Final report on the capacity building workshops
Implemented as part of the Global Support Programme (GSP) II

1. **Background**

Capacity building for reporting is one of the core functions of the UNCCD secretariat. Resulting from decisions taken by Parties to follow a monitoring framework in order to measure progress in the implementation of the Convention in 2009, Parties have requested on a regular basis targeted capacity building programmes whose aim it is to facilitate the UNCCD reporting process, familiarizing Parties with reporting obligations, and ensuring that the data reported is credible.

With the adoption of the second strategic framework of the Convention in September 2017, reporting requirements have become increasingly technical, warranting a different approach to capacity building with a clear focus on quantitative data and land-based indicators. In order to allow all Parties to report and assist those with capacity gaps, a request was made to the secretariat to provide default data for three land-based indicators (trends in land cover, trends in land productivity, and trends in carbon stock above and below ground). With funds provided by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the assistance of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the secretariat and the Global Mechanism have designed a capacity building programme for the 2017-2018 reporting process that focusses on providing training to National Focal Points (NFPs) and/or their designated reporting officers on the reporting requirements, and in particular the land-based indicators through which the implementation of the Convention will be monitored.

While the Global Support Programme (GSP II) has two other components that assist in preparing for the reporting process, this report focusses on the five capacity building workshops that were convened for Parties belonging to regional implementation annexes. The report will highlight how those workshops were facilitated, how training was delivered and most importantly highlights lessons learned which may be used to improve UNCCD reporting in the future.

2. **Workshop details**

Five (5) regional capacity building workshops were organized in collaboration with host governments and/or partner organizations for all implementation Annexes. Separate workshops were conducted for Annex I (Africa), Annex II (Asia) and Annex III (Latin America and the Caribbean). Parties for Annex – IV (Northern Mediterranean) and Annex- V (Central and Eastern Europe), as well as some Parties form Annex II (Asia) (Central Asia) were grouped together for one workshop held in Antalya, Turkey. A separate training for Arab speaking countries from Annex I and Annex II was organized in Cairo, Egypt in collaboration with regional organizations. The following table contains the details of the workshops.

Table: 1

	Region	Location	Dates
1	North Mediterranean, Central and Eastern Europe, and Central Asia	Antalya, Turkey	12 – 15 March, 2018
2	Africa	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	19 – 22 March, 2018
3	Latin America and Caribbean	Fortaleza, Brazil	9 - 12 April, 2018
4	Asia and Pacific	Delhi, India	24 – 27 April, 2018
5	Arab States	Cairo, Egypt	6 – 9 May, 2018

Two representatives from each eligible country were funded to participate in the workshop. Considering the introduction and training on land-based indicators and synergies with reporting on SDG indicator 15.3.1, the UNCCD invitation letter suggested the inclusion of participants from National Statistical Offices (NSOs) or GIS experts amongst the nominations made by the Parties. In total, 316 participants from 140 UNCCD Parties attended the regional capacity building workshops. Out of these, there were 21 NSO representatives and 57 GIS experts. In spite of the emphasis placed by the UNCCD on this particular aspect, it could be observed that the number of participants representing NSOs or having a solid GIS background remained low. The online surveys conducted before the workshops also revealed the same results. In some cases, the National Focal Points were also represented by a participant from their national team.

Table.2

S.N	Regional Workshop	Date	Venue	Number of Countries	Total Number of Participants
1	North Mediterranean, Central and Eastern Europe, and Central Asia.	12-15 March 2018	Antalya, Turkey	18	48
2	Africa	19-22 March 2018	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	44	85
3	Latin America and Caribbean	9-12 April 2018	Fortaleza, Brazil	30	62
4	Asia and Pacific	24-27 April 2018	New Delhi, India	31	73
5	Arab	6-9 May 2018	Cairo, Egypt	17	48
	Total				316

While a uniform training work programme was followed for all workshops with a focus on the introduction and calculation of the progress indicators and important features of the reporting template, the schedule was tailored to also address regional issues that each region chose for itself. The main components of the training were:

a) Introduction to the landbased indicators and SDG indicator 15.3.1,
b) Hands-on training using the Trends.Earth tool designed by Conservation International (CI) to calculate SDG indicator 15.3.1 based on the three land-based indicators,
c) Introduction on how to report on the mobilization of resources for UNCCD implementation,
d) An update on the Drought Initiative initiated as a result of COP 13,
e) Discussions on LDN Transformative Programmes and Projects, and
f) An update on Umbrella Project by UNEP.

The Latin America and Caribbean region requested for a presentation on the LDN Fund which was delivered by the representative from Mirova, a structuring partner and manager of the fund.

Lessons learned:

1. Parties received training on the Trends.Earth Land Degradation monitoring tool designed by Conservation International (CI) with great interest. Evaluations that were conducted at the end of the workshops revealed that this tool proved to be very useful for enhancing participants' understanding of UNCCD reporting obligations and associated SDG reporting requirements related to target 15.3. In addition it was seen also as very useful for managing land resources at the country level and making informed decisions as part of a national planning process to implement the Convention.
2. Interactive maps may very well be used for different purposes at national level in particular for awareness-raising and communication campaigns aiming at promoting UNCCD at national and sub-national level.
3. Linkages between the UNCCD reporting process and the SDG process particularly at national level may need further initiatives and different approaches to achieve a satisfactory exchange between the focal point office and the offices for national statistics and to streamline information reported by NSOs and UNCCD secretariat to the High level political Forum (HLPF).

3. **Logistical issues**

At COP 13, the Global Mechanism started identifying potential host countries and/or agencies for the regional capacity building workshops on reporting.

The GSP – II coordination meeting held in October 2017 decided that partnering with a UN agency for the preparation of the workshop would be preferred since UN agencies adhere to the same set of rules and regulations and hence facilitating the workshops would be easier. However, in cases where a UN entity would not be available, other local or regional organizations could be selected as partners. The following partners assisted in the facilitation of the workshops:

1. Turkey: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO);
2. Brazil and India: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP);
3. Africa: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNEACA), travel arranged by the UNCCD secretariat;
4. Egypt: Arab Organization for Agriculture Development (AOAD) and League of Arab States (LAS), travel of eligible countries was arranged by the UNCCD secretariat.

After the host countries or agencies were identified, the Regional Coordination Units (RCUs) engaged with the host institution and the potential partner organization to finalize the detailed planning of the event. Upon receipt of an informal confirmation from the counterpart agencies, official letters were exchanged to formalize the process. In order to facilitate the logistical arrangements such as for example travel etc., a tripartite agreement was signed between the host government, UNCCD and a partner UN agency.

With the exception of the workshops in Africa and Egypt (travel was organized through the UNCCD secretariat), the partner UN agency was responsible for organizing travel arrangements and DSA disbursement for participants as well as other relevant logistical matters e.g. arrangement of conference room and administrative facilities and provision of coffee breaks etc.

Lessons learned:

1. Overall, the conclusion of tripartite agreements proved to be successful in most cases apart from some minor problems that surfaced during the planning process.

2. *Commitment and involvement of the host country government is key to a successful convening of such events. In those instances where this commitment was prevalent, it not only helped resolving unforeseen problems, but the engagement of the host country provided additional support and contribution in terms of staff time, the selection of the workshop venue, translations services, meals and coffee breaks etc. (Since the UNCCD did not have this support in the case of the Addis Ababa workshop, a number of logistical challenges emerged which hampered the smooth running of the workshop. For instance, a continuous and stable internet connection was crucial for running exercises on the LD monitoring tool. The connection in Addis Ababa was not adequate, therefore the technical team had to rely mostly on offline resources to explain the concepts to the participants and run the hands on exercises. A similar problem was encountered at the workshop venue in India, but it was resolved through the intervention of co-hosting Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.)*

3. *It was also highlighted through the evaluation submitted at the end of the workshops and the training teams on the ground that arranging the workshop in same venue as the lodging of all participants, in addition to the pre-arrangements of meals, tend to be profitable in terms of time and energy considering the large number of participants present in some workshops (i.e. Africa)*

4. **Technical issues**

The workshops provided participants with a general overview of all reporting requirements under the UNCCD 2018-2030 strategic framework, with a particular focus on the UNCCD land-based indicators (namely land cover, land productivity and carbon stock) and their use to estimate the 'proportion of land that is degraded over total land area' (i.e. SDG indicator 15.3.1). As such, the workshop also contributed to building countries' capacity to report on progress towards SDG target 15.3 and to clarifying the linkages between the UNCCD and the SDG reporting processes.

Specifically, participants were trained on the use of the following data and tools made available to facilitate the reporting:

- *Default data for UNCCD reporting*: In accordance with decision 22/COP.11, the UNCCD secretariat provided Parties with default data on the three land-based indicators for use in the absence of other suitable national datasets, or to complement and enhance national data.
- *PRAIS portal and reporting tools*: The PRAIS portal was updated to facilitate the 2018 reporting. Parties are able to access a range of reporting tools including: the default data, interactive PDF reporting templates pre-filled with the default data, the reporting manual and glossary, and other technical documents.
- *PRAIS Data Visualization Tool*: This tool, accessible through the PRAIS portal, allows for a user friendly exploration and visualization of the default data.
- *Trends.Earth*:[1] This GIS tool, developed by Conservation International (CI), supports the calculation and analysis of the three land-based indicators for estimating SDG indicator 15.3.1.

Given the technical nature of the matter under consideration, the workshops did not follow the usual "presentation-followed by Q&A-format", but instead were organized using practical hands-on exercises and using modern GIS technologies. Participants learnt how to use Trends.Earth to calculate the three land-based indicators and SDG indicator 15.3.1 based on the default data as well as other nationally developed data. Through the hands on exercises, participants familiarized themselves with the available data, with approaches to adapt them to their specific country situations, and with ways of how to seamlessly integrate national and default data.

The following lessons were learnt:

- **Default data can facilitate reporting, while enhancing comparability across countries.** Despite some concerns raised on their accuracy level, Parties appreciated receiving the default data as a means to complement and enhance national data.
- **The flexibility to replace the default data with other data ensures country ownership of the reporting process.** Parties also appreciated the option and the tools made available to replace the default data with other data sets more suitable to their national circumstances.
- **Trends.Earth facilitates harmonization of monitoring and reporting methods across countries while encouraging country ownership**. By automating the processing needed to bring nationally developed data into the estimation of SDG indicator 15.3.1 in a way that is as consistent as possible with how the default data were generated, Trends Earth facilitates harmonization of methods across countries while empowering them to use their preferred data for reporting.
- **If further enhanced, Trends.Earth could assist countries in designing and implementing transformative LDN projects/programs**. Trends.Earth could be become a fully integrated framework enabling users to evaluate and prioritize the implementation of activities to avoid, reduce, and reverse land degradation and to achieve LDN targets.
- **Further guidance should be provided to countries on selecting the appropriate data and information that is most applicable to national circumstances.** The availability of alternative recently released data sets (e.g. the GSOC map by FAO, the Trends.Earth land productivity by CI) and their inconsistencies with the default data (due to differences in methodology, spatial resolution and observation periods) is source of confusion among

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[1] http://trends.earth/docs/en/index.html

countries. The Group on Earth Observation could play a role in explaining and reconciling these inconsistencies.

- **Small Island Developing States (SIDS) require dedicated data, tools and support.** The resolution of default data and other readily available global data products is insufficient for SIDS. These countries require dedicated initiatives and tools to improve their capacity to access, process and analyse Earth observation datasets.

- **Further guidance may also be necessary to address specific regional circumstances.** For instance Arab countries identified the need to develop specific regional guidelines for LDN implementation and monitoring in their region.

- **The PRAIS Data Visualization Tool could be further developed to enable exploration and visualization of country reported data.** If further developed, this tool would contribute to increasing the efficiency of geospatial data distribution, enhancing transparency of countries' progress in the implementation of the Convention and safeguarding data between reporting rounds.

- **Technical capacities tend to be better acquired through practical hands on training** rather than passive learning. Despite the logistical and technical challenges encountered in organizing hands on exercises with a large number of participants and simultaneous translation, the format selected for the workshop was effective to build capacity.

- **The delivery of hands on training requires a competent team of trainers and an adequate ratio of trainers to trainees**. A ratio of one trainer to ten trainees is ideal to keep the trainees engaged with sufficient support and supervision.

- **Targeting the right people is important to ensure sustainability of the capacity building efforts.** The participation of national GIS experts has proven effective and has the potential to enable further uptake of data, tools and skills, as well as to ensure further sustainability of the capacity building effort at national level.

- **"One-off" events or training risk to have limited effectiveness**. Capacity building for UNCCD reporting and land degradation monitoring should be conceived as a continuous process, not a one-time event every four years.

- **Documentation and guidelines on how to use the tools were sent to participants via email in 3 languages (SP, EN and Fr) prior to the workshops.** This practice has proven to be beneficial even though not all participants managed to download the documents sent to them. However, for some participants who did manage to download documentation prior to the event in their language it made a considerable difference and they came already prepared.

5. **Way forward**

Evaluations submitted at the end of the regional workshops have shown that Parties perceived capacity building through regional workshops as positive and helpful since in many cases those workshops constituted the starting point for Parties to commence with data compilation and analysis after they returned back home. It is important to note that technical assistance continued to be provided after the workshops had been completed. This was achieved through email communication/skype and a dedicated online facility (i.e. Helpdesk) to which queries could be submitted and where a team of experts was on stand-by to address any questions that surfaced while Parties were undertaking their reporting activities at national level.

Despite the fact that regional capacity building workshops were greatly appreciated by Parties, they also are one of the major expenditure items of the GSP project. Queries submitted through the Helpdesk as a follow up to the workshops revealed the following:

a) Participants of the regional capacity building workshops did not always end up being the experts that used the PRAIS portal or the Trends.Earth tool at national level. This necessitated retraining persons that did not have the benefit of having had in-depth training during workshops and/or having other means for acquiring the needed knowledge. Those reporting officers needed to receive guidance through the Helpdesk or through email communication/skype which in some instances turned out to be very cumbersome.
b) It also transpired that knowledge acquired during the workshops was not necessarily transferred to others at national level which minimizes the impact that workshops have on the overall reporting process.
c) Even for engaged participants of the regional workshops, new technical and substantive challenges emerged when they returned back home in using the portal and the default data or, in fact their own national data. Without a dedicated team that provided further guidance after the workshops had ended, the reporting process would have suffered serious difficulties in servicing Parties and assisting them to submit their report in time.

Timing of the regional workshops

As indicated above, regional capacity building workshops were convened generally speaking during mid-March while the official deadline for the submission of the reports was set for end of July. Already during the capacity building workshops comments were received that the remaining time would not be sufficient for Parties to undertake the reporting and undergo the appropriate authorization process to submit their reports. Considering that many Parties had already participated in the Target Setting Programme (TSP) and therefore had already considerably advanced in their work to establish a baseline, the initial planning for Parties to complete the reporting exercise was much more ambitious. However, after monitoring and assessing closely the reporting situation, the UNCCD secretariat in consultation with the CRIC Bureau decided to move the reporting deadline from end of July to end of August to allow Parties one more month to complete their work and submit their reports. Information from the monitoring revealed that close to the end of July deadline only 74 out of 197 Parties were ready to submit their reports. By the end of August deadline the number had increased to 123 with still some countries having submitted their reports shortly after the August deadline. The final number of reports submitted that was counted for the preliminary analysis for CRIC 17 is 138 reports.

Activities at national level

In addition to the short time available for Parties to put in practice what they received in terms of capacity building during regional workshops, there was another element that hampered reporting at national level and that is the delay in receiving enabling funding for reporting from the Global Environment Facility which occurred due to unforeseen reasons.

The delay in disbursement created for some Parties serious constraints to undertake activities in time and jeopardized their ability to submit their report in time. As a follow up, the UNCCD institutions and UNEP have discussed possible ways for better synchronizing activities of the GSP and the umbrella projects so that global support can be rendered when Parties have time to initiate work using funding from the umbrella project.

One of the major problems however that continue to haunt the reporting process is the lack of institutionalized processes that ensure sustainability for UNCCD reporting at national level. In some instances it feels that reporting has still remained an activity that is launched anew when the reporting deadline is approaching, where access to data needs to be verified and where turnover in personnel is hampering learning at national level. It is our hope that with the reporting requirements remaining generally speaking the same up until 2030 (the end of the 2018-2030 strategic framework) those internal processes and institutional linkages will be improved and maintained so that UNCCD reporting can eventually become a process that not only aspires to report to the Convention, but where information is used for monitoring processes at national level. Considering that the UNCCD and the SDG process in relation to the indicator 15.3.1 are using the same indicators, it is hoped that in future institutional linkages are initiated at national level that ensure a coherent reporting for the two reporting processes.

The following lessons were learnt:

1. Considering that a robust analysis, particularly for the progress indicators produced for CRIC is reliant on a critical number of reports submitted, the timing of regional workshops would need to be carefully considered in the future, allowing sufficient time for the preparation and the approving of national reports before their submission to the UNCCD;
2. In light of the above, it is proposed to use the intersessional session of CRIC in 2020 to launch another capacity building initiative on reporting making use of funds that will be spent for participants to attend the CRIC while additional DSA payments can be secured through GSP II or a follow up GSP. The cost effectiveness of funds would increase while additional participants (GIS experts and/or NSO officers could be more easily funded through GSP resources);
3. Another interesting learning experience was that many Parties referred to the online videos that were made available as part of the trainers of trainers. In Mid-October 2018 more than 2750 views were counted for a total of 11 videos, an all-time high for any online resources produced by the UNCCD. This also suggests that probably another way of capacity building should be seriously considered and that is capacity building through e-learning, webinars and other online means.
4. While e-learning cannot replace in person hands-on training, future GSP activities should include a solid and robust e-learning platform on reporting which would enable designated reporting officers to study and learn online and make use of experts on stand-by assisting in any difficulty that may emerge;
5. Considering the technical nature of UNCCD reporting, a number of consultants/staff should be available to extend services around reporting to Parties. This kind of service

cannot be provided by secretariat and/or GM staff and would need to be seriously considered for the duration of the reporting timeframe;

6. GSP and umbrella projects need to be designed and executed in parallel and well ahead of time since they are feeding on each other and allowing Parties to implement at national level what they have acquired in terms of capacity building during regional workshops.