



**First online meeting of the Intergovernmental Working Group for the Future Strategic Framework on the Convention (IWG FSF)**

**14 October 2025**

**13h00-16h00 CEST via Zoom**

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**--REPORT--**

**I. Welcoming Remarks and Introductions**

1. On behalf of the UNCCD secretariat, the Chief of the Science, Technology, and Innovation unit, Johns Muleso Kharika, warmly welcomed all members to the inaugural meeting of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Future Strategic Framework (IWG FSF) of the Convention, which was held online via Zoom. He expressed appreciation for the IWG FSF members' time and dedication, especially in light of competing responsibilities and commitments. The delays in launching the IWG FSF due to challenges related to the nominations in one of the regions was acknowledged. Mr. Kharika underscored the significance of this first meeting in laying the groundwork for the group's future work and emphasized the importance of moving forward collectively to fulfill the mandate set by decision 4/COP.16. He reaffirmed the Secretariat's commitment to supporting the IWG FSF throughout the process and thanked participants once again for their service to the Convention and its vital mission.
  
2. A round of introductions followed the opening speech where each of the attendees was given the time to introduce themselves. The IWG FSF members noted their enthusiasm for the first online meeting but few highlighted that an in-person meeting as previously planned for in Bonn would have been most preferable, as it would have provided better opportunities for interaction and deliberations among the group.



## **II. Brief presentation on the Terms of Reference of the IWG, key outputs, and proposed schedule of meetings, including input to be provided to CRIC 23**

3. The secretariat delivered a presentation covering the background information, expected outcomes, timeline and deadlines for the IWG relating to the official document to be submitted to the 23rd intersessional session of Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 23) in Panama. The presentation touched upon the Terms of Reference of the IWG FSF,<sup>1</sup> listing the key outputs as mandated by the COP 16 decisions.
4. During the group's discussion after the presentation, it was agreed that two additional online meetings would be convened prior to CRIC 23. The second online meeting, suggested for either 30 October or 6 November 2025, is foreseen to continue discussions on the assessment of indicators initiated during the first meeting, present the current status of the scoping paper, and initiate focused deliberations around its development. The third online meeting, suggested for 11 November 2025, will focus on concluding initial discussions and identifying key substantive inputs for submission to CRIC 23. To finalize the date of the second meeting, the secretariat will consult the group through an online poll to determine the most suitable date.
5. The first in-person meeting of the group is planned back-to-back with CRIC 23 in Panama City, Panama from 6 to 8 December 2025. The meeting will focus on the outcomes of the session on the IWG FSF during CRIC 23, advance deliberations on the scoping paper and address other substantive issues identified during the virtual sessions, including assessment of current indicators for monitoring. Two additional in-person meetings are also scheduled to take place in Bonn in March and May 2026.
6. In light of the limited time between the online meetings and CRIC 23, the IWG FSF members discussed and expressed concerns about the feasibility of producing a comprehensive and credible official document within the established deadline. It was emphasized that it is important for the report of the IWG to include elements relating to key challenges and gaps in the Convention to facilitate meaningful dialogue among Parties at CRIC 23.
7. The members of the IWG FSF decided that the report will be a procedural document that will record the evolution of the IWG from COP 16 to CRIC 23, and will include addenda, containing substantive outcomes from online meetings, as well as elements from the scoping paper and the indicator assessment. The main report will be translated into all UN official languages, while the addenda, which can be submitted to the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) at a later date, will be available in English only. The group decided to develop addenda to the official document rather than submit a Conference Room Paper (CRP). Although a CRP allows more time for preparation, it

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2025-05/ToR%20IWG%20FSF%20amended%20after%20COP%20Buro.pdf>



is generally considered as a working paper and does not carry the same status as the addenda which are recognized as part of the official document.

8. The group reviewed the procedural requirements for submitting an official document to CRIC 23. Negotiated as a late-slotted document, the deadline for submission to UNOG was confirmed for 27 October 2025. In order to comply with the deadline, the secretariat will circulate a draft of the document by 20 October 2025 for comments within the group. Their feedback to the secretariat will be due by 26 October 2025. The finalization of the document with the GBLA unit of the secretariat will be undertaken on 27 October 2025, followed by the submission to UNOG on the same date.
9. In relation to the delays in commencing the work of the IWG FSF, a few of the members inquired about the course of action to be taken should the issue of the EEG nomination remain unresolved. The inquiries were raised in relation to the communication from the EEG regional Chair to the members of the IWG FSF, indicating that one Party had expressed the view that the IWG FSF was not legitimate. In response, the secretariat informed the group that, in such a circumstance, the matter would be referred to the COP Bureau for deliberation on the appropriate way forward.

### **III. Selection of IWG FSF co-chairs**

10. As stipulated in Terms of Reference of the IWG FSF, two co-Chairs shall be selected by the group from its members on its first meeting – one co-Chair will come from Party representatives and the other from the non-Party technical members. The IWG FSF members nominated Mrs. Thizwilondi Rambau as one from Party representatives and Mr. Jeff Herrick (independent scientist) from the non-Party technical members. The nominees took the floor afterwards and accepted the nominations as co-Chairs.
11. One of the co-Chairs Mr. One of the co-Chairs, Mr. Jeff Herrick proceeded to facilitate the rest of the meeting, taking over the role from the secretariat.

### **Preliminary results from the assessment of current indicators**

12. The secretariat introduced the ongoing work on the assessment of current indicators for national reporting on the strategic objectives of the 2018–2030 UNCCD Strategic Framework. The assessment comprises a structured evaluation to determine the technical quality, usability, and coherence of 17 indicators in the UNCCD monitoring framework, ensuring that they remain scientifically sound, policy-relevant, and practical for national application. It was emphasized that the presentation during the meeting would provide preliminary findings from the assessment, and that the report would be finalized only after consultation with the IWG FSG and integration of their comments into the final version. The secretariat gave the floor the senior consultant, Ms. Stephanie Hodge who delivered the presentation.



13. The presentation opened with a restatement of the mandate established by decision 4/COP.16, emphasizing that the assessment serves as an evidence-based foundation for refining the post-2030 monitoring framework, identifying where stronger methodologies, clearer guidance, and capacity-building are most needed to enhance future indicator performance. Ms. Hodge clarified that while data collection was complete, the analysis remained at a preliminary stage, with results intended to guide deliberations on streamlining, coherence, and the integration of social, biophysical, and financial dimensions of land degradation neutrality (LDN). The methodology applied combines desk review, expert interviews, and two global surveys, drawing on the assessment criteria of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) and additional parameters for coherence and measurability.
14. For strategic objective 1 (SO1), the overall preliminary findings were that related indicators provide a strong scientific backbone, but require recalibrated thresholds, adaptive regionalization, and diversified modeling to better represent real land dynamics. For SO2, the interviewed experts acknowledged the value of the related indicators in maintaining a human-centered narrative. Preliminary findings underscored that measurability does not equate to understanding of the overall impact of land degradation and drought on the population, highlighting the importance of local knowledge for interpreting socio-environmental relationships. The experts further noted that the post-2030 framework should integrate livelihood diversity, tenure, food security, and migration to more accurately capture human–land interactions. SO3 was found to be strong from a policy perspective – owing to its alignment with the Sendai Framework and SDG 13- and operationally advanced, but scientifically less mature than SO1. It offers a robust framework for tracking drought exposure and vulnerability, but further work is needed to harmonize definitions, enhance data integration, and strengthen national capacity for reporting drought losses and impacts. Preliminary findings for SO4 indicate that the related indicators concretely bridge climate, biodiversity, and land agendas. However, further efforts are needed to improve national validation and integration, and to align reporting cycles and indicator definitions across the Rio Conventions. SO5 shows clear institutional progress, with standardized, transparent, and operational finance indicators that credibly track and report resource and finance flows linked to UNCCD implementation.
15. In closing the presentation, Ms. Hodge summarized cross-cutting preliminary findings across all SOs. Confidence was highest in SO1, SO3, and SO4 due to their scientific maturity and conceptual clarity, while SO2 and SO5 required further refinement to improve causal logic and closer alignment with nationally-driven outcome indicators. The concept of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) was highlighted as an effective political and policy bridge among the Rio Conventions, harmonizing degradation and restoration narratives. The preliminary results presented reaffirmed the UNCCD indicator framework as a credible and technically sound foundation for future



monitoring. SO1 was recognized as the most mature and scientifically grounded, while SO2 and SO3 were evolving toward better integration of social and resilience dimensions. SO4 stood out for its capacity to unify climate and biodiversity agendas, and SO5 demonstrated significant institutional advancement in financial transparency.

16. The IWG FSF members thanked Ms. Hodge for her work, and then raised their feedbacks and reflections on the preliminary findings presented.
17. One member raised that the current application of the “one-out-all-out” principle under SO1 does not adequately capture land improvement trends. It was noted that SDG indicator 15.3.1 measures only the proportion of degraded land, whereas the broader concept of LDN requires assessment of both degradation and recovery. The group highlighted the need to recalibrate SO1 indicators to better reflect positive change and to ensure stronger integration of LDN across other strategic objectives.
18. Another member emphasized the importance of more comprehensively capturing the economic, environmental, and social benefits of LDN under SO 2, beyond water availability. The member also highlighted the need to account for key drivers of land degradation, such as mining activities in Africa.
19. The importance of harmonizing the UNCCD’s indicator framework with those of the other Rio Conventions was highlighted to enhance coherence and optimize resource efficiency. It was suggested that, where overlap exists—particularly concerning ecosystem health and soil carbon stocks—methodologies be aligned to avoid duplication. Some members proposed exploring additional or alternative indicators, such as soil moisture, particularly to address sensitivity gaps in dryland and hyper-arid contexts.
20. The group recognized the need for indicators that are not only scientifically sound but also decision-useful at the national and local levels. Members underlined that improved indicators alone are insufficient without accompanying measures to strengthen capacity building, technical assistance, institutional coordination, and knowledge exchange. The importance of ensuring that indicators remain adaptable to national contexts was repeatedly emphasized. It was also suggested to distinguish between short-, medium-, and long-term indicators to allow progressive implementation and meaningful tracking of environmental changes.
21. Rather than replacing the existing global indicators for SO1 up to SO5 , it may be more effective to strengthen their uptake and implementation at national and subnational levels. The indicators should be assessed in terms of their ability to measure ongoing processes, not just final states, toward shared goals. Discussions could therefore distinguish between process, status, and resilience measurements and their interrelations. It would also be useful to identify “systemic” indicators—possibly from the existing set—that can pave the way for implementing others requiring longer



timeframes, thereby addressing data and sequencing challenges across short-, medium-, and long-term timeframes.

22. It was acknowledged that persistent financial and technical constraints continue to limit the effective application of the current indicator framework. Thus, it was suggested that resource mobilization be strengthened under SO5 and that fewer, more achievable goals be prioritized to maintain focus and enhance implementation. Promoting synergies among the Rio Conventions was cited as an essential strategy for optimizing limited resources.
23. The group also emphasized the importance of gender-responsive indicators and the inclusion of sex-disaggregated data to strengthen the social dimension of monitoring. Members further noted that limited data availability and high acquisition costs remain barriers for many countries. It was therefore recommended that future indicators be supported by accessible, affordable, and interoperable data systems to ensure effective national reporting and analysis.

#### **IV. Next Steps**

24. The following agreements were reached during the IWG FSF meeting:
  - a. The co-Chair requested IWG FSF members to submit key points to the secretariat with brief summaries to ensure that technical ideas and nuances are captured accurately;
  - b. The draft official document to CRIC 23 will be shared by the secretariat on 20 October, for review by IWG FSF members by COB 26 October 2025;
  - c. The presentations delivered by the secretariat will be shared with the group;
  - d. The secretariat was requested to consult members on the most suitable date to hold the second online meeting of the IWG FSF – selecting between 30<sup>th</sup> October or to 6<sup>th</sup> November;
  - e. Invitation letters for the first in-person meeting, scheduled from 6-8 December 2025 in Panama, will be sent out by the secretariat in the next days.

#### **V. Closing**

25. The meeting closed with the co-Chair thanking all participants once again, expressing confidence in the progress already made in the first meeting and the potential for meaningful outcomes. He extended his best wishes and noted his anticipation for continued collaboration in the weeks ahead.



ANNEX I: Meeting Agenda

**Meeting of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Future Strategic Framework**  
**Virtual meeting via Zoom**  
**14 October 2025**  
**13:00 – 16:00 CEST**

**Provisional Agenda**

<i>Item</i>	<i>Time</i>
<b>Opening and welcome of meeting participants</b> <i>UNCCD secretariat</i>	13:00 – 13:10
<b>Round of introduction for IWG FSF members and UNCCD secretariat</b> <i>All participants</i>	13:10 – 13:45
<b>Brief presentation on the Terms of Reference of the IWG, key outputs, and proposed schedule of meetings, including input to be provided to CRIC 23</b> <i>UNCCD secretariat</i>	13:45 – 14:30
<b>Selection of IWG FSF co-Chairs</b> <i>All participants</i>	14:30 – 14:45
<b>Introduction of the preliminary assessment of indicators</b> <i>UNCCD secretariat</i>	14:45 – 16:00



## ANNEX II: Meeting Participants

### IWG FSF Members:

Member		Contact details
1.	Joanna Akrofi	Programme Management Officer Early Warning and Assessment Division (EWAD) United Nations Environment Programme Nairobi, Kenya email: joana.akrofi@un.org
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4.	Marcelo Böhlke	Minister-Counselor and Deputy Chief of Mission Embassy of Brazil, Moscow, Russia email: marbohlke@gmail.com
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9.	Jeffrey Herrick	Independent Scientist United States of America email: jhlandhealth@gmail.com
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11.	Juliane Muellner	International Relations Officer European Commission - DG Environment, Unit ENV F.3 Global Environmental Cooperation and Multilateralism Brussels, Belgium email: Juliane.MUELLNER@ec.europa.eu



12.	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
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16.	Tashi Wangdi	Programme Director Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, National Soil Services Centre of the Department of Agriculture Thimphu, Bhutan email: twangdi@moaf.gov.bt

**UNCCD Secretariat:**

1	Johns Muleso Kharika	Chief, STI Unit
2	Birguy Lamizana	Chief, GPARC Unit
3	Anja Thust	Programme Officer STI Unit, CRIC secretary
4	Louise Baker	Managing Director, GM
5	Carmen Alina-Margina	Conference Affairs Officer, GBLA
6	Sara Minelli	Programme Officer, STI Unit
7	Brian O'Connor	Geospatial Information Officer, STI Unit
8	Olga Andreeva	Programme Officer Scientific Affairs, STI Unit, CST secretary
9	Coleen Carranza	Associate Programme Officer, STI Unit
10	Lesley Otieno	Programme Assistant, STI Unit
11	Cheikh Toure	Regional Liaison Officer Africa, GPARC
12	Louisa Karika	Regional Liaison Officer Asia, GPARC
13	Nadia Dementieva	Programme Officer, GPARC
14	Pablo Muñoz	Programme Management Officer, GM
15	Milcah Ndegwa	Associate Programme Officer, GPARC
16	Aurelie Boutrou	Associate Programme Officer, CERP
17	Eneedy Njoroge	Consultant, STI Unit
18	Edgar Fernandez	Consultant
19	Stephanie Hodge	Consultant



ANNEX III : Brief presentation on the Terms of Reference of the IWG FSF, key outputs, and proposed schedule of meetings, including input to be provided to CRIC 23

MS PowerPoint slides shared as a separate file



ANNEX IV: Presentation on the assessment of current indicators

MS PowerPoint slides shared as a separate file