

5th Meeting of the Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) on Drought

MEETING SUMMARY

Dates: March 18–20, 2024

Venue: La Serena, Chile

Working language: English

Working hours: Monday, March 18, 2024, 09:30–13:00, 14:30–19:00 (GMT+5)
Tuesday, March 19, 2024, 09:00–13:00, 14:30–19:00 (GMT+5)
Wednesday, March 20, 2024, 09:00–13:00, 14:30–19:00 (GMT+5)

Item 1 Opening

- 1.1) **Opening remarks:** On behalf of the UNCCD, Deputy Executive Secretary Ms. Andrea Meza delivered the opening remarks to the 5th IWG meeting, followed by Mrs. H.E Ms. Ignacia Fernandez, Vice Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Chile. The First Deputy Minister for Agriculture of the Republic of Chile gave an overview of ongoing and current drought challenges of the country and highlighted various efforts to combat desertification and the lack of water across multiple sectors. Mr. Michael Brüntrup (IDOS, Germany) and Hon. Mr. Alfred Prospere (Minister of Agriculture, Saint Lucia) addressed the working group and introduced the new members Catharine Gamper (OECD), Robert Stefanski (WMO) and Yriz Silva (Brazil). Mr. Daniel Tsegai, Programme Officer at the UNCCD Secretariat, presented the progress made so far, recapped prior meetings and set the stage for the current ongoing discussion.
- 1.2) Next, all participants of the IWG shared **expectations** from the meeting. This included the following:
 - We need to structure the remaining months very precisely, making best use of the remaining days.
 - We should remind ourselves that we are all technical people here working with principals behind us and preparing a document for politicians to decide upon. However, it is crucial to not only think about paper, but how to generate the necessary political momentum and commitment.
 - Very few politicians will read a long report (in the scope of 10.000 words), so we need a compelling story with a one-page summary.
 - We need to drop the existing categorisation (options 1-4) as it stands in order to make progress.
 - We should not reduce the options and not look into integration, but into compatibility.
 - We should look into compatibility and complementarity amongst the options.

- - Regional consultations will help countries to understand and analyse what is being proposed (Sep./Oct.), keeping in mind that other consultations beyond drought are happening in parallel.
 - We need to identify where additional research is necessary and external help is needed.
 - We should try to get Ministers on board to help in the negotiation process.
- 1.3) Later, all participants jointly adopted a slightly altered agenda and agreed on the way forward for the three-day meeting, while reassuring that flexibility should be allowed to accommodate new insights.

Item 2 Presentation and discussion of remaining options

(in order of original listing not according to agenda)

1. Finance

1.1. Innovative financing mechanisms

The various propositions under this multifaceted option were not followed-up after the 4th IWG meeting in Samarkand, with the exception of the sub-option of harmful subsidies. Mrs Di Pangraccio presented the multiple benefits for reducing drought threats by repurposing environmentally harmful subsidies; providing elements, possible institutional arrangements, a justification process, mechanism as well as a SWOT evaluation. It was pointed out that under the context of the UNCCD mandate, harmful subsidies are understood as policies and/or practices that encourage desertification, degradation and drought, and appear in the entire spectrum of economic activity. Repurposing environmentally harmful subsidies (by reform or removal) can redirect fiscal support towards land restoration and higher land productivity, which can ensure food security, job creation and the improvement of rural livelihoods.

Discussion points:

It could be considered a stand-alone option or be fully integrated into the section of innovative finance mechanisms. As it might be considered sensitive, we should be careful to not provide the negotiator an opportunity to shoot down the entire proposal. On the other hand, we have presented something that genuinely addresses fundamental root causes and could provide the financial means required to tackle drought holistically. It might be needed to present a phased approach in order to ensure continuation of change already under way in other, related global discussions. This is the evolution of the innovative finance option and it should be integrated into GM processes.

1.2. Strengthen Existing financial mechanisms

Mr. Sébastien Willemart (Belgium) presented the justification, elements, process, mechanisms, institutional arrangements and evaluation of options under existing financial mechanisms. Hereby two general directions were identified. On the one hand a draft COP decision in favour of enhancing the GEF's means and allocation priorities for proactive drought management. Central elements include amending the name of the Land

Degradation Focal Area to include “drought” and increasing resources for it; modify its allocation formula (favouring countries more vulnerable to drought and least developed countries); improve its programmatic directions; incentivize the pooling of joint resources; create an Integrated Program aimed at capitalizing on the synergies with other environmental issues and consider adapting relevant result indicators. On the other hand, a draft COP Decision that would provide guidance to UNCCD’s Global Mechanism (GM) so it can support countries by establishing Project Preparation Partnerships to accelerate the preparation of investment-ready and donor-tailored projects, help identifying the financing needs and opportunities for drought risk reduction and resilience-building activities including the identification of returns from various financing instruments, both traditional and innovative.

Discussion points:

A set of discussion points were triggered. It was clarified that, based on the model of the 11 integrated programs in GEF-8, one should be dedicated to drought in GEF-9 (and beyond). The presenter explained that the option was also about amending the STAR allocation formula to make it more sensitive to drought, and so the overall country envelope for recipients could be getting bigger. He argued that donor countries will see that drought is higher on the agenda, and that it moved higher up in the GEF portfolio. Giving priority also needs to happen in the recipient countries, which is also a consideration that is addressed through an encouragement to Parties.

Regarding the kind of volumes referred to, and whether this is sufficient to address the problem at hand, the presenter pointed out to the repartition of funds historically allocated to drought and recognized that the substantial increase expected could not be a silver bullet for all drought-related infrastructure problems globally. Asked about the innovative character of presented options that appear to be business-as-usual to some, it was clarified that the specific requests and identified result-chains had not been formulated so far. The human resources implications of the GM option were considered fundamental.

In addition, general criticism towards GEF was (too bureaucratic and slow) acknowledged, and contextualized with insights from GBF Fund reforms (one step approval and template streamlining) that are likely to be replicated to the General Trust. It was decided to incorporate the elements on ‘repurposing harmful subsidies’ to the GM option.

Various members asked to consider a more holistic finance landscape, including the World Bank, Loss & Damages Fund or GCF. (For this, the research area of the OECD could prove relevant).

2. Technical

2.1. Setting of global targets

Mrs. Caroline King-Okumu, TG-2, introduced the justification, elements, processes, mechanisms, institutional arrangements and evaluation of establishing global targets for drought resilience, as developed up until that point. While no exact targets were outlined or defined, the group agreed on the critical importance of this option. Consequently, Mr. Daniel Klein presented the way targets were found, developed and established within the

Paris Agreement in a stepwise approach: For Climate, concrete elements on the degree-celsius-benchmark (mitigation target) were agreed, however resilience or adaptation were left without a numerical framework, and for a proactive approach to drought an adaptation/resilience target is needed. The adoption ended with 10 targets over a process of two years, while the indicators are still under discussion up until today. Further, Imad Ibrahim shared what kind of compliance mechanisms/committees were established to implement the 1.5-degree target along with a voluntary reporting mechanism, whereas states need to report on the implementation and achievements of their self-set targets.

Discussion points:

The point was made that it is easier to measure preparedness on drought than on resilience to a drought itself. Targets need to be timebound and outcome oriented. It is something that most often translates into a percentage rates when it comes to land. Targets may also be used to translate a broader (qualitative) goal into more concrete targets (at a later stage). One subsequent question was: “How do you translate the global target into national targets and policies to achieve the results? What is it that makes states comply with these targets?” E.g., SDG and LDN used global target-setting in a non-binding framework with mixed results. Proactive measures along the three-pillar approach were identified as measurable means for preparedness, which will lead to resilience.

Overall, the group agreed that it should not be assumed other conventions/initiatives will remain inactive on the global target-setting. A global target should be further worked on and could be maintained as either a stand-alone option or as element of broader options. A survey on current target-setting initiatives was identified as a potential action item, with a special focus on work done by UNDRR, World Bank and UN Water, as well as UNCCD’s own existing reporting mechanisms. One member requested that an assessment of the already existing national targets, that were communicated by parties in the last UNCCD reporting exercise via the PRAIS platform should be conducted by the consultants supporting this group. Relevant national targets on drought may have been communicated on Strategic Objective 1 and Strategic Objective 3. The assessment of these targets will allow for a conclusion on their scalability and usefulness for the definition of a global target.

2.2. Develop a global work programme

The independent expert, Mrs. Caroline King-Okumu, TG-2, presented the justification, elements, processes, mechanisms, institutional arrangements and evaluation of one potential global work programme, one that sees a possible transitional route over a “relatively short space of time” from the current IWG to the newly imagined IWGP. This programme would also draw insights from across the wider relevant financing landscape, including the GCF and other sources of financial support. The proposal was work in progress and all participants agreed that it needs further refinement.

Discussion points:

At its current state of work, the global work programme was open for a number of different interpretations, therefore it was concluded that further work would be required. The nature of such a work programme was discussed, acknowledging that the term itself can refer to different things. For example, the Nairobi Work Programme, which facilitates knowledge sharing at the beginning, and later focused on the development of a framework, includes

targets versus the AFR-100, e.g., which deals with the active restoration of degraded ecological systems as regional programme and not a global one. In short, there is no universal definition of a work programme, or agreement on what it contains or how it functions. To get clear what the IWG understands and provides as an option for the COP16, Mrs. Andrea Meza was asked to present some thoughts based on her experience and insights (see blue box).

It was noted that a Global Work Programme refers to the upper scale (global) and it is implemented through national and regional drought plans. It was deemed helpful to establish such latter work programme on the three-pillar approach. If adopted by the COP, such a work programme could consist of one or multiple COP decisions (over time). The initial a COP decision (may cover the rough outline of a global work programme and additional/subsequent COP decisions may elaborate in more detail on certain elements, where further work, for example via an intersessional process, would be required. Furthermore, it was said that such a work programme needed to be tightly connected with ministerial power. It was discussed that a work programme may contain ambitious targets and that it could include a global process to assess progress and foresee provisions for national implementation, which is one of the key elements for the work programme. The global process may consist of a multi-year reporting cycle and conference at global level. In addition, it was suggested that elements for national implementation should put focus on the national drought plans, disaster risk reduction plans and ecosystem restoration goals or similar strategic policy documents, which pursue an integrated approach across different policy areas and allow to bring all relevant actors in a country together. It could include a component addressing the potential of private investment flows and early warnings for all. It was considered necessary to provide for enough flexibility for countries for the precise set up of such a tool. Different ministries will manage the process on a national level and integrate the proposed policy measures.

Furthermore, the idea of financing from all sources, private and public, international and national was deemed important. There are also some synergies to be explored between existing programmes, e.g., the global shield¹ proposal.

Flexibility and scalability were considered to be crucial components, and put into the design at an early stage. Given existing capacity constraints in many countries, consistent and thorough planning is often missing. We should advocate for the integration of water plans, hazard plans, etc. into existing drought planning, rather than having an entire drought plan by itself, which might not meet the capacities of every country to design it. The inclusion of a human-rights-based approach was proposed to deal with a variety of socio-economic impacts of drought.

Additionally, it was stated that transboundary aquifer management with joined institutions are hard to track and should not be included at this stage in order not to jeopardize the entire idea. However, a regional planning dimension should be taken into account, possibly as part of the global process. The inclusion of reactive actors should be thought of, as they provide crucial components which can strongly interact with pro-active (positively and negatively) drought management. There was agreement that in case the COP16 would decide to adopt a global work programme, it may not be possible for the COP to agree on all its required details and a further intersessional process may be needed to prepare an agreement on outstanding elements.

¹ <https://www.bmz.de/en/issues/climate-change-and-development/global-shield-against-climate-risks>
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/11/14/world-bank-group-launches-global-shield-financing-facility-to-help-developing-countries-adapt-to-climate-change>

Summary of the presentation by Andrea Meza (Deputy Executive Secretary, UNCCD):

A coherent COP decision is needed in Riyadh. The Plus 10 Conference in Barcelona can help boost the momentum towards Riyadh. The question is: What is the system below to facilitate greater traction? We all agree that this option is important, but we only have two months to get it set up. So how do we best use the remaining time?

We have the tools but what is missing is how to enhance an international system where all parties will be using the policy framework and at the same time going through the legal reforms and institutional arrangements.

Our goal is to catalyse the policy-making process on the national level. How to do this is the central question. How do we accelerate the process of putting a coherent policy framework into place?

The objective should be to set up a comprehensive international system within the UNCCD convention that would catalyze policy-making processes at the national, sub-national and regional levels for implementing proactive drought management as a tool to accelerate drought resilience action in different levels.

We need a setting of positive competition, establishing best global standards for proactive drought management policies. The drought initiative needs to go beyond the LDN initiative. The vehicle of reporting will catalyse the change, building upon [as of now 77, and increasing] National Drought Plans based on the Three-Pillar Model. Nothing on trade, transboundary dimensions or direct land-related policies should be included in the final report.

A COP 16 Decision would create such a Work Program with its main elements and principles. It would launch an IWG to discuss the details of the reporting system. For example, does it require a new vehicle (such as a Drought Resilience Communication, or can it be done by the current monitoring system) and what are the characteristics and format for the evaluation and learning process? A consequent adoption via a COP 17 decision would be required to indicate the specific elements of institutional arrangements for the monitoring and the evaluation and learning process.

Once you have these comprehensive international elements, the process and one or more than one concrete target can mobilize resources for them.

Currently, what is missing is a comprehensive framework, one that accelerates action and defines clear targets. No financing or investment will happen if such a framework does not exist. We need to create the basis for such a policy process.

3. Legally binding options

- 3.1. Adopt a legally binding Amendment to the Convention under the auspices of the Convention.
- 3.2. Adopt a Protocol or Agreement under the auspices of the Convention.

On behalf of TG-3, Mr. Bongani Simon Masuku (Eswatini) presented the definition, justification, elements, processes, mechanisms and SWOT analysis of the protocol while Mr. Daniel Roures Rego (Spain) presented the amendment to the Convention (UNCCD). While an amendment would modify the original Convention text to a certain, limited extent (by deleting, rewriting or by adding), a protocol would not imply changes to the original Convention text but rather complement it through this additional piece of writing. It would specify certain aspects, procedures and mechanisms.

Discussion points:

It was highlighted that subjective wording and a set of attributing adjectives should be avoided, such as calling this option a political instrument rather than a legal instrument, or calling Drought a ‘Pandemic’ when it does not fit with its definition. Another point of discussion was that the current version did not specify what or if compliance mechanisms were foreseen. Ratification clauses usually foresee requirements on how many parties need to sign and ratify the protocol before agreements enters into force, which makes ratification processes time consuming and may subsequently delay action on the ground.

It was questioned if there was an indication of readiness by parties to make such a legally binding commitment, or if a phased approach would be advantageous, or what happens if wording such as “as appropriate” would be used. Legally binding provisions can become voluntary for parties to implement, if wording like “as appropriate” is being used.

It was pointed out that a strength of the protocol is that it is a long-lasting commitment. But a protocol is also less granular and flexible and may require further implementing decisions. However, some of the SWOT-listed strengths also relate to other options as long as they are implemented effectively. Once again, it was highlighted that the negotiation process could be (very) expensive and require lots of human-resources, with a negation window of potentially 10-plus years. Two other forgotten weaknesses were that the concrete results in the field would take many years to be felt and that the existence of a Protocol does not guarantee more resources for its implementation, a specific GEF financing window or dedicated fund.

Mr. Bongani offered that any feedback could be sent to him directly for amendments.

Additionally, SWOT-points concerning all options came up during these discussions, and it was agreed that these should be addressed in the preamble of the final report and deleted in the individual options.

4. Non-legally binding options

- 4.1. Adopt non-legally binding decisions, political declarations or other non-legally binding instruments under the Convention.
- 4.2. Adopt non-legally binding decisions, political declarations or other non-legally binding instruments outside the Convention.

Mr. Daniel Roures Rego (Spain) presented the definitions, objectives, main elements, processes, institutional arrangements and mechanisms of the non-legally binding options. This also included a comprehensive SWOT analysis framework.

Discussion points:

Further discussion was triggered regarding whether the terms of reference actually included options that would have to be carried out in fora outside the UNCCD, such as UNEA or UNGA.

Bringing things to either of the two bodies (UNGA/UNEA) could create a situation where their decisions could have unintended and unexpected changes. On the other hand, it was pointed out that decisions of these bodies would raise attention on drought issues beyond the typical UNCCD stakeholders, which is a value addition for the drought agenda globally.

The question was raised if there were any decisions by UNEA or UNGA that had been translated into COP decisions? In fact, some examples were found where such decisions triggered national laws: The human right to water was integrated into the law of many South American countries after a UNGA decision. Frameworks on the use of plastic and mercury are currently going through adaptation processes via UNEA. But it was stated here that it had not been a COP decision.

UNEA could reinforce and amplify initiatives, creating political traction. However, several rounds of activation may be needed to see the impacts on certain agenda items. So far, there are no specific resolutions and reporting on drought to the UNGA with an annual reporting/statement. WMO offered to help get this established via a NY path.

Lastly, questions of longevity for the non-legally options were discussed, along with connectivity and scalability. Given that many countries have not yet made proactive drought management a priority, these were referring to the great awareness-raising effect of such processes, even under non-legally binding terms. It was stated that the content determines how long a declaration is effective.

Item 3 Final reflections and potential ways forward

- The descriptions and respective SWOT analyses of all options except for the global work programme and the global target, were in principle endorsed by the IWG, as discussed by the group during the meeting in La Serena. Leaders of each task group agreed to incorporate the comments received during the meeting in the final versions of the respective documents.
- It was concluded that the description and SWOT analyses of the global target and global work programme require further work.

- It is important to decide what format and content the work programme is going to have in order to properly evaluate it.
- The work programme is being developed jointly by all members with the notion of a global policy framework as outlined in the discussions following the initial presentation of Andrea Meza (as requested by the IWG), the co-chairs are leading the work on the Global Work Programme.
- It was decided to continue the work on a global target option until June and then decide if it will be dropped, be self-standing option or integrated into another one.
- The summaries are to be written by the individual task groups, after that all groups will be dissolved with the exception of the global target group, which is newly composed as follows: Catharine Gamper, Martina Bussetini, Juliane Muellner, Bob Stefanski, Mark Svoboda, Charles Lange, Caroline King-Okumu and Michael Brüntrup. It remains open to interested IWG members.
- Each option should be provided with a similar number of words in the final report (approx. 1000). References are to be used as sparsely as possible, not eating up too many words. The (executive) summary should not exceed 1000 words.
- It was agreed to drop the “headlines” of the (four) different categories of options, which were used to define the different task groups (“finance”, “technical”, “legally binding” and “non legally binding”) for the final report.
- It was agreed that the wording used for the SWOT analyses should be aligned as much as possible. In addition, very dry and short textual elements describing the characteristics should be used, which would allow to describe characteristics of the different options in the same way. This would allow the reader for an easier understanding of the similarities and differences on the SWOT-elements of each option and make it easier for parties to compare the options.
- All members agreed on the need to produce a reader-friendly report, containing digestible information.
- Opinions diverted on the use of graphics. Illustrations can be helpful to understand complex interrelations, if properly produced. Due to the complexity of the subject matter, the feasibility of such comprehensive illustrations was put in question by some members of the group. It was repeated that, in line with the agreement to not rank the options, visuals that would bring any sort of hierarchy amongst the option (that would go beyond the numeric listing) should not be included.
- Regional consultations will be happening in September and regional meetings will also be initiated with Ministers to inform them about the process. In addition, a set of meetings are planed with UNEP and other UN bodies. A calendar containing the various consultation rounds and a roadmap for the upcoming COP16 will be shared shortly.
- Finally, there are different positions on how a draft decision should be handled, given that, according to the UNCCD Secretariat, how it was conducted in the first

IWG was not optimally conclusive. It was reiterated that the mandate of the IWG does not include the drafting of decisions or recommendations, but to present findings to the COP. Preparing draft decisions in preparation for the negotiations at COP16 is the prerogative of the Secretariat. Some IWG members proposed that the IWG on Drought could advise the process of drafting decisions, and the Secretariat agreed to see how to make this an inclusive process, were appropriate and as far as possible.

- The updated list of options reads as follows. (There are still ongoing discussions to reduce it to eight options):
 1. Guidance to the GM
 - include Repurposing incentives and subsidies
 2. Collaboration with the GEF
 3. Global Target
 4. Global Work Programme
 5. Amendment
 6. Protocol
 7. COP [special] decision on drought
 8. Political declaration
 9. Resolutions outside UNCCD (UNGA/UNEA)

Item 4 Online presentation by Mr. Esteban Valenzuela, the Minister for Agriculture, Chile,

- Esteban Valenzuela Van Trek, Hon. Minister of Chile, highlighted multiple dimensions on policies that Chile passed in the past years to act on drought pro-actively, including a ban of conversion of primary forest to plantations, a new research centre on dryland agriculture and new regulatory frameworks for water use in the agrarian sector, aiming at water conservation and sustainable land management.

Item 5 Closing

- The co-chairs thanked the host country, Chile, and the UNCCD Secretariat, for facilitating the meeting.
- Mrs. Andrea Meza, Deputy Executive Secretary, UNCCD, thanked the host country the hospitality and everyone for their participation.
- Mrs. Birguy Lamizana, Chief, Global Policy, Advocacy and Regional Cooperation, UNCCD, thanked all participant for their work and officially closed the meeting.

Item 6 Future considerations

- Update timelines, work modalities, deliverables and tasks ahead until the final IWG meeting are listed in the table below:

Date	Work on the Global Work Programme (GWP) option	Draft IWG report	Further considerations
By 1 April (1 week)	Further comments and textual inputs by IWG members on the initial framework proposal (in addition to today's discussion)		
By 19 April (2 weeks)	First draft on GWP shared with IWG (justification, elements, institutional arr., mechanisms, process)	Summaries of each option provided by Task Groups (led by TG leads/co-leads)	Global Target: first draft prepared by Task Groups and shared with IWG members
By 29 April (2 weeks)	Comments and textual inputs by IWG members on First draft	Comments by IWG members on Summaries	Comments by IWG members on the Global Target
By 6 May (1 week)	Second draft shared with IWG members (addressing comments on 1 st draft, and including an initial draft SWOT)	Address comments on the summaries, harmonization of language for inclusion in the Draft IWG report (by Sec./Cons.)	Address comments on the global target, incl. SWOT (Sec./Cons.)
By 13 May (1 week)	2 nd round of comments by IWG members (on Second draft, incl. on the initial draft SWOT)	Draft IWG report (including the summaries of options) shared with IWG members	(2 nd round of the comments by IWG members if needed)
By 20 May (1 week)	Third draft (addressing 2 nd round of comments), included in the Draft IWG report	Comments on the IWG report.	Address further comments and align for inclusion in Draft IWG report
22 May 2024	Virtual IWG meeting		
By 27 May 2024	All material for IWG-6 finalized (incorporating further comments, incl. from IWG virtual meeting) and shared with IWG members		
3–6 June 2024	IWG 6 meeting, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia		
By 20 June	Fourth draft of the report is disseminated to all members		
By 02 July	Deadline for second round of comments		
By 15 July	Fifth draft/final report is shared for factual errors and non-objection approval		
By 20 July	Submission to UNOG		