



First in-person meeting of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Future Strategic Framework of the Convention (IWG FSF)

Intercontinental Miramar Hotel
Panama City, Panama
06 – 08 December 2025 10h00-19h00 EST

--REPORT--

I. Welcome Remarks

The Co-chairs Ms. Rambau from the Republic of South Africa and Mr. Herrick from United States of America officially opened the meeting. The remarks were provided by the Co-chair, Ms Rambau who indicated that, the programme of work for the IWG FSF is very important as its outcomes will guide the development of the future UNCCD Strategic Framework. She requested members to not be discouraged by the fact that the programme of this work was not discussed during the recently concluded UNCCD CRIC 23 owing to political issues amongst the Regions. She reiterated that as members of the IWG, we have the responsibility to continue working as this collective while the Secretariat will continue engaging with the CEE region to resolve the issue of representation to this group.

II. Adoption of the Agenda

1. The provisional agenda was proposed to the group. With no additional items proposed, the members proceeded to formally adopt the agenda.

III. Outcomes of informal consultations during CRIC 23

1. Co-Chair Mr. Herrick provided an overview of the outcomes of the informal consultations held daily during CRIC 23 from 1 – 5 December to gather inputs and promote discussions among stakeholders on the future strategic framework of the Convention. Each of the sessions focused on the Convention's five Strategic Objectives (SOs). The informal consultations provided an open and inclusive space for Parties and observers to exchange perspectives on how the Convention can strengthen its influence on the desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) agenda over the coming decade.

2. Overall, the informal consultations revealed that all five Strategic Objectives remain relevant and fit for purpose, though there is scope for reorganization and refinement. This could include re-ordering some objectives (e.g. switching SO2 and SO3) and re-stating them within a clearer pyramid structure, progressing from outcomes at the top, to activities and solutions, and supported by cross-cutting enablers such as integrated land use planning, tenure, finance, and policy. Discussions emphasized the importance of improving coherence, sharpening focus, and strengthening implementation and communication, rather than undertaking major restructuring of the SOs. One of the strong messages from the informal consultations was the need to elevate the profile of drought



and agricultural land within the Convention's work, including clearer articulation of the links between land condition, vulnerability, and drought impacts.

- The following are the cross-cutting priorities that emerged during the informal consultations: Land tenure was widely recognized as a critical enabling factor for effective implementation, with strong support for deeper integration across objectives and for disaggregating indicators by land tenure—especially under SO1—while also retaining the value of highlighting tenure as a stand-alone issue to facilitate engagement with other conventions.
- Prevention of land degradation (referred to as “Avoid” in the land degradation neutrality response hierarchy) was highlighted as offering high returns on investment, yet receiving less attention than restoration, underscoring the need to rebalance emphasis across the objectives.
- Implementation and communication were seen as areas requiring significant strengthening, including better demonstration and monitoring of positive impacts, clearer narratives around solutions, and more granular data to showcase progress at national and subnational levels.
- The need to strengthen the connection between land degradation and drought was emphasized, noting that degraded land is more susceptible to drought impacts, and that addressing land degradation can therefore play a key role in enhancing resilience.
- Other Objective-specific discussions also reinforced that:
 - SO2 requires greater emphasis on the interconnections between land degradation, drought, and their broader social and economic impacts, such as conflict, migration, poverty, stunting and nutrition, as well as health outcomes.
 - SO3 should place greater focus on monitoring the impacts of drought and the effectiveness of drought response measures, rather than on drought itself. Discussions also highlighted the need for more explicit references to nature-based solutions and water management.
 - SO4 should continue to facilitate synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements, while avoiding duplication, even as views differed on its added value.
 - Under SO5, participants converged on the need to broaden the understanding of implementation levers beyond project funding to include policy reform, subsidy repurposing, cross-compliance mechanisms, and the redirection of finance away from activities that are out of the scope of the Convention's objectives.

IV. Theory of Change approach and the development of elements of a future strategic framework of the Convention

Brief review of relevant outcomes from the IWG MTE and IWG Drought

2. Within the context of the discussions on the application of a Theory of Change (ToC), Ms. Muellner and the Co-Chair, Ms. Rambau, briefed participants on the outcomes of the previous Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) on Drought and on relevant findings and recommendations from the Midterm Evaluation (MTE) of the Convention, respectively. The first



presentation highlighted linkages between drought-related policy work, while the presentation on the MTE outcomes noted how the recommendations are directly relevant to the development of a future strategic framework.

Reviewing the mandate of the IWG FSF

3. Participants discussed the scope and mandate of the group in relation to the development of a future strategic framework. Views converged on the need for the group to operate within its existing mandate while providing forward-looking and strategic inputs. It was underlined that the group's main outcomes are identifying elements for the future strategic framework, and not the development of the framework itself.

3. Several interventions stressed the importance of clarity regarding how the group's work would feed into other future intergovernmental processes, including CRIC and COP deliberations, and how it will overlaps with other ongoing initiatives to avoid duplication of efforts and resources. The need to ensure inclusivity, transparency, and alignment with the Convention's objectives and obligations was also emphasized.

Interactive discussion and activities aimed at developing an initial version of a future vision for the Convention

4. The meeting dedicated substantial time to articulate and refining possible vision statements for the UNCCD. The IWG FSF members worked in a small groups to develop draft vision statements that could capture the Convention's long-term ambition. These drafts ranged from highly aspirational narratives focused on healthy land and human well-being, to more structured statements referencing sustainable land management, land degradation neutrality, and long-term time horizons such as 2050.

4. When the group reconvened, their drafts were reviewed collectively. The discussions focused on shaping a clear, effective long-term vision that balances inspiration with precision. Participants broadly agreed that the vision should be ambitious and forward-looking, guiding collective action while remaining accessible to non-specialists.

5. The working group emphasized the importance of recognizing interconnections among land, climate change, biodiversity, and food security. Land was seen as a central nexus for addressing multiple global challenges, and there was consensus that these linkages should be reflected in the vision. However, care was urged to preserve the UNCCD's distinctive focus on land degradation. Food security was acknowledged as an integral component already embedded within land degradation neutrality and deserving more explicit recognition.

5. The group also reflected on lessons from the other Rio Conventions, noting differences in long-term visions, theories of change, and reporting frameworks. These comparisons were intended to inform learning rather than replication, particularly given the relatively high reporting burdens under UNCCD.

6. Despite differences in wording and emphasis, participants identified strong convergence around several core elements, including healthy and sustainably managed land, resilient ecosystem services, and benefits for people and societies. They worked to streamline multiple draft visions into a clear and simple text, and refining references to climate and land-based processes. The consolidated vision statement combining the initial set of vision statements is presented in Annex III.



V. Updates on the scoping paper and background paper on financial-related aspects of the convention

Brief update on the work scoping paper

7. The senior consultants presented an update for the scoping paper, describing the contents of the initial text shared, and the framework for the succeeding sections for the group's consideration. In addition, at the request of the IWG FSF members, they presented a brief comparison of the vision statements from the Rio Conventions: UNFCCC and CBD.

Proposed background document on financial-related aspects of the Convention

6. The Global Mechanism (GM) of the UNCCD delivered a short presentation proposing the development of a separate background document on the financial-related aspects of the Convention. The main rationale for the proposal was that currently, the section on the financial-related aspects in the scoping paper is quite narrow in scope. A standalone document would also capture initial ideas from the GM to support discussions of the group. The document is proposed to focus on systemic and transformational changes in how resources are mobilized and allocated. Its main elements would include a financial needs assessment, an analysis of the limitations of existing mechanisms, and action areas across different sectors (i.e. domestic, bilateral, multilateral, private, and blended finance), with emphasis on policy coherence and incentive-based mechanisms.

VI. Practical matters and communication to the COP Bureau President


8. Practical matters related to collaboration and documentation were also discussed. Several members raised challenges related to accessing shared documents and collaboration platforms. The secretariat committed to resolving access issues, ensuring that the dedicated MS teams channel created for the group is easily accessible by each member.

7. The group also discussed the approach and arrangements for consultations with regional groups. It was agreed that regional Chairs would lead consultations within their regions supported by the IWG members in that region, with the secretariat compiling and synthesizing the input received, especially with the plan to share the initial vision statement to the regions for their further feedback.

9. During the meeting, the group also discussed how to address concerns related to the absence of representation from one regional group. The impact of this issue, which resulted in the non-approval of the agenda item on the IWG FSF during CRIC 23, was particularly concerning for all members. Nonetheless, the group emphasized the importance of remaining faithful to its mandate and continuing its work to deliver a final report by COP 17, as requested by decision 4/COP.16. The co-chairs drafted a letter to the COP Presidency to be communicated to reiterate the importance of regional balance as stipulated by Parties at COP16. Suggestions from Group members were incorporated and were requested to indicate by 17 December if they would support sending the letter on behalf of the entire group. In the absence of consensus, the co-chairs indicated that they may independently send a letter signed only by the co-chairs.



Annex I: Meeting Agenda

 United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification	REFERENCE:	IWG FSF 1 st in person meeting		
	CIRCULATION TO:	IWG FSF Members	COMPILED BY:	UNCCD Secretariat
DOCUMENT TYPE:	MEETING DRAFT AGENDA –			
TITLE:	First in person meeting of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Future Strategic Framework			

VENUE: Intercontinental Hotel Miramar – Salon Miramar

TIME: 10h00 – 18h00

CHAIRPERSON: Thizwi Rambau and Jeff Herrick

SECRETARIAT: UNCCD Secretariat

NO.	TIME	ITEM	PRESENTER	PURPOSE
DAY 1				
1.	10:00– 10:15	Welcome of the participants and adoption of the agenda	co-Chairs	To provide official opening and adoption of the agenda
2.	10:15 – 11:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elements emanated from the CRIC 23 session (tbc) 10. - <i>Informal consultations with Parties in the margins of CRIC 23 and beyond</i> 	co-Chairs	To reflect on critical aspects emanating from the consultations and to come up with the road map on how Regions will be consulted
11:30 – 11:45 Coffee Break and Group photo				
.	11:45 – 13:00	- <i>CRIC 23 session</i>	co-Chairs / UNCCD secretariat	



NO.	TIME	ITEM	PRESENTER	PURPOSE
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Informal consultations with Parties in the margins of CRIC 23 and beyond</i>		To reflect on critical aspects emanating from the consultations and to come up with the road map on how Regions will be consulted
13:00 – 14:30 LUNCH				
3.	14h00 – 16h00 –4:00 PM	Informal facilitated discussion on the Theory of Change <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>How can the convention influence the agenda on DLDD over the next 10 years?</i>- <i>What are the different levers that help the convention do that?</i>	co-Chairs	Discussion session on the two main questions raised. This is intended to help the group reflect on the past achievements and future directions that the Convention can take
16h00 – 16h15 Coffee Break				
	14h00 -16h45	Informal facilitated discussion on the Theory of Change (cont..) <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>How can the convention influence the agenda on DLDD over the next 10 years?</i>- <i>What are the different levers that help the convention do that?</i>	co-Chairs	Discussion session on the two main questions raised. This is intended to help the group reflect on the past achievements and future directions that the Convention can take
4.	17h00 -18h00	Overview of relevant work from outcomes/recommendations from the IWG MTE and IWG Drought <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Identify the most important recommendations of the MTE</i>- <i>IWG on Drought</i>	Ms. Juliane Muellner and Ms. Thizwi Rambau	Review and reflect on the outcomes from the two previous IWGs and how these can be integrated in the work of the IWG FSF



NO.	TIME	ITEM	PRESENTER	PURPOSE
DAY 2				
	10h00 -11h30	Overview of relevant work - Outcomes/recommendations from the IWG MTE and IWG Drought (<i>cont....</i>) - <i>Identify the most important recommendations of the MTE</i>	co-Chairs /	Review and reflect on the outcomes from the two previous IWGs and how these can be integrated in the work of the IWG FSF
11h00 to 11: 45 Coffee Break				
5.	11h00 -13h00	Review of the strategic objectives of the Convention - <i>Are the strategic objectives fit for purpose and are they still relevant for the future strategy of the Convention</i>	co-Chairs	With the preliminary findings from Mid-Term Evaluation, reflect on and discuss more broadly the relevance of the existing strategic objectives as the Convention develops its future strategic framework.
1:00 PM – 2:30 PM LUNCH				
	14h30 -16h00	Review of the strategic objectives of the Convention (<i>cont...</i>) - <i>Are the strategic objectives fit for purpose and are they still relevant for the future strategy of the Convention</i>	co-Chairs	With the preliminary findings from the assessment of the Mid-Term Evaluation as one of the background documents, reflect on and more broadly discuss the relevance of the existing strategic objectives as the Convention develops its future strategic framework.
16h00-16h30 Coffee Break				
6.	16h00-18h00	Continue the discussion on the scoping paper - Feedback on initial key findings report submitted:	UNCCD secretariat	Provide reflections on initial findings of the scoping paper document shared with the group on 26 Nov, and undertake discussions on the other



NO.	TIME	ITEM	PRESENTER	PURPOSE
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Nature and Scope ii. Utilization and implementation of targets - Presentation on next sections of the scoping paper, which may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Institutional arrangements (including arrangements for science to inform policy-making) ii. Compliance mechanisms iii. Monitoring and reporting systems 		sections of the document based on the presentation that will be delivered by the senior consultants
DAY 3				
7.	10h00 -11h30	Discussion on the financial-related aspects in the Convention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Presentation of the GM with an initial idea of tabling a separate background paper to inform the discussions of the group</i> 	GM	Review and reflect on the initial ideas presented by the GM for the financial-related aspects and
		Consider discussion on LDN monitoring		
11h30-11h45 Coffee Break				
8.	11h45 – 13h00	Housekeeping issues for the 2 nd meeting and other potential online meetings	UNCCD secretariat	
13h00 lunch and departure				



Annex II. Meeting participants

IWG FSF Members:

Name		Contact details
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6.	Jeffrey Herrick	Independent Scientist affiliated with the University of Colorado and New Mexico State University email: jhlandhealth@gmail.com
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9.	Thizwilondi Rambau	Director: Land Degradation and Desertification UNCCD National Focal Point Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment Pretoria, South Africa email: tsrambau@environment.gov.za; thizwirambau@gmail.com
10.	Emmanuel Seck	Directeur Exécutif GNDR Global Board Chair Dakar, Senegal email: emmanuel.seck@endaenergie.org; emmanuel.seck@gmail.com



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13.	Ahmed Abdelati Ahmed Ali	Professor of Agronomy Desert Research Center (DRC) 1 Mathaf El-Matarya St., El-Matareya 11753 Cairo - Egypt email: unccd.egypt@gmail.com ; dr.abdelati@gmail.com

UNCCD secretariat:

1	Johns Muleso Kharika	Chief, STI Unit
2	Sara Minelli	Programme Officer, STI Unit
3	Olga Andreeva	Programme Officer Scientific Affairs, STI Unit, CST secretary
4	Coleen Carranza	Associate Programme Officer, STI Unit
5	Pablo Muñoz	Programme Management Officer, GM
6	Barron Orr	Chief Scientist, UNCCD
7	Etedy Njoroge	Consultant, STI Unit
8	Edgar Fernandez	Consultant
9	Felipe De Leon	Consultant



Annex III: Consolidated vision statement developed during the first meeting

A world where healthy and sustainably managed land enhances resilient and inclusive human well-being and food security, ecosystem services and enables societies to cope with drought and other growing pressures on land.