

E-Learning Course – The CST

**The UNCCD Process and the subsidiary
bodies of the Convention with
particular attention to the CST**

UNCCD Capacity Building Marketplace

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1. Introduction to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Desertification is a major economic, social and environmental problem of concern to many countries in all regions of the world. It is a type of land degradation where land regions become increasingly arid, typically losing bodies of water as well as vegetation and other biological species. In other words, the land taken on desert-like conditions. One of the main causes of the development of these desert-like conditions is improper human behavior which could range from deforestation and overgrazing to improper agricultural practices and land use change.

The first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The conference called on the United Nations General Assembly to establish an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to prepare a convention on desertification. This Convention (the UNCCD) was later adopted in Paris in 1994 and entered into force in 1996.

The objective of UNCCD is to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought in countries experiencing serious drought particularly in Africa. It is supported by international cooperation and partnership arrangements. Some of the general approaches used to facilitate the implementation of the Convention include;

- Adopting an integrated approach to address the physical, biological and socio-economic aspects of desertification and drought.
- Developing strategies for poverty eradication
- Promoting cooperation among all country Parties in the field of environmental protection and conservation of land and water resources.

2. History and Objectives of the Convention

Recognizing the great challenges of desertification, along with climate change and loss of biodiversity, the 1992 Rio Earth Summit called for the establishment of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Originally initiated through the United Nations Conference on Desertification (UNCOD) in 1977, and upon agreement of the UN General Assembly in December 1992 (resolution 47/188), the Convention was finally adopted in Paris on 17 June 1994 and entered into force on 26 December 1996, 90 days after the 50th ratification was received. 193 countries and the European and African Unions have ratified the Convention. The Conference of the Parties (COP), which is the Convention's supreme governing body, held its first session in October 1997 in Rome, Italy. So far, the COP has had 11 regular (the latest of which (COP 11) took place in Windhoek, Namibia September 2013) and one extraordinary session,

The goal of the Convention, as defined by its Article 2 is “to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought in countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa, through effective action at all levels, supported by international cooperation and partnership arrangements, in the framework of an integrated approach which is consistent with Agenda 21, with a view to contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in affected areas”

The Parties at COP 8 adopted the 10-Year Strategy of the UNCCD (2008-2018) which aims *“to forge a global partnership to reverse and prevent desertification/land degradation and to mitigate the effects of drought in affected areas in order to support poverty reduction and environmental sustainability”*¹. The Convention particularly addresses the arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, also known as the dry lands, where some of the most vulnerable ecosystems and peoples can be found. The parties are working together to improve the living conditions for people in dry lands, to maintain and restore land and soil productivity, and to mitigate the effects of drought. The UNCCD is particularly committed to a bottom-up approach, encouraging the participation of local people in combating desertification and land degradation², and in mitigating the effects of drought

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http://www.unccd.int/Lists/SiteDocumentLibrary/actionProgrammes/NAP_alignment_CRIC_COP8_presentation_3-eng.pdf

² What's 17 June?

As the dynamics of land, climate and biodiversity are intimately connected, the UNCCD collaborates closely with the other two Rio Conventions; i.e., the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to meet these complex challenges with an integrated approach focusing on exploiting the natural synergies that exist within these processes.

3. The Institutions/Bodies of the UNCCD

The general institutional structure of the UNCCD, is outlined Articles 22 – 25 of the Convention itself. These institutional arrangements are briefly described below.

The Secretariat

The secretariat, located in Germany since January 1999, services the COP, its subsidiary bodies and their Bureaus, as established under the Convention. This includes a multitude of tasks, ranging from the preparation of substantive documentation to logistical arrangements for the sessions and meetings of these bodies.

The Global Mechanism

The Global Mechanism serves the UNCCD process by promoting actions leading to the mobilization and channelling of substantial financial resources, including for the transfer of technology, on a grant basis, and/or on concessional or other terms, to affected developing country Parties.

The Conference of the Parties (COP)

The COP is the supreme decision-making body, which takes decisions as regard the entire process of the Convention. It is responsible for regularly reviewing the implementation of the Convention and the functioning of its institutional arrangements. One of the main functions of the COP is to review the progress reports submitted by the Parties and make recommendations for further actions. It also has the power to make amendments to the Convention including the adoption of new annexes, such as additional regional implementation annexes. The COP therefore guides the Convention taking into consideration changing circumstance To assist the COP, the Convention has subsidiary bodies and allows the COP to establish additional ones if necessary³.

The Bureau of the COP is comprised of a President and nine Vice-presidents, one of them doubling as Rapporteur). They are elected from among the representatives of the Parties present at the COP session. A Chair of the Committee of the Whole (CoW), if such a committee is established for that session, acts as ex-officio member of the COP Bureau but only for the session at which that CoW was established.

Chairs for the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) and the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) are also elected by the COP.

³ <http://www.unccd.int/en/about-the-convention/the-bodies/the-cop/Pages/default.aspx>

The Subsidiary Bodies (CRIC, CST)

Two subsidiary bodies of the COP have been established to support its work. They are the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) and the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC).

Each of the subsidiary bodies (CST & CRIC) elects a Bureau comprising of a Chairperson and several Vice-chairpersons. In each case one of the Vice-chairpersons acts as rapporteur.

The Committee on Science and Technology (CST)

The CST has been established to provide the COP with information and advice on scientific and technological matters relating to combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought. It is assigned various advisory functions, including providing data and other information, to perform research and review as well as for technology and evaluation⁴. With the adoption of the 10-year Strategy, the CST has been somewhat transformed. Its sessions are now organized in a predominantly scientific and technical conference-style format with each session focusing on a defined priority theme.

The CST meets in conjunction with the ordinary sessions of the COP. It is meant to be multidisciplinary, open to the participation of all Parties, and composed of government representatives competent in the relevant fields of expertise.

The current priority areas of the CST include the following:

- Monitoring and Assessment
- UNCCD Scientific Conferences
- International Scientific Advice
- Knowledge Management
- Fellowship Programme

⁴ The Committee on Science and Technology
<http://www.unccd.int/en/about-the-convention/the-bodies/The-CST/Pages/default.aspx>

The Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC)

The CRIC was established by decision 1/COP.5 to assist the COP in the review of the implementation of the Convention under the authority and guidance of the COP and as an integral part of the [Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System](#).

The CRIC shall focus its work on the assessment of implementation by Parties and other reporting entities through, inter alia:

- a. Undertaking an assessment of implementation against performance indicators every two years and against impact indicators every four years;
- b. Disseminating best practices on the implementation of the Convention, focusing its work on thematic topics: (a) capacity-building and awareness raising; (b) policy, legislative and institutional framework; (c) funding and resource mobilization, and (d) participation, collaboration and networking;
- c. Reviewing financial flows for the implementation of the Convention;
- d. Giving recommendations to Convention's institutions and subsidiary bodies on priorities to be included in their programme of work and budget for the programming biennium; with a view to submitting to the COP a final report on sessions held between ordinary sessions of the COP as well as draft decisions prepared at sessions held in conjunction with the COP.

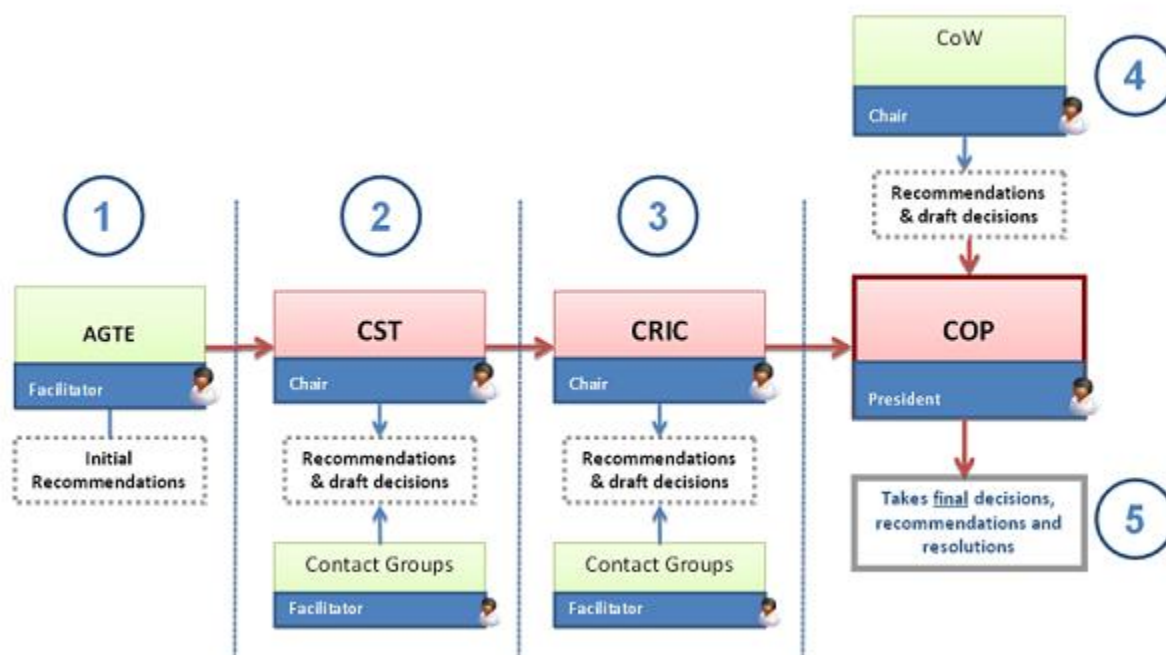
The review of implementation at sessions held between ordinary sessions of the COP is based on reports by all reporting entities submitted at the same time.

Apart from the permanent institutional structures, some temporary ad hoc groups work during sessions of the COP such as Friends of the Chair, Contact Groups, Ad hoc working groups and Drafting groups.

4. Process of the UNCCD

The decision making process of UNCCD involves all the institutional levels including the ad hoc working groups that may be set up to deal with drafting of these decisions. For example the process of decision making as regards scientific and technical or technological issues may start with the initial recommendations, produced by the Advisory Group of Technical Experts (AGTE). These are then sent to the CST which reviews the recommendations and may maintain them as recommendations or prepare them as draft decisions. The CST passes on the recommendations and/or draft decisions to CRIC for its review. The CRIC then sends them on to the COP for final consideration. There are usually contact groups which provide support to CST and CRIC in carrying out this work, dealing specifically proposing the general text of these recommendation and decisions.

A simple diagram of the UNCCD decision-making process is shown below.



Negotiations on key issues are usually conducted in contact groups, ad-hoc working groups or “friends of the Chair” meetings. These groups are set-up by the respective Presidents or Chairpersons of the COP, CST, CRIC, and CoW on the basis of the issues on the agenda. Similarly, the subsidiary bodies usually allocate specific agenda items to contact groups or informal consultations. The President of the COP and the Chairpersons of the subsidiary bodies inform the meeting of the facilitators selected to

chair the various contact groups and informal consultations. The outcomes expected from the negotiating sessions may include:

- The Chair's summary
- Draft resolutions, recommendations, declarations, conclusions and decisions.

Even though it is expected that the texts are agreed upon through consensus, the negotiations sometimes fail in achieving this. In such cases:

- The Chair of the body that established the contact group who may decide that there is need for further consultations, or
- Conduct bilateral consultations with interested delegations, until a compromise is reached.