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#### Programme and budget

#### Report of the Evaluation Office

## Report of the Evaluation Office

### Note by the secretariat\*

#### *Summary*

The systematic evaluation of activities carried out under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) started in 2014 in order to strengthen the external credibility and accountability of the secretariat and the Global Mechanism and enhance their internal culture of learning.

This document presents an overview of the main findings and recommendations of the UNCCD evaluations commissioned since the previous Conference of the Parties in September 2017. It also provides information on the follow-up actions concerning the recommendations of earlier evaluations. Furthermore, this document presents the proposed work programme for the UNCCD Evaluation Office for the biennium 2020–2021, accompanied by an indication of the estimated costs.

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\* The present report was submitted after the deadline so as to include the most recent information.

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## I. Introduction

1. Regulation 7.2 of the United Nations Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation indicates that all programmed activities shall be evaluated over a fixed time period. Regulation 7.1 of the same document refers to the objective of evaluation as: (a) to determine as and objectively as the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the organization's activities in relation to their objectives; (b) to enable the secretariat and Member States to engage in systematic reflection with a view to increasing the effectiveness of the main programmes of the organization by altering their content and, if necessary; and (c) reviewing their objectives. Furthermore, Rule 107.1 of the same document states that evaluation findings shall be communicated to Member States through intergovernmental bodies.<sup>1</sup>

2. The systematic evaluation of activities carried out under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) started in 2014 in order to strengthen the external credibility and accountability of the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) and enhance their internal culture of learning. The evaluations are usually prepared by independent professional evaluators and planned and supervised by the UNCCD Evaluation Office. This office also arranges for knowledge-sharing of the evaluation outcomes and follows up on the implementation of evaluation recommendations.

3. The evaluation reports and related management responses are openly accessible to Parties and other stakeholders through the UNCCD Evaluation Office web page.<sup>2</sup> They are presented at meetings of the Conference of the Parties (COP) in the context of the agenda item on programme and budget and represent an important aspect of informing Parties of progress made toward the objectives of the UNCCD workplan, following a results-based budgeting approach.

4. This document presents an overview of the main findings and recommendations of those UNCCD evaluations that were commissioned during the biennium 2018–2019. It also provides information on the follow-up actions of earlier evaluations. Furthermore, this document presents the proposed work programme for the Evaluation Office for the biennium 2020–2021, accompanied by an indication of the estimated costs that would be covered from the UNCCD core budget.

## II. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification evaluations in 2018–2019

5. As of 1 June 2019, four evaluations commissioned by the UNCCD Evaluation Office since the last sessions of the COP during this biennium had been completed while two more are in preparation. An overview of the completed evaluations, starting with the most recent, is presented in the following chapters, while the full evaluation reports can be accessed on the Evaluation Office web page.

### A. Evaluation of the Regional Coordination Units (June 2019)

6. The UNCCD Regional Coordination Units (RCUs) were formally established in the follow-up to a 2009 decision by the COP. Over the years, some key parameters for their functioning have been identified by the COP. However, their exact purpose has not been thoroughly defined; rather, their role has varied according to the changing urgencies and priorities of the secretariat and the GM. The diversity of Parties' views about the RCUs has further contributed to this lack of clarity.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation. ST/SGB/2016/6; also see the earlier version: ST/SGB/2000/8.

<sup>2</sup> <[www2.unccd.int/about-us/evaluation-office](http://www2.unccd.int/about-us/evaluation-office)>.

7. With the aim of gaining a better understanding of what the RCUs could and should do to optimize their contribution to the effective implementation of the Convention, an evaluation of the RCUs started in April 2019. This evaluation seeks to “map” the operational modalities and realities of the RCUs so that related strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats can be systematically identified. It also looks at the mandate and working modalities of regional coordination offices of other intergovernmental organizations with focus on offices similar to the UNCCD RCUs. Based on findings concerning the RCUs and other regional offices, the evaluation will consider potential options for the RCUs to improve their effectiveness, building on experiences in other processes. These considerations will be crystallized in one or more scenarios of what the RCUs could look like (mandate, priorities, functioning and resources), each accompanied by an indication of the measures that would need to be taken in order to implement this.

8. The evaluation report is expected to be completed at the end of June 2019, after which it will be posted on the Evaluation Office web page. The primary user of the evaluation results is the UNCCD secretariat in terms of assisting the management of the secretariat and the regional coordinators in planning and improving the functioning of the RCUs. The results of the evaluation will be reported verbally to the COP.

## **B. Evaluation of the “Front Local Environnemental pour une Union Verte” project (June 2019)**

9. The Great Green Wall (GGW) is an Africa-led initiative that seeks to address many urgent threats – notably climate change, drought, malnutrition and unemployment – through better natural resource management and land degradation control projects. In 2014–2019, the GM partnered with five African countries<sup>3</sup> to implement the “Front Local Environnemental pour une Union Verte” (FLEUVE) project as part of the GGW, supported by the UNCCD focal points and national GGW authorities. Partnering organisations included the United Nations Capital Development Fund, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Centre d'Actions et de Réalisations Internationales Association.

10. The project aimed to strengthen the capacities of local actors in planning and financing development, with an emphasis on simultaneously promoting the sustainable management of land and natural resources. It had three main components: local-level capacity-building to prepare and implement development plans that integrate sustainable land management (SLM); addressing immediate livelihood and food security issues by promoting land rehabilitation and income generation; and enhancing knowledge sharing and partnership building within the GGW and beyond.

11. An independent evaluation of FLEUVE is currently underway and expected to be completed by the end of June. It is intended to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and, as feasible, impact of the project for two primary purposes: (a) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (b) to promote learning and knowledge sharing through the achieved results and lessons learned, particularly for the next steps in supporting GGW in the context of the UNCCD. As a cross-cutting theme, the evaluation will also look at the quality and effectiveness of a participatory approach throughout the project, with particular attention on the role of women in the implementation of the project.

12. The completed evaluation report will be posted on the Evaluation Office web page and the main results will be reported verbally to the COP. The main users of the evaluation are the donors supporting the project, the GM, partner governments and institutional partners.

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<sup>3</sup> Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and Senegal.

### **C. Prospective assessment: Additional arrangements for drought under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (May 2019)**

13. By decision 29/COP.13, the COP requested the secretariat to prepare a report on the need, if any, for additional arrangements on drought, for consideration at the fourteenth session of the COP (COP 14). The secretariat approached this request by seeking to clarify what such additional arrangements could be and what they would entail in terms of expected results and requirements for their establishment under the UNCCD. This work targeted numerous potential additional arrangements, including technical approaches, financing instruments and legal instruments.

14. In this context, the UNCCD Evaluation Office was assigned to prepare a prospective assessment focusing on the likely success of a variety of legal instruments in addressing drought under the UNCCD. This assessment covers eight types of legal instruments of both “hard law” and “soft law”, which are commonly used in international environmental cooperation: protocols, amendments, annexes, principles, declarations, decisions, standards and gentleman’s agreements. It outlines the main characteristics of each instrument, including their common definition, information on the preparatory process and approval, monitoring and reporting routines, and institutional and budgetary requirements. The assessment also provides examples of the use of each instrument in other international processes, mostly from within the United Nations system. Furthermore, the potential use of each legal instrument for addressing drought under the UNCCD is considered, building on the generic information, the examples and, where feasible, the use of the instrument under the UNCCD so far.

15. The prospective assessment does not make recommendations on whether legal instruments should be used for addressing drought under the UNCCD and, if so, which ones. Instead, it explains what the potential strengths and challenges of each instrument could be when applied to drought matters under the UNCCD, assuming that the COP may use this information for its decision.

16. Key points of the assessment of each of the reviewed legal instruments are presented in document ICCD/COP(14)/16 concerning progress made in the implementation of decision 29/COP.13 on the Policy Advocacy Framework on drought. Further details can be found in document ICCD/COP/14/INF.3, and the full version of the prospective assessment is available on the UNCCD Evaluation Office web page.

### **D. Evaluation of the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme (March 2019)**

17. Implemented from 2016 to 2019, the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme (LDN TSP) has supported 106 countries in their efforts to establish national voluntary LDN targets and the baseline data necessary for measuring progress against those targets. The TSP provided countries with financial support and technical inputs and facilitated peer learning between participating countries. The GM and IUCN managed the project, and it was funded mostly by the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

18. The evaluation offices of the IUCN and the UNCCD jointly commissioned an independent terminal evaluation of the TSP, which assessed the project performance against the criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, progress to impact and sustainability, and a cross-cutting criterion looking at participation and the extent to which the project integrated gender considerations.

19. The evaluation found that the TSP was highly relevant to the needs of participating countries, and to the priorities of the project’s partners. The number of countries involved, the variety of institutions within those countries, and the breadth of technical and financial partners that supported delivery was noted to have also helped raise the profile and understanding of LDN and the UNCCD, exposing many stakeholders to the concept of LDN for the first time.

20. The evaluation found the project to be cost- and time-efficient, with the TSP's rapid delivery achieved through a structured, easily replicated process and a centralised operating model. Significant efficiencies were gained through the high volume of co-financing mobilised, both cash and in-kind. And yet, the centralised operating model was said to have sometimes resulted in a reduced sense of ownership for countries, with a minority of participants highly critical about the lack of control and influence they had on the process.

21. In terms of effectiveness, the evaluation found that most of the project outputs and outcomes have been or are likely to be achieved, with the number of participating countries greatly exceeding original projections. It identified the work to establish national baselines and define national targets especially effective. However, it also noted that limited work was undertaken on knowledge management (including outreach and the facilitation of peer-to-peer learning), and that the TSP approach to capacity-building and development was insufficient to address some countries' needs. While the establishment of National Working Groups was stated to have helped many countries to build ownership of the process and ensured relatively broad participation, gender dimensions were not well incorporated within the project's design. Although some gender-focused work was eventually undertaken, this was somewhat reactive and unstructured.

22. With regard to progress towards impact and sustainability, the evaluation stated that the LDN TSP has laid critical foundations for reaching the long-term impact of achieving LDN as, within most participating countries, it has helped to generate considerable interest and momentum around LDN. But the potential loss of this initial momentum was identified as the primary risk to the project's sustainability and long-term impact: with targets now set, participating countries must now see the pay-off for their investment in the target setting process, and there is a pressing need to demonstrate that those targets can drive the achievement of LDN. The most important next step towards impact and sustainability was identified as developing concepts for transformative projects and securing investment for their delivery. Building political commitment, raising broader awareness of LDN, and continuous capacity-building and development were also pinpointed as crucial factors.

23. The evaluation made the following recommendations to the secretariat and the GM:

- (a) Develop a more systematic approach to knowledge management, learning and outreach;
- (b) Make preparations to advise on capacity-building and development options;
- (c) Develop guidance on integrating gender and co-benefits into LDN strategies and targets;
- (d) Explore options for closer harmonisation across the Rio Conventions; and
- (e) Revise some administrative procedures in advance of future project delivery.

24. In their joint management response, the UNCCD secretariat, GM and IUCN accepted all recommendations. Their implementation has already started and will include, inter alia, the development and dissemination of targeted knowledge products, tools for cross-country learning, support for the development of transformative LDN projects, capacity development for the monitoring of LDN indicators, technical guidance and backstopping for the integration of gender issues as well as synergies between the Rio Conventions and LDN projects, and a revision of the business standards used for the TSP.

## **E. Evaluation of cooperation between the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification secretariat (April 2018)**

25. An independent evaluation of cooperation between the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT) and the UNCCD secretariat was commissioned in 2018. The evaluation assessed whether the aims that were set in the cooperation agreement had been met, taking into account changes that had been introduced to the agreement since it was signed. It also looked at the cooperation process and identified and documented lessons learned. The main purpose of the evaluation was to advise on the

possible continuation of WOCAT-UNCCD secretariat cooperation after the expiry of their cooperation agreement at the end of 2018.

26. The evaluation found that the WOCAT-UNCCD secretariat cooperation had been relevant for the UNCCD priorities and acknowledged by COP decisions. The cooperation was also found to correspond to the mandates and the usual level of resource uses of the two partners, and to adhere to the UNCCD standards and practices.

27. In terms of efficiency and effectiveness, there had been considerable delays in the delivery of tasks outlined in the cooperation agreement, and in their completion in the planned quality. Nevertheless, from 2016 onwards, work on the agreed products advanced faster and, at the time of the evaluation, all main tasks mentioned in the agreement had been completed: the SLM best practices were categorized, and those practices submitted through the performance review and assessment of implementation system (PRAIS) portal were adjusted and transferred to the WOCAT online database. A unified template for reporting on best practices was completed, including questionnaires and categorization systems as well as graphic illustrations and practical forms in order to standardize and harmonize the approaches to documenting best practices. The online facility was launched and now contains all best practices previously submitted through the PRAIS platform, hundreds of other best practices as well as the standardised template for submitting new information.

28. An assessment of the impact of the WOCAT-UNCCD secretariat cooperation was not the focus of the evaluation. Nevertheless, the evaluation noted that the extent of submission of new best practices and visits to access these practices indicate that countries find the new online facility useful. This in turn indicates that there is awareness and interest in using the uploaded best practices for planning and decision-making by country Parties, which is the long-term objective of the WOCAT-UNCCD secretariat cooperation.

29. The database and uploaded practices are available within the WOCAT system, which is institutionalized within the WOCAT consortium. The evaluation finds that this makes up for strong sustainability of the system in place.

30. Building on the findings and their analysis, the evaluation presents six recommendations:

(a) The UNCCD secretariat and WOCAT should continue their cooperation on SLM best practices;

(b) The UNCCD secretariat should use the UNCCD process to promote the importance and potential of the collection, sharing and use of best practices;

(c) WOCAT should create tools to improve the access and use of the database at country and, where possible, local levels;

(d) The UNCCD secretariat and WOCAT should ensure that the next phase of cooperation is founded on a jointly agreed framework of objectives and activities, and clear roles and responsibilities;

(e) The UNCCD secretariat and WOCAT should establish a realistic budget for the cooperation and secure the necessary resources in a timely manner; and

(f) The UNCCD secretariat and WOCAT should cooperate with other development partners active in the SLM field and intensify their own joint efforts to enable cross-fertilisation, synergies and learning.

31. In their joint management response, WOCAT and the UNCCD secretariat accepted all recommendations except the third, which is partially accepted. In a follow-up to the evaluation, the secretariat has facilitated access to the WOCAT online facility and encouraged Parties to submit new best practices. WOCAT has recently invited the secretariat to join its steering committee, and the two entities are also consulting on the content of the upcoming WOCAT strategy. Continuation of this cooperation will be considered based on this new strategy, and both WOCAT and the secretariat are committed to ensuring that any new joint activities are built on careful planning and realistic budgeting.

## **F. Evaluation of the Global Land Outlook (December 2017)**

32. The first edition of the Global Land Outlook (GLO) was published by the UNCCD secretariat in September 2017. Its preparation was supported by numerous partners, inter alia, national governments, the European Union and many United Nations system entities. The GLO aimed to provide an enhanced policy and knowledge base, including future scenarios and projections on land degradation/rehabilitation trends, and to assert land degradation as an issue of global importance and the UNCCD as a central player in addressing it.

33. An independent evaluation of the GLO was carried out soon after it had been published, with focus on drawing out its strengths and possible weaknesses with a view to informing decisions regarding future editions and supplementary outputs. The scope of the evaluation included:

- (a) The relevance of the GLO to its primary audience of policy-makers at the national, regional and global levels;
- (b) The actual and anticipated effectiveness of the GLO in triggering debate and underwriting progressive policy change;
- (c) The efficiency of the process to produce the GLO; and
- (d) The lessons in terms of both content and process.

34. The evaluation findings indicate that the GLO met a real need and landed in an increasingly favourable external context. As a publication that functions as an outlook and synthesis, the GLO was said to be more substantial than typical UNCCD products. And though aimed at policy-makers, the quality and depth of its content was considered “definitive” and solid. The GLO Working Papers were said to further increase its (substantive/scientific) credibility. In comparison with other related publications, the GLO approach and content were seen as complementary to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Land Degradation and Restoration Assessment (LDRA). It was stated to reach a standard at least as high as the Global Environment Outlook and Global Biodiversity Outlook.

35. In terms of effectiveness, the evaluation found that the GLO was generally appreciated for its analysis of the causes of, trends in and solutions to land degradation. It was considered successful and timely in making the links between land and other key themes such as climate, and also in contributing to broader and more forward-looking agenda setting for the UNCCD.

36. On efficiency, the evaluation notes that the initial work plans were over-optimistic in terms of the GLO launch date and wide of the mark in terms of its length. Although the end result was assessed as commendable, the evaluation found difficulties in the production and promotional processes, including the lack of standardized guidance for the numerous contributors, coordination with the contributors, and the small size of the team overseeing the process, which should be addressed in the upcoming editions.

37. The evaluation made recommendations on intensifying the promotion of the first GLO, and on cooperation with IPBES around the publication of the LDRA. It recommended that future editions of the GLO are produced every four years and that they include, in some form, more in-depth regional analyses and further exploration of the key themes. The development of the Global Land Index was to be reviewed and analysed. On the planning and production of future editions, the evaluation recommended an early outreach phase to ensure high-quality contributors and partners with a shared agenda, widening of the (geographic) range of contributors, and the provision of clear, early guidance relating to the contributors’ input and referencing. Some production bottlenecks were also addressed.

38. In the management response, the secretariat accepted or partially accepted all recommendations and the follow-up actions for the promotion of the GLO cooperation with IPBES, scheduling of the future editions and analysis of the development of the index have been completed. Four regional GLO reports are in preparation and will be presented during COP 14. The GLO steering committee has started to consider the involvement of contributors – for what purpose, when, and how to ensure an optimal input – and will address the



evaluation outcomes concerning the production process in its meeting scheduled for September 2019.

### **III. Follow-up to earlier United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification evaluations**

39. By decision 10/COP.13, the COP requested the secretariat and the GM to use the evaluation recommendations when planning and conducting their work. To systematically follow up on the recommendations, the secretariat and/or the GM prepares a management response for each evaluation, outlining the action to be taken to meet the recommendations. The management responses are made public together with the evaluation reports, and they should be considered essential components of the evaluation reports.

40. This section provides an overview of action taken on the recommendations of evaluations that were completed during the biennium 2016–2017. Similar information on earlier evaluation recommendations is available in the report submitted to COP 13.<sup>4</sup>

#### **A. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the participation of civil society organizations in the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (June 2017)**

41. An independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the UNCCD was commissioned in 2017 in order to assess changes in CSO involvement (i.e. the extent to which results were achieved) in the UNCCD process since the establishment of the CSO Panel, and clarify how the evolving facilities for CSO involvement, particularly the CSO Panel, contribute to changes in the CSO involvement. The evaluation was limited to the role and activities of the CSOs in the context of the intergovernmental UNCCD process.

42. The evaluation recommended the following actions:

(a) Development of an operational guideline or terms of reference, including a time-bound strategic plan, for CSO participation in the UNCCD and the functions and operations of the CSO Panel Recommendation;

(b) Development of a UNCCD CSO communication plan; and

(c) Continuation of the UNCCD secretariat support for effective participation of accredited CSOs in the UNCCD process at global, regional and national levels, paying particular attention to actively engaging new CSOs to become involved in the UNCCD and facilitating follow-up to CSO activities to deepen the impact.

43. By decision 5/COP.13, the COP welcomed the outcomes and recommendations of the independent evaluation and requested the secretariat, in collaboration with the CSO Panel and subject to the availability of resources, to take the necessary measures to implement the evaluation recommendations. Action was taken accordingly: the previous and current CSO Panel members joined forces in preparing operational guidelines, which will regulate the work of the Panel in the future and assist the panel members in carrying out their mandate. The recommended communication plan was also completed by the Panel. With regard to the continuous support of the secretariat, the promotional activities have specifically targeted youth, local governance and faith-based organizations and, as at 1 June, close to 60 new CSOs had submitted their documents for accreditation as observers to the COP. UNCCD issues have also had a more visible role than earlier in many major CSO processes.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Report of the Evaluation Office: ICCD/COP(13)/14.

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see document: ICCD/COP(14)/13.

## **B. Assessment of the Science-Policy Interface (May 2017)**

44. The work conducted by the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) and its overall achievements since its establishment were set by the COP to be reviewed at the thirteenth session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST 13) in September 2017. To prepare for the SPI review, an external assessment of the SPI was commissioned earlier the same year, with emphasis on stakeholder feedback.

45. The assessment found that the SPI has made good progress in implementing its 2016–2017 work programme and effectively organized its work by allocating tasks among members. The assessment further found that the SPI had produced useful knowledge on a solid scientific basis, and that it was succeeding in influencing other scientific processes and better involving the scientific community in UNCCD work, although it was noted that there was yet plenty to be done in these areas. In general, the findings of the assessment indicated that the SPI had had a promising start and its continuation was recommended.

46. The assessment presented eight recommendations on the SPI composition, functioning and resourcing, with the aim of improving its operations and capacity to deliver. These recommendations addressed, inter alia, promoting SPI work through the work of the SPI members, formalizing the interaction between the SPI and IPBES and the SPI and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), refining the terms of reference for SPI membership, increasing the observer seats of the SPI, better focusing the SPI work programme, involving partners, and considering the frequency of the SPI meetings and the availability of resources for the SPI work.

47. The content and recommendations of the assessment provided the background information for the CST review of the SPI.<sup>6</sup> The outcomes of related CST and COP exchanges were outlined in decision 19/COP.13 by which the COP, taking into consideration the findings and recommendations from the assessment, decided to extend the mandate of the SPI up to COP 16 in 2023. The COP also decided to renew the SPI membership using a rotating system to ensure the continuity of the work and requested the CST Bureau to revise the SPI terms of reference and selection criteria accordingly.

48. With regard to the SPI work programme, the COP requested it to focus on one or two broad, globally relevant priority topics related to desertification/land degradation and drought and coordinate its activities with six existing scientific mechanisms. Among these, the establishment of more formal relationships between the SPI and the IPBES, IPCC and Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) and the International Resource Panel of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP-IRP) was explored in order to develop synergies and avoid duplication of efforts. The SPI was encouraged to continue fostering partnerships with scientific bodies and institutions, international organizations, CSOs and other relevant stakeholders; and the SPI members were invited to increase awareness of the work of the SPI. The COP further requested the secretariat to facilitate communication between the SPI and the science and technology correspondents of Parties, and to continue to mobilize resources for the effective functioning of the SPI.

49. Following COP 13, the SPI terms of reference were accordingly revised by the Bureau of the CST, the rotating renewal system was initiated, and two more observer seats were added to the composition of the SPI. In 2018, a memorandum of cooperation was established between the secretariats of the UNCCD and IPBES, and fewer formal agreements were reached with the IPCC, ITPS and UNEP-IRP to strengthen collaboration. The secretariat has continued to regularly disseminate information about the work of the SPI and ensured the resources for its functioning.

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<sup>6</sup> For more information, see document: ICCD/COP/CST(13)/6.

### **C. Evaluation of the development of the Land Degradation Neutrality Fund (February 2017)**

50. An independent evaluation was commissioned in 2017 to assess the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of activities carried out by the GM in developing the LDN Fund. The evaluation focused on three work streams that dealt with project pipeline development; monitoring, reporting and verification; and communication, marketing and outreach.

51. In general, the evaluation found that the development phase of the LDN Fund was well planned and executed while a robust, diverse project portfolio had been constructed. It also commended the LDN Fund development as a rare example of a substantive, practical partnership between the United Nations system and the private sector. However, there were some delays in the LDN Fund development process which, according to the evaluation, were largely attributed to difficulties associated with the innovative nature of both the investment approach and the LDN concept.

52. The evaluation made four recommendations suggesting actions in favour of: (a) a more diverse portfolio of sourcing partners, (b) alignment of project-level monitoring data with relevant national statistical system, (c) additional, portfolio-level key performance indicators and/or periodic evaluations to support the measurement of the LDN Fund's broader influence on the LDN investment environment, and (d) revision of the communication strategy. In the management response, the GM accepted or partially accepted recommendations a, c and d but rejected recommendation b, stating that the monitoring data from projects funded through the LDN Fund is more significant in the global context than from the viewpoint of national statistics of individual countries. Implementation of activities to meet recommendation a are ongoing, while those on recommendations c and d have been completed.

53. After the active support of the GM in the development phase, the LDN Fund has now been established as an independent impact investment fund managed by the private sector investment management firm, Mirova. The LDN Fund invests in revenue-generating SLM and land restoration projects worldwide. On 1 June 2019, it announced more than USD 100 million of commitments from a wide range of investors and it made its first investment in January 2019. The LDN Fund also has a grant-making technical assistance facility to provide technical support to projects with the potential to receive funding through the LDN Fund and be investment-ready within 24 months.

### **D. Evaluation of the performance review and assessment of implementation system (May 2016)**

54. The UNCCD PRAIS was evaluated in 2016 against the criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and sustainability with the aim of supporting the consideration of the future use of PRAIS for the new UNCCD reporting requirements. The evaluation found that the use of standardized reporting templates, which is an essential feature of PRAIS, helped to introduce and operationalize the concept of quantifiable, indicator-based reporting under the UNCCD. However, the focus of the reporting was noted to be on procedural, institutional and organizational performance instead of progress in combatting desertification/land degradation or mitigating the effects of drought. In terms of technical features and cost-efficiency, the evaluation found that PRAIS portal modifications could not be carried out internally but required external support, and that other UNCCD knowledge management tools could be used more efficiently to complement PRAIS.

55. The evaluation made broad recommendations for improving the effectiveness, relevance cost-efficiency and sustainability of reporting under the UNCCD which included, inter alia, focusing future national reporting on progress made towards the strategic objectives and incorporating the national LDN targets; using more qualitative narratives as reporting data; ensuring that the reporting templates can be modified without significant additional costs; integrating the information about the reporting tools in the UNCCD website; and maintaining the PRAIS 'brand' for UNCCD reporting even if the system is significantly changed.

56. In the management response, the secretariat accepted the recommendations partially, taking into account that several processes that would influence national reporting were underway at the time of the evaluation and the action to be taken could be determined only after the completion of related decisions at COP level.

57. COP 13 adopted a new strategic framework for implementing the Convention which necessitated an overhaul of reporting modalities and procedures. For the 2017–2018 reporting process, the focus of reporting shifted to land-based indicators, using a standardized methodology and standardized data for which countries were given default data to serve as at least a starting point. Through reporting on land-based indicators, PRAIS met the evaluation recommendation about focusing on the strategic objectives.

58. The COP also requested various changes to the reporting process, such as simplifying the reporting templates and other reporting tools for future reporting processes and making PRAIS more user-friendly. For the 2017–2018 reporting process, this request was met with e-learning reporting modules and an updated manual while a glossary was also made available. The PRAIS online platform was further developed to reflect the new requirements for UNCCD reporting.

### **E. Evaluation of the Changwon Initiative (April 2016)**

59. Launched in 2011, the Changwon Initiative provides the UNCCD with financial, technical and strategic support from the Korea Forest Service (KFS). An independent evaluation was commissioned in 2016 to assess the Initiative's overall performance and contribution to results achieved under the UNCCD.

60. The evaluation found that the Changwon Initiative performed a vital role in some of the most significant results achieved by the UNCCD during the period 2012–2015, many of which were linked to developing and testing the concept of LDN, and contributed to the adoption of SDG target 15.3. It stated that the Initiative offered political backing and, as predictable extrabudgetary financial support, facilitated timely planning and the implementation of many key activities. While the general assessment of the Changwon Initiative was positive, the evaluation also noted that it would have benefited from more clearly defined targets and indicators and precise links to the UNCCD results framework.

61. On this basis, the evaluation recommended the continuation of the Changwon Initiative, including the definition of a results framework linked to the overall UNCCD priorities. Similar alignment with the UNCCD results framework was also recommended to other future agreements of the secretariat with donor partners. The evaluation also recommended that the secretariat improve the availability of updated status of funding to the project managers; and that the outcomes of the Changwon Initiative be better integrated into the UNCCD knowledge management platforms and processes.

62. In the management response, the secretariat, after consulting with KFS, accepted or partially accepted the recommendations. Since 2016, results frameworks and other similar approaches reflecting the UNCCD priorities have been included in the Changwon Initiative workplans and other framework agreements between the secretariat and its partners. In addition, the recommendations concerning the continuous financial status reports and the integration of the outcomes of the Changwon Initiative into the UNCCD knowledge management platforms and processes have been met.

### **IV. Evaluation Office: 2020–2021 work programme**

63. The proposed 2020–2021 UNCCD Evaluation Office work programme is presented in the table. This programme may be adjusted in the light of other tasks or further evaluation or assessment requirements assigned by the COP.

64. The UNCCD Evaluation Office has one professional member of staff funded from the programme support costs. An allocation from the UNCCD core budget is proposed to recruit independent evaluators and publicize the results. Evaluations of activities that have been funded from extrabudgetary sources will be covered from the budget of each activity.

Table  
**2020–2021 United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification Evaluation Office work programme**

<i>Evaluations</i>	<i>Estimated core budget allocation (in euros)</i>
Evaluation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Gender Action Plan	12,000
Evaluation of private sector engagement in the UNCCD	15,000
Evaluation of cooperation with the International Institute for Sustainable Development	8,000
Evaluation of the New York Liaison Office	8,000
Evaluation of the UNCCD conference services	8,000
Evaluation of the support for the preparation of transformative projects	0
Evaluation of the Drought Initiative	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>51,000</b>

## V. Conclusions and recommendations

**65.** This document presents the main outcomes and recommendations of evaluations carried out during the biennium 2018–2019, as well as the action taken by the secretariat and the GM to meet the recommendations of the earlier evaluations.

**66.** This document also presents the provisional plan for the evaluations to be carried out in the coming biennium. The COP may wish to:

- (a) Take note of the proposed Evaluation Office work programme; and
- (b) Request the Executive Secretary to report to COP15 on the outcomes of the evaluations that will be conducted in 2020–2021 and on the action taken to meet the pending recommendations of earlier evaluations.