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Elaborating on the Drought Initiative

Summary

Pursuant to the new Strategic Framework (2018–2030), and recognizing that drought impact mitigation in the context of the implementation of the convention is lagging behind – recalling decisions 4/COP.8, 8/COP.9 and 9/COP.10 – the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification is paying closer attention to drought. Recent drought mitigation guidance from the Conference of the Parties includes decision 9/COP.11, urging Parties to develop and implement national drought management policies and requesting the secretariat to assist them; decision 36/COP.11 (the Namib Declaration), calling for increased emphasis on drought impact mitigation; and decision 9/COP.12, highlighting the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration to develop and implement national drought plans.

This document elaborates on the existing and earlier activities of the secretariat as regards to drought-preparedness. It also clarifies how these activities fit together, the connection with the proposed drought initiative, and the relevance with the global policy development debate and processes.

I. Rationale

1. The world is facing its worst food crisis in 70 years with 20 million people at risk of famine in four countries: north-eastern Nigeria, south Sudan, Somalia and Yemen. If no action is taken, an additional 10 million will be affected. Drought and the associated risks, including conflict, are forcing people to abandon their land and homes to find a place where they can survive. The geopolitics of the Sahel is already influenced by drought-related tension. Lake Chad – a lifeline for at least 25 million people in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger – is the birthplace of Boko Haram and the home of Al Qaeda in the Maghreb. The increased frequency of drought is unprecedented, with three severe episodes of drought in the last five years. The 2016 El-Niño phenomenon was the worst in 35 years, forcing at least 20 countries to declare drought emergencies. Despite these grim realities, countries remain inadequately prepared to cope with the recurring drought.

2. “To mitigate the effects of drought” is one of two overall objectives of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), stated in Article 2, and therefore an essential dimension of the Convention. The text of the UNCCD interprets this objective as “*activities related to the prediction of drought and intended to reduce the vulnerability of society and natural systems to drought*”. This entails an understanding of where and when drought will happen, who and what is vulnerable and why. It calls for information on the incidence and severity of drought to identify vulnerable groups and geographic regions, and facilitate timely development and implementation of drought impact mitigation actions.

3. The UNCCD is paying more attention to drought through the new Strategic Framework (2018–2030) and a number of decisions by the Conference of the Parties (COP). Recent drought mitigation guidance from the COP includes decision 9/COP.11, urging Parties to develop and implement national drought management policies and requesting the secretariat to assist them; decision 36/COP.11 (the Namib Declaration), calling for increased emphasis on drought impact mitigation; and decision 9/COP.12, highlighting the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration to develop and implement national drought plans.

4. At the country level, several Parties to the UNCCD are developing national drought policies to mitigate drought risk, with some already at an advanced stage. Many more are currently in the planning stage. To help them move forward and pave the way for broader partnerships, the secretariat to the UNCCD proposes a positive and inclusive action agenda on drought preparedness. This agenda is based on three pillars: (i) monitoring and early warning systems, (ii) vulnerability/impact assessment, and (iii) practical risk mitigation measures.

The UN-Water Initiative

5. The three pillars were the result of the High-level Meeting on National Drought Policy (HMNDP) held in Geneva in March 2013, and co-organized by the secretariat to the UNCCD, World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). This meeting also led to an initiative of the UN-Water (United Nations-Water) on “Capacity Development to support National Drought Management Policies”. It served as the cooperation framework on the three pillars for the UNCCD secretariat, WMO, FAO, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and UN-Water, resulting in a major joint capacity building initiative that culminated in 2013–2015 in six regional training workshops, with 70 countries and 170 high-level policymakers. The outcomes of the workshops have been used as guidance for upcoming activities. The

partners involved continue their work, as well as collaboration and coordination on various aspects of drought mitigation. Information on recent drought activity by the secretariat to the UNCCD is set out below.

Regional Drought Conferences

6. In August 2016, the secretariat to the UNCCD co-organized an African Drought conference in Windhoek, Namibia, where the involved countries adopted a regional strategy on ‘Drought Resilient and Prepared Africa (DRAPA)’. This strategy is to be implemented at national level and guided by six principles, three of which are directly derived from the three pillars. The six principles are the following: (i) drought policy and governance for drought risk management; (ii) drought monitoring and early warning; (iii) drought vulnerability and impact assessment; (iv) drought mitigation, preparedness, and response; (v) knowledge management and drought awareness; and (vi) reducing underlying factors of drought risk. The need to improve timely drought information and vulnerability and impact assessments for enhanced mitigation measures at national and regional level was emphasized during the conference. This led to a number of follow-up actions, many of which seek to fill knowledge, policy and action gaps identified during the conference.

7. Another regional drought conference for Latin America and Caribbean countries was co-organized by the Government of Bolivia, the secretariat to the UNCCD, the FAO and the WMO. The conference was held in August 2017 in Santa Cruz, Bolivia and considered a regional strategy document on drought preparedness systems, building on the three pillars. It concluded with a declaration focusing on integrated drought management approaches to the development and implementation of national drought monitoring, early warning systems, vulnerability studies, impact assessments, mitigation and preparedness policies and plans.

Pilot Projects

8. One of the follow-up actions to the African regional conference is a series of pilot projects aiming to help countries strengthen drought preparedness systems. The focus is to ensure that the latest and most appropriate policy-relevant knowledge, analysis and best practices on pro-active drought management are accessible and available to key stakeholders to guide policy and action for enhanced drought preparedness. The secretariat is carrying out these pilot projects in Namibia, Nigeria and Colombia.

9. The outcomes of the pilot projects will contribute to approaches to develop comprehensive drought monitoring and early warning systems that go beyond meteorology and forecasting to include risk assessment and monitoring. They address aspects including prediction capacity for the location and intensity of impact of upcoming drought; the communication of alerts to the media, authorities and vulnerable communities; and options for a coordinated response to the drought warnings.

Development of a Drought Resilience, Adaptation and Management Policy Framework for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

10. Building on the above-mentioned developments and activities and the earlier Advocacy Policy Framework on Drought,¹ the secretariat is proposing to the thirteenth

¹ For more detailed information, please see ICCD/CRIC(11)/17.

session of the COP (COP 13) a Drought Resilience, Adaptation and Management Policy (DRAMP) Framework for the UNCCD that directly responds to the three pillars from the UNCCD perspective. DRAMP has six interlinked objectives, as follows:²

- (a) Reducing exposure to drought,
- (b) Reducing vulnerability to drought,
- (c) Increasing resilience to drought risk,
- (d) Transforming relevant social, economic and ecological attributes to support drought resilience,
- (e) Preparing, responding and recovering from drought,
- (f) Transferring and sharing drought risks.

11. DRAMP is meant to serve as a policy/planning tool for use by Parties to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of drought. The secretariat will continue to support related action, within the limits of its mandate, and in collaboration with, inter alia, the WMO, FAO, CBD and the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs.

II. The Drought Initiative

12. The secretariat's "drought portfolio" resources are limited to one policy officer, in addition to some travel and consultancy funding. These resources ensure that global exchanges and developments on drought mitigation are followed up and analysed, with a focus on the DRAMP objectives; that UNCCD inputs are provided to relevant processes; and that related information is delivered to the Parties through COP documents and, occasionally, special reports, briefings and regional and national events. They also ensure continuous contact and information exchange with partners working on drought issues.

13. The Drought Initiative proposed to COP 13 targets the same objectives as the routine tasks of the secretariat, with a much broader and more concrete tool selection. It is intended to kick-start work on the renewed focus of the UNCCD on drought preparedness issues by upscaling the piloting of approaches for a comprehensive drought preparedness system; providing for the development of a drought vulnerability/risk assessment methodology, including related regional technical workshops; and exploring specific approaches and techniques for resilience building in drought-prone areas.

14. The essence of the Drought Initiative is to guarantee the means for timely, substantive development of drought mitigation policies, approaches and activities under the UNCCD, which would not be possible without the additional resources of the Initiative. It is also expected to motivate partners to continue being involved and sharing their expertise, and to encourage new partners to join in supporting action on drought mitigation.

15. The WMO and FAO have been involved in all of the above-mentioned drought activities of the secretariat, and they will also be the closest partners for the Drought Initiative. The strength of the WMO on weather forecasting, meteorology and early warning, and the long term commitment of the FAO on disaster risk mitigation measures and food security are invaluable assets for any cooperation effort on drought.

² For more detailed information, please see document ICCD/COP(13)/19.

Added Value of the UNCCD

16. It may be noted that in the global development policy debates and processes, drought has been traditionally included in the cooperation topics and conceptual clusters on land degradation, starting with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 and the establishment of the UNCCD, then under the Millennium Development Goals and the Commission on Sustainable Development reviews, in Rio+20 and the ‘Future We Want’ in 2012, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the overall United Nations development policy “task allocation”, the UNCCD has the clearest mandate to bring forward international cooperation on drought. That said, its operational role is limited.

17. For the UNCCD to assume its strong policy mandate on drought, it must develop into a platform for cooperation and information on drought, with significant input into global agenda-setting and policy-making relative to drought. It should not challenge or duplicate the drought activity carried out by other development partners and organizations in their own field of expertise, for humanitarian assistance, meteorological services, rural development, etc. Instead, it should promote more effective and coordinated responsiveness and better preparedness/resilience to drought.

18. In terms of the work of the secretariat, the aim should be to build on activity underway, to raise political awareness of the importance of drought mitigation, to support coordination and partnership building, and to collect, sometimes further develop and distribute information on approaches, practices and methodologies concerning drought mitigation. The secretariat should also seek to ensure that current and future work on drought increasingly responds to/connects with the priorities of the UNCCD (particularly the land degradation neutrality targets). The drought activities having involved the secretariat so far, as well as the proposed Drought Initiative, follow this approach.

19. “Land” is also the window through which the UNCCD perceives action on drought impact mitigation. In its earlier actions, the secretariat aimed to capitalize on “land expertise” and the importance of good land management, which are inherent to the Convention process and essential for mitigating the effects of drought. This emphasis on land directs attention to “proactive drought management” and resilience-building instead of emergency preparedness, and focuses the involvement of the UNCCD on certain types of drought impact mitigation activities and approaches.

20. The next programme of the Science Policy Interface (SPI) proposes to provide guidance to support the adoption and implementation of land-based interventions for drought management and mitigation. A UNCCD conceptual framework on drought preparedness, developed by the SPI, could guide multi-stage and multi-scale intertwined processes for adopting and implementing land-based interventions for drought management and mitigation. The framework would consider stages, tools and requirements for implementing land-based interventions and monitoring their effectiveness. Co-benefits of increased resilience and reduced vulnerability of ecosystems and populations are likely to be achieved as result. The work to be done by the SPI will lay the scientific basis for the approaches to drought preparedness by the UNCCD.
