim of advancing shared understanding and alignment of public and private sector interests, collaboration modalities and expectations for effective country-level action addressing land;

(c) Further development of the UNCCD tools, facilities and capacity for effective business sector engagement, which may include:

(i) A platform for the business sector to collaborate, access and share information, and exchange views on matters relevant to UNCCD priorities;

(ii) Revamping communications targeting the business sector for improved transparency and alignment;

(iii) Reviewing the processes (e.g. around due diligence) to ensure they cover the different types of business sector actors and engagement;

(iv) More collaboration and complementarity across the secretariat and the GM, for instance through the creation of a business sector task team;

(v) Improving knowledge management on business sector engagement through the systematic tracking of related resources and results, and periodic reporting on related matters for external purposes;

(vi) Internal learning and staff training on matters relevant to business sector engagement;

(d) Improvements to the efficiency in business sector engagement by focusing on strategic, high-yields partnerships, taking advantage of existing efforts and materials from other United Nations institutions on the matter, and engagement in collaborations with said institutions.

33. In addition to the guidance building on the evaluation recommendations, the study outlined further strategic outputs and related main deliverables as potential elements for a new UNCCD business sector engagement strategy. These outputs were defined around the broad focus areas of “norms, policies and practices”, “brokering and convening” and “implementation support”.

34. In their management response to the evaluation part of the study, the secretariat and the GM noted that they would have welcomed a deeper analysis of the extent of results, strengths and weaknesses of different types, so as to have a more substantial and specified basis for the consideration of future activities. They nevertheless agreed with the emphasis given in the evaluation report to the importance of UNCCD private sector engagement leading to widespread business behavioural change and progress in preventing land degradation as well as restoring already degraded land. All recommendations of the evaluation were either fully or partially accepted.

35. After the completion of the study, the secretariat and the GM have continued the development of the new UNCCD approach to business sector engagement. Further information on that work can be found in document ICCD/COP(15)/13.

E. Evaluation of United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification support to the development of land degradation neutrality transformative projects and programmes (February 2021)

36. The GM programme for the development of LDN TPPs was established in 2018 to provide early-stage support to countries and regions seeking investments for LDN projects. LDN TPP support is demand-driven and typically involves the GM helping countries and regions to refine initial concepts, identify implementation and funding partners, develop funding concept notes, and contribute to the development of full funding proposals. As funding proposals mature, the GM also provides ad hoc, targeted technical inputs to further strengthen each concept by – for example – funding gender analyses and consultation processes.

37. An independent formative evaluation was undertaken to assess LDN TPP performance so far and provide guidance for future activities. The evaluation established an LDN TPP theory of change as a starting point and used the OECD/DAC standard criteria and gender-responsiveness as additional criteria for its assessment. Its data collection included interviews, documentation review and an online survey.

38. The evaluation found that the country-driven approach of the LDN TPPs has assured their relevance to country/regional needs and priorities and their coherence with policies and activities by involved countries and regions. The GM’s conceptualization support to early-stage project initiatives was found to address a clear gap that potential projects face, providing resources and expertise that would not otherwise be available. That has helped to initiate some projects that may have struggled to get off the ground in the absence of GM support. LDN TPPs were also found to be relevant to the work of implementation agencies

and funders, although there is still scope for building the profile and understanding of LDN amongst those institutions.

39. With regard to efficiency and effectiveness, the LDN TPPs demand-driven operating model was assessed as appropriate for its aims, particularly for supporting multi-country projects. The evaluation noted that LDN TPPs are on track to deliver their anticipated short-term results, with this effort currently underpinned by sufficient financial resources and a well-regarded LDN TPP team. The LDN TPP team dealt well with the COVID-19 pandemic, continuing to provide support and maintain relationships with partners throughout the crisis. The evaluation noted some inefficiencies due to relatively rigid internal planning and approval procedures, which, however, did not affect external perceptions of the GM's performance: country and partner representatives that participated in the LDN TPP evaluation were universally complimentary about the efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of support.

40. On progress towards impact and sustainability, the evaluation noted that ultimately, LDN TPPs represent a further logical step towards the long-term goal of achieving LDN. It further noted that it is too early to identify tangible impacts, although the initiatives being supported by the GM have clear potential to deliver significant contributions to LDN (the 63 concepts supported through LDN TPPs at the time of the evaluation targeted over USD 1.74 billion in funding). To ensure the sustainability of LDN TPP results, the project partners involved in the evaluation highlighted the importance of continuing GM engagement with projects during their actual implementation. The evaluation also found opportunities for strengthening TPP monitoring through a combination of alternative indicators and approaches that better reflect the likely contributions the GM makes (or will make) to their partners' long-term efforts.

41. On gender responsiveness, the evaluation found that LDN TPPs have significantly helped to raise the profile, understanding and application of gender mainstreaming within supported projects' designs. This was said to have been achieved through a combination of the GM's clear position that gender responsiveness is an integral, essential facet of transformative project design, and through the provision of high-quality technical support on gender mainstreaming. An upcoming challenge will be to ensure that the pre-implementation advice and design principles are converted into actual practice.

42. The TPP evaluation made the following recommendations:

(a) Identify options for continued GM engagement with projects during implementation in order to build and share knowledge around the reality and practical challenges of LDN, and to help to ensure that LDN design principles (including gender-responsive design principles) are realized;

(b) Review and reform inefficient financial management and approval processes to ensure that individual project managers have the necessary flexibility to respond efficiently to time-sensitive support requests;

(c) Develop a broader, longer-term monitoring strategy that focuses on measuring the longer-term influence and contribution of LDN TPPs; this could make use of monitoring data that all successfully funded projects will be required (by donors) to gather;

(d) Articulate clearer 'pitches' for LDN's role in addressing climate change so as to provide potential projects with material that can directly inform requirements to define a proposal's contribution to addressing climate change and support access to climate finance.

43. In its management response, the GM welcomed the evaluation report as a carefully crafted, focused and timely input to the considerations on the future work on LDN TPPs. Through the theory of change and related analysis, the evaluation was considered to clarify the conceptual setting of LDN TPPs, their successes and remaining challenges, which will be useful for the further development and targeting of related activities. All evaluation recommendations were either fully or partially accepted, and the implementation of related measures has influenced recent LDN TPP activities as well as the planning of the Project Preparation Partnership.

F. Evaluation of the New York Liaison Office (June 2020)

44. In recent years, the secretariat has worked on an organizational update process with the aim of elevating its organizational effectiveness through improved internal coherence and coordination, updated staff capacities and empowered managers. The evaluation of the New York Liaison Office (NYLO) in 2020 was one element of this process. In addition to the standard criteria, the evaluation applied a light-touch organizational assessment as an underlying methodology, looking at (1) organizational motivation; (2) organizational capacity; and (3) an enabling environment as key factors that affect performance.

45. The findings of the evaluation indicate that NYLO has generally met the aims that were set for it, and that it can be particularly effective when:

(a) It promotes a topic that is directly relevant for a process that is centralized to New York (such as linking LDN with the Sustainable Development Goals);

(b) It advocates for a topic that is brand new or particularly high on the political agenda (such as the land–security/migration nexus);

(c) It advocates for a topic for which attention/approval beyond the UNCCD constituency is necessary (such the decision for the Global Environment Facility to become a financial mechanism for the UNCCD).

46. As NYLO is a small office with only 1.5 professional staff, the evaluation noted that the achievement of tangible results would benefit from NYLO focusing its activities on those that are most likely to produce the best results for the UNCCD without spreading its resources too thin. Better coordination and complementarity of the activities of NYLO and those of the Bonn-based secretariat could assist in identifying the activities on which NYLO will focus, and provide NYLO with a broader technical knowledge base. In terms of resources, the evaluation found that the NYLO office equipment is in a serious need of an update.

47. Building on the findings and their analysis, the evaluation recommends the following actions with the aim of improving the effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of the NYLO activities:

(a) In collaboration with the Bonn-based secretariat units, NYLO formulates for every biennium a brief work programme that specifies its aims and main activities and is derived directly from the secretariat's corporate work programme;

(b) NYLO revises its approach to partnerships, which will include enhanced support to the Group of Friends of DLDD and further partnership-building with selected New York or Washington-based organizations;

(c) The secretariat continues improving regular information-sharing between NYLO and the Bonn-based units;

(d) The secretariat ensures that NYLO resources are commensurate to its workload.

48. In its management response, the secretariat commended the evaluation report for clarifying the specific strengths and key achievements of NYLO in supporting the Convention, which will assist not only the office itself in further targeting its work, but also the Bonn-based secretariat in defining where to involve NYLO and what kind of support to expect from it. All recommendations of the evaluation were accepted or partially accepted, and their implementation is underway.

G. Participant survey: Fourteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (November 2019)

49. COP 14 was held in September 2019 in New Delhi, India, and involved close to 6,000 participants and approximately 100 ministers and other high-level representatives. The COP resulted in 33 decisions and 1 one resolution, and the New Delhi Declaration and summary records of ministerial round tables were prepared during its high-level segment.

50. Together with the host country, India, the secretariat had a central role in the substantive and logistical preparations of the COP. With the aim of finding out what went well and what could be improved, the secretariat prepared a survey in the form of a scaled response questionnaire on various aspects of the COP to seek the feedback of the participants. The survey was made available in English, French and Spanish. A total of 96 responses were received.

51. The outcomes of the survey were generally positive, with 70–80 per cent of respondents expressing satisfaction with almost all preparations and arrangements. The substantive servicing and organization of work were appreciated, and the respondents were also largely satisfied with the logistics and the Conference App, which was introduced at COP 14. Nevertheless, the findings of the survey still identified room for improvement, and related recommendations were loosely grouped into three categories: substantive work, practical arrangements and the Conference App.

52. For substantive work, the survey report recommends the following:

(a) Streamlining the COP, Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) and Committee on Science and Technology agendas and organization of work to ensure that the negotiations and resulting decisions under each body complement each other;

(b) As feasible, pursuing the involvement of relevant United Nations system organizations in COP agenda items at the plenary level to bring new perspectives to the meeting exchanges;

(c) Ensuring the timeliness of publishing official documents on the UNCCD website;

(d) In preparing official documents and draft decisions, the secretariat is to introduce measures to make it easier for COP participants to grasp the key points and main controversies of each document, as well as linkages with other agenda items; and

(e) Provision of further capacity support to national delegates to effectively negotiate on various agenda items.

53. For practical arrangements, the survey report recommends the following:

(a) Establishment of minimum standards for the services to be provided by the host country during the COP;

(b) Establishment of standard requirements for selected consular and protocol matters, including the visa application process and the arrangements for high-level participants;

(c) Arrangement for an easily accessible service for the COP participants to calculate and offset the CO₂ emissions of their travels to and from the COP.

54. For the Conference App, the survey report recommends the following:

(a) Ensuring that the information on the App is correct and updated regularly over the duration of the COP; and

(b) Further developing the modules of the App.

55. The recommendations have been considered in the planning and preparations for COP 15, and many improvements have been introduced. The updated Conference App was already used for the intersessional CRIC in 2021. Attention has been given to supporting the capacity of new national focal points to effectively participate in the negotiations.

56. A similar survey will be conducted close to the end of COP 15, with the aim of continuing the development of the arrangements for the future COPs.

III. Follow-up to earlier United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification evaluations

57. By its decision 10/COP.13, the COP requested the secretariat and the GM to use the evaluation recommendations when planning and conducting their work. To systematically follow up on the recommendations, the secretariat and/or the GM prepare a management response for each evaluation, outlining the action to be taken to meet the recommendations. The management responses are made public together with the evaluation reports, and they should be considered essential components of the evaluation reports.

58. This section provides a brief overview of action taken on the recommendations of evaluations that were completed during the biennium 2018–2019. More information on the listed evaluations may be found in document ICCD/COP(14)/12.

A. Evaluation of the Regional Coordination Units (June 2019)

59. An evaluation was carried out in April 2019 with the aim of gaining a better understanding of what the UNCCD Regional Coordination Units (RCUs) could and should do to optimize their contribution to the effective implementation of the Convention. This evaluation resulted in four recommendations, suggesting that (1) the planning, coordination and monitoring of the work of the RCUs be improved; (2) the RCUs focus on specified and targeted activities and results that can generate added value to the UNCCD, and in which they have a comparative advantage; (3) the RCUs enhance the effectiveness of their advocacy and liaison functions to leverage partnerships to support the implementation of the UNCCD; and (4) the communication and information-sharing functions of the RCUs be revamped.

60. In its management response, the secretariat accepted all recommendations, and their implementation is well underway. The purpose, aims and modalities of the regional coordination functions have been revised to better reflect the current priorities and working modalities of the UNCCD, with more attention paid to policy advocacy and partnership-building. The results-oriented, targeted regional coordination work programmes, built on the overall objectives of the secretariat, are under development. Taking into account the limited resources of the regional coordination functions, enhancing related communication and information sharing functions is challenging and will require further consideration.

B. Evaluation of project Front Local Environnemental pour une Union Verte (FLEUVE) (June 2019)

61. In 2014–2019, the GM, in partnership with five African countries, implemented the *Front Local Environnemental pour une Union Verte* (FLEUVE) project as part of the GGWSSI. The project was funded by the European Union, and the partnering organizations included the *Centre d'Actions et de Réalisations Internationales* (CARI), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the United Nations Capital Development Fund.

62. An independent evaluation of FLEUVE was carried out in 2019. This evaluation found that several aspects of the project, notably demonstrating the compatibility of land restoration with profitable value chains, the motivating and training of the involved local communities, and some of the tested farming methods, had been successful and there were clear signs of progress toward the expected impact. Room for improvement was found particularly in the organization of communication and information flow among the project stakeholders, mobilizing innovative funding and new partnerships, and some processes and routines concerning project management.

63. The evaluation recommendations were largely detailed proposals on further activities within the involved country partners, including suggestions on which plants and farming approaches to use for optimizing future harvests and income. Implementing them would have required another similar project in the same countries, which was not planned

for by the GM. Nevertheless, the information contained in the evaluation report has been useful for developing other activities within the GGWSSI.

C. Prospective assessment: Additional arrangements for drought under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (May 2019)

64. By its decision 29/COP.13, the COP requested the secretariat to prepare a report on the need, if any, for additional arrangements on drought for consideration at COP 14. One background document for this purpose was a prospective assessment focusing on the likely success of a variety of legal instruments in addressing drought under the UNCCD. This assessment covers eight types of legal instruments that are commonly used in international environmental cooperation: protocols, amendments, annexes, principles, declarations, decisions, standards and gentleman's agreements. It outlines the main characteristics of each instrument and provides examples of the use of each instrument in other international processes, mostly from within the United Nations system.

65. The prospective assessment did not include recommendations on whether or which legal instrument should be used for addressing drought under the UNCCD, but it explained what the potential strengths and challenges of each instrument could be when applied to drought matters under the UNCCD. It served as background information for the consideration by the COP at its fourteenth session of addressing drought under the UNCCD, and also the work of the related intergovernmental working group that was established by that COP.

D. Evaluation of the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme (March 2019)

66. The Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Project (LDN TSP) has supported close to 130 countries since 2016 in establishing national voluntary LDN targets and identifying the baseline data necessary for measuring progress against those targets. In 2019, the evaluation offices of the IUCN and the UNCCD jointly commissioned an independent formative evaluation of the LDN TSP to assess the results achieved and the project performance against the criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and progress to impact. The evaluation recommended that the secretariat and the GM develop a more systematic approach to knowledge management, learning and outreach; offer advice on capacity-building options; provide guidance on integrating gender and co-benefits into LDN strategies and targets; explore options for closer harmonization across the Rio conventions; and revise some administrative procedures in advance of future project delivery.

67. In their joint management response, the UNCCD secretariat, GM and IUCN accepted all recommendations. Many of them are implemented, and related actions have included, among other things, the development and dissemination of targeted knowledge products, tools for cross-country learning, support to the development of transformative LDN projects, capacity development for the monitoring of LDN indicators, technical guidance and backstopping for the integration of gender issues as well as synergies between the Rio conventions into LDN projects, and a revision of the business standards used for the LDN TSP.

E. Evaluation of cooperation between the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT) and the secretariat (April 2018)

68. An independent evaluation of cooperation between the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT) and the secretariat was commissioned in 2018 to provide advice on the possible continuation of WOCAT–UNCCD secretariat cooperation after the expiry of their cooperation agreement at the end of 2018. Building on the findings and their analysis, the evaluation presented six recommendations:

- (a) The secretariat and WOCAT should continue their cooperation on SLM best practices;
- (b) The secretariat should use the UNCCD process to promote the importance and potential of collecting, sharing and using best practices;
- (c) WOCAT should create tools to improve the access and use of the database at the country and, as possible, local levels;
- (d) The secretariat and WOCAT should ensure that the next phase of cooperation is founded on a jointly agreed framework of objectives and activities, and clear roles and responsibilities;
- (e) The secretariat and WOCAT should establish a realistic budget for the cooperation and secure the needed resources in a timely manner;
- (f) The secretariat and WOCAT should cooperate with other development partners active in the SLM field and intensify their own joint efforts to enable cross-fertilization, synergies and learning.

69. In their joint management response, WOCAT and the secretariat fully accepted all recommendations except the third one, which was partially accepted. Following up to the evaluation, the secretariat has facilitated access to the WOCAT online facility and encouraged Parties to submit new best practices.

70. Since 2018, the secretariat has fully participated in all WOCAT Steering Committee meetings in an advisory role. Through this involvement, the new WOCAT strategy (WOCAT 2020+) was fully aligned with UNCCD objectives and the needs of UNCCD stakeholders. All recommendations from the evaluation report mentioned in paragraph 66 above have been fully implemented.⁵

F. Evaluation of the Global Land Outlook (December 2017)

71. The first edition of the Global Land Outlook (GLO) was published by the UNCCD secretariat in September 2017, and an independent evaluation was carried out soon after, with a focus on drawing out its strengths and possible weaknesses with a view to informing decisions regarding future editions and supplementary outputs. The evaluation made recommendations on intensifying the promotion of the GLO and cooperating with other relevant science-policy communication processes. For future editions of the GLO, it recommended that they are produced every four years, and that they will include in some form more in-depth regional analyses and further exploration of the key themes. Furthermore, the evaluation recommended an early outreach phase to ensure high-quality contributors and partners with a shared agenda, a widening of the (geographic) range of contributors, and provision of clear, early guidance relating to the contributors' input and referencing. Some experienced production bottlenecks were also addressed.

72. In the management response, the secretariat accepted or partially accepted all recommendations, and most follow-up actions (scheduling of the future editions, regional reports, early launch of cooperation and wider geographical coverage) have been completed.

IV. Evaluation Office: 2022–2023 work programme

73. The proposed 2022–2023 UNCCD Evaluation Office work programme is presented in the table. This programme may be adjusted in the light of other tasks or further evaluation or assessment requirements assigned by the COP.

74. The UNCCD Evaluation Office has one professional staff funded from the programme support costs. An allocation from the UNCCD core budget is proposed for the

⁵ For a detailed report on the collaboration between the secretariat and WOCAT, please see document ICCD/COP(15)/CST/5.

recruitment of independent external evaluators. Evaluations of activities that have been funded from extrabudgetary sources will be covered from the budget of each activity.

Table
2022–2023 United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification Evaluation Office work programme

<i>Evaluations</i>	<i>Estimated core budget allocation (in euros)</i>
Participant survey from the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties	0
Assessment of the Science-Policy Interface	35,000
Evaluation of Global Mechanism (GM) knowledge management (focus on information flows between the GM, the countries and partners)	12,000
Evaluation of the Ankara Initiative	0
Midterm evaluation of the Grant Arrangement with Canada (interim progress in the 2020–2024 cooperation agreement)	0
Evaluation of the Land for Life programme	8,000
Evaluation of the UNCCD servicing of the Conference of the Parties	15,000
TOTAL	55,000

V. Conclusions and recommendations

75. This document presents the main outcomes and recommendations of evaluations carried out since COP 14, as well as the action taken by the secretariat and the GM to meet the recommendations of the earlier evaluations.

76. This document also presents the provisional plan for the evaluations to be carried out in the coming biennium. The COP may wish to:

- (a) Take note of the proposed Evaluation Office work programme;
- (b) Request the Executive Secretary to report to the COP at its sixteenth session on the outcomes of the evaluations that will be conducted in 2022–2023 and on the action taken to meet the pending recommendations of earlier evaluations.