

Capacity Building Marketplace

E-Learning

The UNCCD Process



The Secretariat

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Introduction

The permanent Secretariat of the UNCCD was established by Article 23 of the Convention. It has been located in Bonn, Germany since January 1999. In line with Article 23 of the UNCCD, the key function of the Secretariat is to service the sessions of the COP and its subsidiary bodies. This includes a multitude of tasks, ranging from the preparation of substantive documentation to logistical arrangements for the sessions. However, over time the functions of the permanent Secretariat has evolved leading to it providing inter alia more support for the facilitation of the implementation of the Convention in general and its 10 year strategy.

The ten-year Strategy specifies the mandate of the secretariat for the period 2008-2018. According to The Strategy," Successful implementation of this strategic plan requires a strengthening of the core servicing, advocacy and agenda-setting and representation functions of the UNCCD Secretariat – with commensurate capacity and resources – in order to support Parties, the COP and the subsidiary bodies of the Convention in fulfilling their respective roles. The Secretariat has a leading role to play for operational objective 1 [on advocacy, awareness raising and education] and specific outcomes of operational objectives 2 and 3 [on policy framework and science, technology and knowledge, respectively] as well as a support role in other operational objectives [on capacity building and financing and technology transfer]...".

Main functions of the secretariat

The main functions of the UNCCD Secretariat are outlined in Article 23 of the Convention. According to Article 23 the Secretariat is established;

- (a) To make arrangements for sessions of the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies established under the Convention and to provide them with services as required;
- (b) To compile and transmit reports submitted to it;
- (c) To facilitate assistance to affected developing country Parties, on request, particularly those in Africa, in the compilation and communication of information required under the Convention;

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- (d) To coordinate its activities with the secretariats of other relevant international bodies and conventions;
- (e) To enter, under the guidance of the Conference of the Parties, into such administrative and contractual arrangements as may be required for the effective discharge of its functions;
- (f) To prepare reports on the execution of its functions under this Convention and present them to the Conference of the Parties; and
- (g) To perform such other secretariat functions as may be determined by the Conference of the Parties.

As outlined above, the ten-year strategy of the UNCCD has granted the Secretariat additional mandates to play a leading role with regards operational objectives 1 [on advocacy, awareness raising and education] and specific outcomes of operational objectives 2 and 3 [on policy framework and science, technology and knowledge, respectively] as well as a support role in other operational objectives [on capacity building and financing and technology transfer].

COP 12 and the changing role of the Secretariat

Following upon the United Nations General Assembly recent adoption of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), including SDG 15 which aims to “15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss” the mandate of the UNCCD Secretariat has broadened. This is so as the Parties to the UNCCD at COP 12 which took place in Ankara, Turkey in October 2015 decided that the Secretariat should play a leading role in helping Parties to achieve SDG 15 and in particular target 15.3. They took that decision cognizant of the fact that the Convention is the only legally binding international agreement addressing the question of sustainable land management.

More specifically, the Secretariat will play a major role in helping countries to achieve target 15.3 i.e. “By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral

world.” For this target to be achieved country Parties will have to be able to set national targets, have a set of relevant and applicable indicators, and be able to monitor and evaluate their progress in achieving land degradation neutrality. The Secretariat will play a major role in supporting the Parties in these quests.

The structure of the Secretariat

The Secretariat of the UNCCD is headed by an Executive Secretary who is responsible for guiding and supervising the work of the Secretariat as well as representing it externally. The present Executive Secretary is Ms. Monique Barbut. Like all previous Executive Secretary Ms. Barbut was appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General and is accountable to that office and of course the COP which is the supreme body of the UNCCD. The Executive Secretary is also de facto Head of the Global Mechanism. The Secretariat had two previous Executive in Secretaries in the late Mr. Hama Arba Diallo (1996-2007) and Mr. Luc Gnacadja (2007-2013).

The UNCCD Secretariat has at present 4 units namely Executive Direction and Management Unit, Administrative Services; ;, External Relations Policy and Advocacy; and the Science, Technology and Implementation unit.

The Secretariat also has a liaison office at UN headquarters in New York, and two regional offices in Bangkok and Santiago de Chile for Asia and Latin America and Caribbean respectively.

The work plans and priorities of the UNCCD Secretariat

As already mentioned, the basic mandate of the UNNCD Secretariat is set out in Article 23 of the Convention. However that concrete work programme and priorities of the Secretariat are considered and determined by the COP at its regular sessions. This programme and these priorities are set in accordance with the priorities of the Convention process itself. These priorities therefore reflect the changes in the evolution of the UNCCD process.

The Staff of the UNCCD Secretariat

The UNCCD has a very small staff of approximately 50 persons comprising of professionals and general service personnel with one person at the director level, this being the Executive Secretary. However, due to the amount of work the Secretariat is expected to do and the amount of programmes it is expected to run, it is quite often forced to hire consultants and experts to assist with these tasks. Additionally, the Secretariat offer internships through which many young people contribute to its work.

Additional reading:

- i) [Text of the Convention](#)
- ii) [Decisions of the COP](#)