



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification

Telephone: + 49 (0) 228 815 2800
Fax: + 49 (0) 228 815 2898/99
Email: secretariat@unccd.int

Opening Speech

Thirteenth Session of the Committee on Science and

Technology

(CST 13)

Monique Barbut, UNCCD Executive Secretary

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Distinguished Chair,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Firstly, allow me to thank the Chinese authorities for their generosity in hosting us. And thank you all for coming.

Welcome to Ordos.

Colleagues, our meetings over the next two weeks will be significant for many reasons. But I wanted to flag up one aspect of historical significance. The CST meeting will coincide with the 40th Anniversary of the first UN Conference on Desertification which was held at the end of August until the 9th of September in 1977.

We have come a long way in 40 years. But one thing that hasn't changed is that ever since those first meetings, stakeholder have demanded to know why is this happening? What can we do about it?



In particular, Parties and other stakeholders have demanded scientific guidance for the policy and decision-making processes of the UNCCD

For years Parties and other stakeholders have demanded scientific guidance for the policy and decision-making processes of the UNCCD. They have called for the translation of the science - behind desertification, land degradation and drought - to be put into accessible language. The kind of language that can be understood – and more importantly used – by policy-makers and land users.

At COP 11, you established the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) to do just that.

So I hope you will welcome the dialogue, at this CST, between Parties and the SPI regarding the work they have been doing. And its policy implications.

Amongst other results, there are a few highlights that should provide substance for your discussion:



The SPI has laid out a Scientific Conceptual Framework for Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). Because the LDN scientific conceptual framework was developed in conjunction with the LDN target setting programme, it is proving to be a valuable “on the ground” tool for policy makers and land managers.

The SPI has also prepared a report on sustainable land management within the context of climate change mitigation and adaptation. The report and an associated policy brief are available for your consideration. As input for this report, the SPI co-organized - with the IPCC and the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soil (ITPS) of the Global Soil Partnership - a Global Symposium on Soil Organic Carbon involving 500 soil scientists from around the world.

There is a Chinese proverb. **A nation's treasure is in its scholars.**

Independent scientists and representatives of this Committee, the CST, have been working side by side to ensure the scientific integrity and policy



relevance of the SPI's work. Strong linkages with the wider scientific community and other scientific advisory bodies are emerging. UNCCD scholars have become a real "treasure" to this process.

SPI scientists have, for example, contributed to and reviewed thematic assessments for the land degradation and restoration assessment of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and the upcoming IPCC Special report on Climate Change and Land.

The SPI is proving itself to be a cost-efficient, flexible and collaborative interface for the scientific community. It has repositioned UNCCD and the value of UNCCD related science. It is closing some of the knowledge gaps and needs identified by UNCCD country Parties. But as Confucius once put it **"Real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance"**.

So I would urge you to bear that in mind as you review the SPI at this COP. And if you decide to extend the mandate of SPI, please define a **bold** work



programme that addresses the most pressing needs and our most glaring “gaps and ignorance”.

To my mind, the agenda for this COP will throw up a number of topics, such as drought or sand and dust storms, which warrant your consideration. But there is huge and varied demand from parties. You will have to define a work programme that is bold but also **feasible**.

In all cases, the outputs should be designed to reach the people who need it. As you may know, with the support from a number of partners, a Knowledge Hub to offers tools and a centralized platform of science, information and best practice for UNCCD stakeholders has been established. It should help ensure your science reaches the people who need it and can use it to drive implementation.

So, in addition to reviewing and framing the future work of the SPI, your guidance on how to develop the Knowledge Hub – to make it even more useful and practical - will be most welcome.



Let me assure you, your guidance and scientific feedback is a treasure for UNCCD implementation. The Parties look forward to receiving the outcome of your deliberations.

I wish you a very fruitful and productive CST meeting.

Thank you.