



**The Fifth Intersessional Meeting of the Bureau of the 16th Session of the
Committee on Science and Technology (CST16)**

Acropolis International
Montpellier, France
Meeting Room: Salle du Conseil

Date: 15 September 2023
Working Language: English
Working hours: 08:30 – 14:15

– MINUTES –

1. The Fifth Intersessional Meeting of the Bureau of the 16th Session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) was held on 15 September 2023 at Acropolis International Montpellier, France.

2. The Meeting was chaired by Mr. Jorge Luis Garcia Rodriguez, Chair of the CST who opened the meeting and presented his introductory remarks. All five CST Bureau members attended the meeting.

3. Invited by the Chair of the CST, Mr. Johns Muleso Kharika, Chief of the Science Technology and Innovation Unit of the secretariat, welcomed all participants (see Annex I) and appreciated the French Scientific Committee on Desertification (CSFD) for hosting this CST Bureau meeting.

I. Adoption of the agenda

4. The Chair of the CST invited the secretariat to introduce the provisional agenda (see Annex II). The agenda was adopted by the members of the CST Bureau without amendments.

II. Inputs from CST Bureau to the intergovernmental working group to oversee the mid-term evaluation on how science will be organized in the UNCCD in the future.

5. On request of the CST Bureau, the secretariat provided an update on the progress of the intergovernmental working group to oversee the mid-term evaluation of the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the UNCCD (IWG-MTE), including the process for provision of inputs from stakeholders including CST Bureau members.

A. Process for inputs to the mid-term evaluation

6. The secretariat informed that there are three main channels for the CST Bureau to contribute to the midterm evaluation, including:



- Interviews for the independent assessment (June-August 2023);
- Participatory consultations at the 21st session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC); and
- Direct inputs through the two CST Bureau members who are the SPI representatives serving on the IWG-MTE.

7. The secretariat thanked the CST Bureau members who provided initial inputs in an interview involving the independent evaluation team for the midterm evaluation process, held on 13 June 2023.

8. The secretariat highlighted that the envisaged next steps of the IWG-MTE:

- An independent assessment report by the consultants' team is expected to be ready before CRIC21. This report will be converted into a Conference Room Paper (CRP) for participatory consultations during the CRIC;
- Prior to CRIC plenary, the CRP will be discussed within each region in their consultations scheduled to take place on Sunday, 12 November 2023;
- At the CRIC plenary, the CRP will be discussed in a moderated session on Thursday, 16 November 2023; and
- The IWG-MTE will produce their report based in part on the CRP as a background document coupled with the results of participatory consultations and follow-up of further IWG-MTE discussions.

B. Inputs provided by the CST Bureau members

9. The CST Bureau was provided by the secretariat with a summary of the key points which were collected by the independent consultant supporting the IWG-MTE from the interview with CST Bureau members and the discussions in the earlier CST Bureau meetings. The Bureau members acknowledged what the secretariat presented and further discussed how the functions of the CST and SPI and how their activities might be improved. This included:

- maximizing the STCs participation in sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) and the work of its subsidiary bodies to ensure scientific support is possible during negotiations of any decisions which require scientific input,
- enhancing science communication pathways under the UNCCD to reduce the complexity of concepts and tools for effective use and advocacy and easier to understand national reporting,
- improving the SPI work by formalizing SPI under the UNCCD process, strengthening technical support to its work, and ensuring inclusion of social scientists and further alignment of its work with the actions of the implementation.

10. The CST Bureau recognized that the SPI review provides a process for collecting and analyzing detailed information of how the current science-policy interface approach works, and what the challenges are. In response to a CST Bureau member's request for updates on the status of the SPI it review, the secretariat clarified that the consultant is in the process of scheduling interviews with CST Bureau members, current SPI members and former SPI members.



C. Impact pathways for the independent assessment and SPI review

11. A CST Bureau member noted that some Parties are looking forward to the data from the national reports being used in support of IWG-MTE to show the impacts of the strategy.

12. A CST Bureau member highlighted two practical points regarding the achievement of the strategic objectives in the UNCCD Strategic Framework 2018-2030. First, the current framework has limited impact on national budgets, and second that current Strategic Framework lacks binding quantitative targets for measuring the impacts and progress.

13. The secretariat acknowledged the challenges of evaluating impact, acknowledging that while there is good information about commitments made by Parties, less is known about the actions being taken to achieve those commitments, and the impacts of those actions. What can be learned from national reports will be obtained through an analysis of data reported on the PRAIS platform combined with data obtained from online survey and interviews.

14. A CST Bureau member suggested the identification and description of impact pathways could be helpful for the SPI and the CST, and more broadly the COP, and could perhaps ultimately guide future investments. The secretariat responded affirmatively, noting that impact pathways would be addressed in the mid-term evaluation and SPI review.

III. CST Bureau discussions on the participation of STCs in COP16

15. The secretariat explained that the CST Chair was requested to report on the activities of CST as part of the agenda of the 13 November 2023 meeting of the COP Bureau to take place on the sidelines of CRIC21. A summary of the key outcomes of the fourth and fifth CST Bureau meetings as well as the 17th and 18th SPI meetings was then presented to the CST Bureau members for their consideration. As agreed in the last CST Bureau meeting, this included particular focus on the on the arrangements for full participation of the Science Technology Correspondents (STCs) in COP16 and intersessional sessions. After the presentation of the secretariat, the CST Chair then opened the floor for discussion.

A. Estimation of the budget support needed to cover STCs full participation at COP

16. The CST Bureau highlighted that while arrangements for supporting STCs to participate the COP16 have already been included in the host country agreement awaiting signature, a decision to normalize funding to support STCs for the whole session of follow-up COPs is needed and would require a financial analysis of STC participation in past COPS with an estimation of the incremental costs.

17. The secretariat informed the CST Bureau Members that the estimation of the incremental cost of funded STC full participation in the COP will be provided after a further analysis of the data currently in collection from the expenditure documents of the last three session of the COP.



18. The CST Bureau agreed an initial estimation of the costs of actual STCs participation in the past three COPs should be provided by the secretariat should be shared with CST Bureau members for a further discussion.

B. Improving communication with STCs and the underlying database system

19. The CST Bureau reiterated the need for an improvement of the credential updating of STCs and management of the current underlying database system so as to ensure that CST Bureau members consult and communicate effectively with the STCs in their respective regions.

20. The CST Bureau encouraged the secretariat to:

- explore how STC credentials could be regularly updated/renewed in a timely manner;
- explore technological options for a secured two-way access to the regularly updated list of STCs in a way that would give CST Bureau members access and editing privileges to enter information.

21. The CST Bureau pointed out that frequently, communications sent to National Focal Points (NFPs) which would have also benefitted the STCs, are currently not being sent to both. The CST Bureau encouraged the secretariat to explore a possible system where all communications with NFPs could be simultaneously delivered to the STCs, when and as appropriate.

22. The CST Bureau requested the secretariat to provide an update on the progress of the STCs database improvement in the CST Bureau meeting anticipated for March 2024.

IV. Review and update on issues that may benefit from future COP decisions

23. Four on-going activities that may lead to future COP decisions were introduced by the secretariat followed by discussions of the CST Bureau members.

24. The first of these activities which may lead to a future COP decision is linked to the SPI coordination activity with the Integrated Drought Management Programme (IDMP). The IDMP and its cooperating partners are responding to decision 17/COP.15 para 4 which invites the IDMP to help further work on a) drought resilience assessment indicators, b) drought early warning systems and planning, c) harmonization of drought resilience terminology and definitions, and d) coordination and interaction between the land and drought communities.

25. The second activity that may lead to future COP decision responds to decision 19/COP.15 para 13, which calls for a coherence and alignment assessment of the expanding number of approaches that may contribute to the sustainable management of land and water resources which, while not being formally recognized under the UNCCD or other intergovernmental processes, may contribute to addressing desertification/land degradation and drought and the achievement of land degradation neutrality



26. The secretariat clarified that this work, which is being led by United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS), is focused on how the expending approaches may or may not align with SLM and LDN but is not intended to evaluate or validate the effectiveness of the approaches. The expected outcomes are aimed at alignment and categorizing expending approaches with the principles of the SLM under the Convention, with a goal to guide the NPFs and project developers and penitential donors to consider the potential for incorporating these approaches within the context of SLM and LDN guiding principles.

27. The secretariat presented the formative and participatory research approach being taken by UNU-EHS, which includes a) a peer-reviewed and grey literature review, b) more than 70 key respondent interviews with experts from all regions, and c) expert workshops to bring further views where there is incoherence in the literature and/or among the contributions of experts.

28. A CST Bureau member expressed three related concerns over this approach:

- An assessment on sustainability of any practices-based approach should be determined by the outcomes rather than the intentions of practices, which are assumed in a particular definition.
- Even if the definition of a new approach is consistent with the principle of SLM or LDN under the Convention, the application and outcome of an approach depends on where and how it is applied.
- In practice, the application of an approach which, for example, seeks in principle to be inclusive and representative of the views of all stakeholders, may in practice be applied in a way that is inconsistent with social and economic values of key stakeholders such as those using and managing the land.

As a result of these expressed concerns, there is a risk that a report that is intended to be communicating alignment may be considered by readers as an endorsement of the approaches presented therein.

29. In conclusion, the same CST Bureau member underscored that while this assessment may be an academic exercise for publication in an academic journal, the outcomes may not prove relevant for a future COP decision on this topic.

30. The secretariat acknowledged the concerns and confirmed they would be relayed to the UNU-EHS research team with the aim of shaping the structure and text of the report to directly communicate what the report should and should not be used for, including provisos for these specific concerns.

31. The third activity that may lead to a future COP decision presented to the CST Bureau responds to decision 20/COP.15 para 4, which requests for the development of a supplement to the national adaptation plan (NAP) technical guidelines on promoting synergy between efforts addressing DLDD, the achievement of LDN and the process to formulate and implement national adaptation plans under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, produced in collaboration with



relevant constituted bodies under the UNFCCC as well as relevant scientific and technical partners.

32. The secretariat introduced the project, which is being led by UNU-EHS experts in climate change adaptation, noting the work will not only lead to a NAP guidelines supplement, but will also feed into the UNFCCC's UN4NAPs platform which is being actively used by countries to communicate their needs for technical support and advice on an ongoing basis, with the aim of sharing expertise and fostering collaboration among major partner organizations and realizing the synergies among them.

33. The secretariat briefed the CST Bureau on the approach and the progress being made on this project, including a) the completion of the first round of key respondent interviews, b) the compilation of useful case studies, and c) a stakeholder workshop to be held to discuss and build upon the information collected from the experts and case studies.

34. The CST Bureau acknowledged the importance of this assessment and foresaw the potential role of the UNFCCC NAP supplementary guideline to help the Parties enhance synergy between the UNCCD National Action Programme (UNCCD NAP), including LDN targets and drought plan with UNFCCC NAPs, with the aim of more uniform and integrated solutions at the national level.

35. A CST Bureau member emphasized the importance of UNCCD internal synergies and alignment of the parallel processes at national level including the UNCCD National Action Programme (NAP), LDN targets, drought national plan and reporting process.

36. The CST Bureau expressed concern that the preliminary findings of UNU-EHS suggest few Parties are currently maximizing synergies between land and climate change and biodiversity in an integrated way across these different plans, increasing the importance of the supplemental guidance under development. The Bureau members provided a few examples that may prove to be useful additional case studies and asked the secretariat to communicate these to UNU-EHS.

37. The fourth and final activity that may lead to a future COP decision presented to the CST Bureau responds to decision 20/COP.15 para 5, which requests for the development of guidelines for Parties on the design of policy options to make ecological restoration attractive in terms of financial inclusion, social protection and adaptive safety nets and contingent finance and reserve funds to support land users, especially women, youth, indigenous people, and other vulnerable groups, to reduce the additional burden caused by the added cost of land degradation driven by climate change and human induced activities and processes.

38. The secretariat presented the need for policy options designed to help Parties ensure financial inclusion and social protection are incorporated into the design of restoration projects, particularly in the context of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, noting the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land highlighted that governments lack clear options to make restoration attractive financially and socially, particularly with respect to the most vulnerable.



39. The secretariat presented a pathways approach being implemented by UNU-EHS in the development of this report, including a) the identification and analysis of case studies, b) key respondent interviews to both identify and assess potential policy options, and c) a stakeholder workshops to further discuss the topic based on the analysis of the case studies and interviews.

40. The CST Bureau acknowledged the importance of this assessment, noting the need to ensure the most vulnerable benefit from and are not harmed by restoration projects.

V. The Roster of Independent Experts of the UNCCD

41. The secretariat provided an overview of the current status and history of the Roster of Independent Experts for the UNCCD, the challenges faced by the secretariat and Parties in its maintenance and the challenges in the effective use of the roster.

42. The CST Bureau initiated discussions around the need, desirability, and financial feasibility of continuing the Roster of Experts established by the Convention Article 24 given that the Convention text was agreed prior to the advent of the Internet and online professional and research networking platforms.

43. A CST Bureau member suggested a major change in the structure of the roster of experts, recommending either one list for the entire world or a separate list for each country.

44. A CST Bureau member pointed out that the current international roster has been in stagnation/out of date and argued that resources would be better utilized by including SPI members and CST Bureau members.

45. Another CST member suggested that the process of nominating experts needs to be reexamined as someone nominated becomes non-independent and another CST Bureau member emphasized the importance of preserving a list of SPI members as a valuable resource.

46. A CST Bureau member raised that the cost of maintaining the roster of independent experts might not be worth the value it brings, and proposed consulting with regions to reassess this, highlighting the successful recruitment of the last SPI membership and the opportunity cost of updating the roster.

47. The CST Bureau members acknowledged the challenges in efficiency and effectiveness for identifying experts through the current nomination process and using and maintaining the roster system/database. They considered the advantages and disadvantages of a UNCCD-specific roster when compared with modern online research expert platforms. They also discussed the need for technical and financial resources for improvement of the current system and whether or not it would be possible to replicate the advantages provided by online research expert platforms.

48. A CST Bureau member reiterated that with the availability of the Internet and other tools in relation to independent experts, the utility and effectiveness of the roster of independent experts were being questioned and proposed to the other CST Bureau members to consult with their



respective regions to consider the possibility of a decision to be tabled in the next COP that the roster of independent experts be discontinued as a cost-saving measure.

49. The secretariat mentioned the importance of implementing decisions made in COPs and the convention text through policy directives and the fact that functioning of similar Roster of Experts under various conventions and organizations.

50. The CST Bureau recognized the need to have further exchange on this topic.

VI. Any other business

51. A CST Bureau member proposed a discussion on a proposed list of other key science and technology issues that might be discussed by the CST Bureau in upcoming meetings which might suggest the need for future COP decisions.

52. The CST Bureau agreed in principle that the remaining CST Bureau meetings to be held in the run up to COP16 include further discussion on the key issues relevant to science that may benefit from future COP decisions, including

- Maximizing the engagement of STCs, including reaching out to NFPs for budget discussions.
- Improving communication with STCs,
- Enhancing further the SPI's provision of scientific quality assurance for the GLO,
- Providing guidance on the future of the Roster of Experts,
- Providing guidance on future arrangements/pathways for the scientific review and Provision of advice on methodological matters related to reporting, and
- Exploring ways to help ensure the secretariat has the capacity and budget to support the science agenda of the UNCCD.

53. The CST Bureau members also highlighted the importance of ensuring the SPI Review process includes input from relevant experts in countries and suggested that the consultant facilitating the review should communicate with former UNCCD staff responsible for science matters as well as external people knowledgeable in IPBES and IPCC governance.

54. The CST Bureau recognized the need for consensus and broad discussion on these topics and acknowledged that budget implications and regional diversity might influence different perspectives. The CST Bureau agreed discussions on topics that might lead to future COP decisions be informed by further consultation within the respective region of each CST Bureau member.

VII. Next meeting

55. The CST Bureau requested the secretariat to make further internal coordination to explore the possibility of having a CST Bureau meeting on the margin of CRIC21 during 13-17 November 2023 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.



56. For early planning of the future work, the CST Bureau agreed tentatively to also have a CST Bureau intersessional meeting on 22 March 2024 back-to-back with the next SPI meeting in Bonn, Germany.

57. The CST Bureau requested the secretariat to further consult the CRIC Bureau for the potential need for a joint CST-CRIC Bureau Meeting.

Closing of the meeting

58. John Muleso Kharika, Chief of the Science, Technology, and Innovation Unit of the UNCCD, presented the closing remarks with gratitude to the attendees for their participation and contributions to the discussion.

59. The Chair of the CST then closed the meeting.

Annex I. List of Participants



CST BUREAU MEMBERS	UN GEOGRAPHICAL REGIONAL GROUPS¹
Jorge Luis Garcia Rodriguez, CST Chair	Latin America and Caribbean Group
Abdul Hamid, CST Vice-Chair	Asia-Pacific Group
Ahmed Abdelati, CST Vice-Chair	Africa Group
Hamid Čustović, CST Vice-Chair	Eastern Europe Group
Jeffrey E. Herrick, CST Vice-Chair	Western Europe and Others Group
UNCCD secretariat	
Johns Muleso Kharika	Science, Technology, and Innovation Unit
Barron Joseph Orr	
JIA, Xiaoxia	
Anja Thust	
Olga Andreeva	
Lawrencia Eposi	
Satu Ravola	Evaluation Office
Carmen-Alina Margina	Conference Affairs, Governing Bodies and Legal Affairs Unit
Jeroen Van Dalen	Communication, External Relations, and Partnerships Unit
Somarajan Pillai	Administrative Services Unit
Nadezda Dementieva	Global Policy, Advocacy and Regional Cooperation Unit

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¹ <https://www.un.org/dgacm/en/content/regional-groups>



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– PROVISIONAL AGENDA –

I. Adoption of the agenda

II. Inputs from CST Bureau to the intergovernmental working group oversee the midterm evaluation on how science will be organized in the UNCCD in the future.

III. Schedule and arrangements for STCs participation in COP16

IV. Review and update on issues that may benefit from future COP decisions.

V. The Roster of Independent Experts of the UNCCD

VI. Any other business

VII. Next meeting