

Management response: Independent evaluation of the Changwon Initiative

Overview

The Changwon Initiative is an important partnership for the UNCCD. Its independent evaluation was conducted at two levels: by looking at (1) the performance/achievements concerning each activity carried out under the Initiative, and (2) the impact/influence of the Changwon Initiative in the achievement of those objectives of the Strategy that it addresses. The secretariat welcomes the careful analysis that was made on the responsiveness of the achievements under the Initiative to the overall UNCCD priorities that are stated in the UNCCD workplan, and the resulting detailed findings. This information is very useful for future planning, with regard to the content as well as the process of linking the objectives of the Changwon Initiative, and also other partnerships, to the broader UNCCD setting.

In addition to assessing the extent to which the expected results were achieved, the evaluation considered also the administrative and management aspects of the Changwon Initiative. While the secretariat appreciates the attention given to these matters, it does not agree with some of the evaluation conclusions, as they seem to be based on a rather thin base of evidence. This is particularly the case with the conclusions concerning the internal information flow on voluntary contributions and the (low) level of spending in 2015. On the first matter, the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services conducted in June 2015 a thorough audit of the secretariat's procedures and practices concerning voluntary contributions, and it did not find problems in the internal information sharing. The secretariat would like to make clear that the issues presented in the Changwon Initiative evaluation report are temporary consequences of the move to a new UN wide administration system during the second half of 2015; not "systemic" as the report claims. On the second matter, the 2015 funding under the Changwon Initiative was received by the secretariat in two installments, at the end of June 2015 and at the end of December 2015. Indeed, only 21% of these funds had been spent at the time of the preparation of the evaluation (February 2016), but the secretariat questions whether this can be considered as a "low level of expenditure", taking into account the time of receipt of the contributions.

Nevertheless, the secretariat is grateful for the insights provided through this evaluation, and will seek to further develop its approaches and effectiveness in managing partnerships.

Recommendations

Evaluation recommendation 1. *As the Changwon Initiative has generated significant results for the UNCCD and provided valuable learning opportunities to both the UNCCD secretariat and KFS, its continuation is recommended.*

Management response: Accepted.

Evaluation recommendation 2. *For future work plans under the Changwon Initiative, the secretariat – in consultation with KFS – should define a results framework that is clearly linked to the overall UNCCD priorities for the time period in concern, reflects the shared aims of the two partners and provides the basis for systematic monitoring and assessment of progress.*

Management response: Accepted. Upcoming annual workplans under the Changwon Initiative will include a definition of the expected results and a description of how these results will contribute to the UNCCD priorities. Also a medium-term strategic paper for the Changwon Initiative will be formulated in consultation with KFS and relevant partners, which will take into account the outcomes of this evaluation, experience gained and the evolving environment of the UNCCD, for further orientation of the workplans of the Changwon Initiative.

Evaluation recommendation 3. *Building on the experience gained from the Changwon Initiative, the secretariat should ensure that in its future agreements with donor partners that are contributing to the UNCCD's core work, the objectives that are set for core work-focused cooperation are explicitly aligned to the prevailing UNCCD results framework. This would enable more efficient monitoring, while at the same time providing donors with a clear understanding as to how their support contributed to UNCCD results.*

Management response: Partially accepted. The work of the secretariat is, obviously, geared towards the UNCCD priorities that are reflected in the UNCCD results framework, and the secretariat will further work on describing how various contributions support these priorities.

However, voluntary contributions cannot, and should not, be equaled to the assessed contributions or the results framework that has been adopted for the use of the assessed contributions, as they are by nature different from the regular budget and governed by specific contribution agreements.

Evaluation recommendation 4. *The secretariat should analyse and address the reasons behind the low expenditure rate in implementing the Changwon Initiative in recent years, with a view to ensuring that such delays are avoided in the future.*

Management response: Partially accepted. The delays in implementing the activities planned for the Changwon Initiative 2014 contribution were mostly due to the increasing global attention to land degradation neutrality, and the need to find out whether the UNCCD process would be willing - and capable - of using this concept for national level work. This matter was eventually solved in October 2015, as the UNCCD Conference of the Parties recognized the importance, and potential, of the land degradation neutrality target-setting.

For the 2015 Changwon Initiative contribution, the secretariat does not expect major challenges or delays in effecting the expenditure.

Evaluation recommendation 5. *The secretariat should improve the clarity of the extrabudgetary financial information provided to internal project managers and external partners, in order to ensure that project managers have a clear, up-to-date understanding on the status of funding.*

Management response: Accepted. The secretariat continues to implement the new UN-wide administrative system UMOJA, which will enable project managers to have easy access to up-to-date

information of both the regular budget and the voluntary contributions. This system will also facilitate the preparation of financial reporting and other information-sharing to external partners.

Evaluation recommendation 6. *The secretariat should ensure that best practices identified through the Land for Life Programme and the Greening Drylands Partnership are routinely integrated within relevant UNCCD knowledge management platforms and processes.*

Management response: Accepted. The secretariat will integrate these best practices to its knowledge management platforms and processes. The secretariat will also promote, where appropriate, their use in relevant external knowledge management platforms.