



Midterm evaluation of the 2018-2030 UNCCD Strategic Framework

Report of the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Working Group 13-15 February 2023

Background

In 2017, at its 13th session, the Conference of the Parties (COP) adopted the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework and encouraged Parties to apply this Strategic Framework in their national policies, programmes, plans and processes relating to desertification/land degradation and drought. At the same session, the COP requested its Bureau to prepare appropriate modalities, criteria and terms of reference for a midterm evaluation of the Strategic Framework. Building on the terms of reference proposed by the COP Bureau, COP 15 decided to start the midterm evaluation, with a view to considering the resulting findings and recommendations at COP 16 in 2024. COP 15 also established an intergovernmental working group (IWG) to oversee the midterm evaluation and requested the secretariat to support the process and the IWG. In addition, the secretariat was requested to regularly update the COP Bureau on the progress made.

The midterm evaluation will be based on factual findings that are to be considered through a participatory process. These considerations will lead to a report and a draft decision, which will be submitted to COP 16. The main elements for the evaluation process are as follows:

- (a) An independent assessment, to be carried out by external evaluation experts using the evaluation criteria;
- (b) The intergovernmental working group - IWG-MTE - that oversees the midterm evaluation process;
- (c) A participatory consultation on the conclusions and recommendations of the independent assessment; and
- (d) A report to COP 16, including a draft decision, which outlines the proposal of the IWG-MTE on the action to be taken to further enhance the implementation of the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework.

The IWG-MTE consists of three representatives per UN region, nominated by each region. The group is supported by seven observers: two members of the Science-Policy Interface, one representative each from three major international organizations (FAO, GEF secretariat and IUCN) and two representatives from civil society. The secretariat and, where feasible, the GM will support the work of IWG-MTE and service its meetings.

Unless otherwise agreed by the IWG-MTE and depending on the availability of resources, the group will have three in-person meetings: one at the beginning of its work, another one immediately after the intersessional CRIC session, and one at the end of its work to finalize its report. In addition, the group will meet online, either in full or in smaller subgroups, and it will also actively communicate online.

Purpose of the first meeting of the intergovernmental working group

The IWG-MTE held its first meeting from 13 to 15 February 2023 in Bonn, Germany. The list of members and observers to the group is in annex 1 of this report; almost all of them attended this meeting in-person. Mr. Luis Constantino (Angola) and Mr. Daniel Van Assche (European Union) were selected



as the co-chairs of the IWG, and as Mr. Constantino had to cancel his participation at the last minute due to a family urgency, Mr. Van Assche chaired this meeting in its entirety.

As may be noted from the enclosed agenda (annex 2), the purpose of the first meeting was to set the basis for the midterm evaluation and to consider the programme of work of the IWG-MTE. The group considered the content, implementation and monitoring of the Strategic Framework and discussed on the scope, focus and methodology of the independent assessment. It also considered its own tasks and work programme and agreed on a schedule for its work.

Scope and focus of the midterm evaluation

As stated in the terms of reference adopted by COP 15, the purpose of the midterm evaluation is to assess the progress made in implementing the Strategic Framework and achieving its five strategic objectives. It will determine whether the Strategic Framework is working as intended, whether its implementation is meeting the stated aims, and whether/how it is contributing to broader global priorities of sustainable development. The evaluation will inform Parties and other key stakeholders about the successes and challenges in the implementation, and result in recommendations to further improve performance for the remaining period of the Strategic Framework.

At its first meeting, the IWG-MTE had a detailed look at the three main components of the Strategic Framework: the vision, the strategic objectives and the implementation framework. They noted that the vision is a broad statement of Parties' commitment:

“A future that avoids, minimizes, and reverses desertification/land degradation and mitigates the effects of drought in affected areas at all levels and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, within the scope of the Convention”

They also looked at the five strategic objectives of the Strategic Framework that focus on improving the condition of ecosystems and the living conditions of people in affected areas, drought resilience, global benefits and resource mobilization. These strategic objectives are meant to guide the actions of all UNCCD stakeholders and partners; meeting them will contribute to achieving the vision. The IWG-MTE considered the key areas of concrete action under each strategic objective and noted that particular attention will be placed on progress made toward land degradation neutrality (LDN) and resilience-building concerning drought.

The third main section of the strategic framework, the implementation framework defines the roles and responsibilities of Parties, UNCCD institutions, partners and stakeholders in meeting the above-mentioned strategic objectives. The IWG-MTE noted that the midterm evaluation will include also this dimension and consider, for example, how the work of the secretariat and the GM has contributed to progress toward the strategic objectives, and how the national reporting process has supported promotion and targeting of actions.

Preparation of the independent assessment

The independent assessment will provide the basis for the midterm evaluation. It will be carried out by a team of two external evaluation experts managed by the secretariat. Mr. Ronnie MacPherson has been selected as the lead evaluator, and Ms. Eneyd Njoroge will serve as the assistant evaluator. They have started their assignment and will continue supporting the process until the COP 16 report on the midterm evaluation is ready for submission.

For the independent assessment, the evaluation team will collect and compile information on the measures taken and progress made toward the strategic objectives. The consultants will review key documentation and data from the 2018 and 2023 national reports, study external reports and evaluations



that are relevant to UNCCD, and engage with key UNCCD stakeholders through interviews and online surveys, with the aim to ensure the availability of adequate information to draw credible, verifiable conclusions on the progress made. They will analyse the information against the evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and progress to impact, and an additional criterion of gender responsiveness will be applied as well.

The IWG-MTE considered the scope, approach and methodology for the independent assessment, as presented by the evaluation team, and provided its feedback. The following points were particularly emphasized:

On the scope of the independent assessment, the group considered that while the five strategic objectives will be covered, the priority focus areas would be LDN (including its role in the context of the SDGs) and drought. Among the aspects that were asked to be included in the independent assessment were regional level cooperation and implementation, the role and contribution of civil society, cooperation among the Rio Conventions, and the role of collaborative initiatives and agreements such as the Changwon Initiative. A separate section dedicated to the role / effectiveness of the secretariat and the GM was proposed to be included. Several IWG-MTE members suggested that capacity building as a cross-cutting measure be reflected in suitable sections of the independent assessment. The evaluation team was also asked to consider how to integrate country experiences and particularly best practices within the assessment.

Some members noted that the consideration of strategic objective five on resource mobilization should cover a broad scope of resources, from domestic to external and public to private finance, as well as variety of funding mechanisms such as those on climate finance that are closely related to the UNCCD implementation. However, members also felt that a comparative analysis of UNCCD's resources against the other Rio Conventions would not be useful at this stage.

On data collection and analysis, the IWG-MTE members considered the information that is needed to complement the results of the two national reporting processes and UNCCD documentation, to establish a good basis for the independent assessment. Surveys and targeted interviews of various UNCCD stakeholders will be important for direct feedback, and IWG-MTE noted that the groups to be involved include at least UNCCD focal points and science technology correspondents, civil society, relevant regional bodies and entities, as well as major external partners and collaborators. The independent assessment could also use available material on projects and data from external sources, when useful and as feasible.

Some IWG-MTE members were concerned about the validation of the findings of the independent assessment. It was agreed that any challenges of potentially inadequate data for credible analysis will be clearly identified in the report.

The evaluation team took note of the feedback provided by the IWG-MTE. As their first product, the consultants will prepare an inception report, which will specify the scope, approach and questions of the independent assessment, taking into account the feedback received. That report will also detail the evaluation methodology (information sources and types of collecting the information) and present the planned schedule. It will be shared with the IWG-MTE in March, for any further feedback. In the following months, the evaluation team will carry out data collection and analysis, with the aim to come up with a draft report before the October meeting of the group. To ensure that the work is on the right track, already in June the consultants will share with the IWG-MTE a summary of their emerging findings, which will be discussed in an online meeting close to the end of June.

The evaluation team will conduct its analysis and prepare its conclusions and recommendations impartially and independently. The resulting independent assessment report is expected to present evidence-based findings against the evaluation criteria and, based on the findings, conclusions and recommendations for possible future action. It will provide the basis for the consideration of the IWG-



MTE of its own report to the COP. The conclusions and recommendations of the independent assessment will be subjected to participatory consultations that will give the IWG-MTE first-hand feedback of how the broader UNCCD audience sees them.

UNCCD processes that are linked with the midterm evaluation

There are several UNCCD processes that are closely interlinked with the topics of the midterm evaluation. To ensure that at COP 16 Parties can build their decision-making on a coherent, clear basis, the secretariat aims to ensure continuous communication, information-sharing and interaction among the interlinked processes. The processes that were considered at the IWG-MTE meeting are the following:

- The financial needs assessment of the GM
- The review of the Science-Policy Interface
- The Gender Action Plan evaluation
- The study on land restoration commitments, and
- The intergovernmental working group on drought

In the IWG-MTE meeting, the UNCCD staff presented the main features of each process, with specific attention to how they relate to the midterm evaluation. Some of them, most notably the Gender Action Plan evaluation, have content that is identical with parts of the midterm evaluation, and the secretariat will aim to join these processes for mutual cost-efficiency and enriched substantive considerations.

The secretariat will continue to inform the IWG-MTE on relevant developments in the mentioned processes. A joint meeting with the IWG on drought and a presentation from the evaluator for the Science-Policy Interface review are planned.

Tasks of the intergovernmental working group

According to its terms of reference, the IWG-MTE is assigned five key tasks in overseeing the midterm evaluation process. Below are the tasks and the action taken at the first meeting.

(1) **Plan and schedule:** The IWG-MTE will agree on a detailed plan and schedule for the midterm evaluation process, including the preparation of the independent assessment, a consultative process and the preparation of a report for the COP, as well as its own organization of work and schedule.

At its first meeting, the IWG-MTE considered the planned schedule of the independent assessment and on that basis, its own timetable. Many details of its work will be decided only when the assessment report becomes available, but to start with, the group agreed on the following provisional schedule:

15 March:	Inception report (independent assessment) for comments: Evaluation questions, stakeholders to be involved etc
Around mid-June:	Summary of emerging findings
By end of June:	Online meeting on emerging findings
By 22 September:	Draft independent assessment report
9-13 October:	CRIC 21; launching of the participatory consultations
14-16 October:	Second IWG meeting
April-May 2024:	Third IWG meeting



(2) **Quality of the independent assessment:** The IWG-MTE will ensure that the first main component of the evaluation, the independent assessment, is responsive to the objectives and criteria of the evaluation and conducted according to high evaluation standards, and that the team of external evaluation experts preparing that assessment observes geographical and gender balance.

During the first meeting and its immediate follow-up, the group provided comments on the independent assessment scope and focus, the stakeholders to be involved, and the methodology and tools. In the upcoming online meeting in June, it will make a “reality check” of the emerging findings, and in the second meeting in October, it will complete its check of factual accuracy.

(3) **Participatory consultations:** The IWG-MTE will advise the secretariat on the organization of the participatory consultation on the conclusions and recommendations of the independent assessment, to be conducted during an inter-sessional meeting of the CRIC.

The group discussed this task in detail. According to the COP decision on the terms of reference of the midterm evaluation, these consultations are to be organised during the CRIC, but they are not included in the programme of work for the CRIC.¹ This leaves room for differing interpretations. The secretariat proposes that the CRIC has a very brief agenda item for providing Parties with an update on the midterm evaluation process (no plenary debate, only a briefing), during which also the participatory consultations would be launched. The actual consultations would not be part of the CRIC sessions but would be instead held as a specific event during one evening, and/or through a call for feedback or online meetings after the CRIC. The IWG-MTE looks forward to the guidance from the CRIC Bureau on this matter.

(4) and (5) **Report and draft decision to COP 16:** The IWG-MTE will prepare, with the support of the secretariat, a draft report including the findings of the independent assessment, conclusions and recommendations, as well as preliminary observations of the group; and the IWG-MTE will prepare a report on the findings and recommendations of the midterm evaluation and submit it for the consideration of COP 16.

The midterm evaluation process will produce three main documents:

The independent assessment report will contain factual, evidence-based findings on the progress made in implementing the Strategic Framework and achieving its five strategic objectives, as well as conclusions and recommendations deriving from the findings. The report is prepared by the external evaluation team and its conclusions and recommendations will be considered through a participatory process. The intergovernmental working group will use the independent assessment report as the basis for its considerations.

The report of the intergovernmental working group will be the official document to be submitted to COP 16. This report will present the strategic/political considerations of the intergovernmental working group: as it considers the independent assessment and the feedback received through participatory consultations, it may agree, for example, that some findings need to be particularly emphasized, or that some recommendations by the evaluation team need to be modified. The report to the COP will present the group’s view of the progress made and the next steps to be taken in the implementation of the Strategic Framework. While the independent assessment report may be a long, detailed document, the report of the working group will be more concise and focused.

The COP 16 draft decision, currently with a working title “Enhancing the implementation of the Strategic Framework“, will be built directly on the main recommendations of the report of the

¹ For further detail, please consult decisions 7/COP.15 and 14/COP.15



intergovernmental working group. It translates the key content of that report into a policy and action-oriented decision text.

At the first meeting, the IWG MTE considered briefly the preparation of the report and a draft decision for COP 16. As the substantive elements are yet to come, this part of the IWG work will be looked at in detail in the forthcoming meetings.



Annex 1: IWG MTE members and observers

Group, country	Name, position
Africa: Algeria	Mme. Saliha Fortas, UNCCD Focal Point, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, General Directorate of Forests
Africa: Angola	Mr. Luis Domingos Constantino, Head of Department, Ministry of Environment
Africa: Namibia	Ms. Kauna B Schroder, Principal Project Coordinator, Ministry of Environment and Tourism
Asia: China	Ms. WANG Hua, Director, UNCCD Implementation of International Cooperation, National Forestry and Grassland Administration
Asia: Republic of Korea	Mr. Jungyo Lee, Program Officer, Korea Forest Service
Asia: Cook Islands	Ms. Hayley Weeks, Environmental Partnerships Manager, National Environment Service
LAC: Mexico	Ms. Valeria Cruz- Directora de medioambiente y cambio climático Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores
LAC: Peru	Ms. Cristina Rodriguez -Directora de Adaptación al Cambio Climático y Desertificación, Ministerio del ambiente
LAC: Argentina	Mr. Pablo Viegas -Asesor Tecnico, Ministerio de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible
CEE: Czech Republic	Mr. Premysl Stepanek, Head of Multilateral Relations Unit Department of International Relations, Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic
CEE: Montenegro	Ms. Biljana Kilibarda, Adviser, Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism
CEE: Slovakia	Ms. Beata Houskova, Senior scientific worker, National Agricultural and Food Centre, Soil Science and Conservation Research Institute/ Department of Soil Science and Pedogeography
WEOG: Australia	Ms. Fleur Downard, Director, International Environment Policy Section, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
WEOG: EU	Mr. Daniel Van Assche, International Relations Officer, Directorate General for Environment at European Commission
WEOG: USA	Mr. Patrick Reilly, Foreign Affairs Officer Office of Conservation and Water, Department of State Bureau of Oceans, Environment, and Scientific Affairs

Observers

Affiliation	Name, position
IGO: FAO	Ms Vera Boerger, Senior Land and Water Officer in the Land and Water Division
IGO: GEF	Mr. Ulrich Apel, Senior Environmental Specialist
IGO: IUCN	Mr. Chris Magero, Senior Programme Officer, Forest and Grassland Team
SPI	Prof. Ahmed Abd El-Ati Ahmed, Professor of Agronomy, Desert Research Center (DRC), Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation
SPI	Prof. Hamid Čustović, Professor, Faculty of Agriculture and Food Science Institute of Soil Science, University of Sarajevo
CSO	Ms. Manon Albagnac, Chargée de projet Sahel - Désertification, Coordinatrice du ReSaD, Centre d'actions et de réalisations internationales (CARI)
CSO	Mr. Charles Oyeoussi Balogoun, President, Afrique Esperance



Annex 2 : Agenda of the first IWG MTE meeting

Monday 13 February

- 11:00 Opening of the meeting
 Ms. Andrea Meza, UNCCD Deputy Executive Secretary
- Selection of the co-chairs
- Introductions
1. Adoption of the agenda
2. Overview of the midterm evaluation
- 13:00 Lunch break*
- 14:30 3. UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework: content and
 monitoring
- 16:00 Coffee break*
- 16:30 Continuation of the discussion on the Strategic Framework as
 the subject of the midterm evaluation
- 17:30 Closing of day 1

Tuesday 14 February

- 09:30 4. Preparation of the independent assessment
- The evaluation criteria
 - Methodological approach
 - Timeline
- 11:00 Coffee break*
- 11:30 Continuation of the consideration of the preparation of the
 independent assessment
- 13:00 Lunch break*
- 14:00 5. Parallel UNCCD processes and their links with the midterm
 evaluation
- 15:30 Coffee break*
- 16:00 Continuation of the consideration of parallel UNCCD processes
 and their links with the midterm evaluation
- 17:30 Closing of day 2



Wednesday 15 February

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| 09:30 | 6. Programme of work of the intergovernmental working group:
Main tasks |
| <i>11:00</i> | <i>Coffee break</i> |
| 11:30 | Programme of work of the intergovernmental working group:
Organization of the participatory consultative process |
| <i>13:00</i> | <i>Lunch break</i> |
| 14:30 | Programme of work of the intergovernmental working group:
Schedule |
| <i>15:30</i> | <i>Coffee break</i> |
| 16:00 | Wrap-up and next steps |
| 16:30 | Closing of the meeting |