



**Conference of the Parties
Committee on Science and Technology
Tenth session**
Changwon, Republic of Korea, 11–13 October 2011
Item 7 of the provisional agenda
Science and technology correspondents

Role and responsibilities of science and technology correspondents

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) agreed to set out general guidelines on the role and responsibilities of science and technology correspondents in the aftermath of the first special session of the CST (CST S-1), held in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2008.

After reviewing those guidelines, the Conference of the Parties, by its decision 22/COP.9, requested the CST Bureau to consult with Parties and the regional groups to develop recommendations on the role and responsibilities of the science and technology correspondents for consideration by the CST at its second special session (CST S-2) and its tenth session (CST 10).

With the agreement of the CST Bureau, the secretariat sent a questionnaire on the role and responsibilities of science and technology correspondents to all national focal points in April 2010. The preliminary survey results were presented at the CST S-2, held in Bonn, Germany, in 2011. Because of the limited number of responses to the questionnaire, and the increased number of science and technology correspondents, it was recommended at the CST S-2 that the questionnaire be circulated again. Accordingly, the questionnaire was resent in April 2011. This document contains the combined findings and recommendations of the consultations in 2010 and 2011.

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I. Introduction

1. By its decision 15/COP.7 on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST), the Conference of the Parties (COP) encouraged country Parties to select a science and technology correspondent to the CST under the coordination of the national focal point.

2. In the aftermath of the first special session of the CST (CST S-1), held in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2008, the CST Bureau consulted with science and technology correspondents and agreed on their role and responsibilities. It was agreed that the science and technology correspondents should provide scientific support for the implementation of the Convention, especially through planning, implementation and monitoring national action programmes in affected countries. This will include:

(a) Enhancing relationships and networks with the scientific community at local, national, regional and global levels with the support of national focal points;

(b) Assisting national focal points in establishing a dialogue with scientists and technologists at national level;

(c) Assisting national focal points in measuring progress in the achievement of the strategic objectives of the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) (The Strategy) and the reporting process.

3. During its meeting in May 2009, the CST Bureau recognized that uncertainty about the role and responsibilities of science and technology correspondents could result in some Parties not nominating a science and technology correspondent. The COP, by its decision 22/COP.9, therefore requested the CST Bureau to consult with Parties and the regional groups to develop recommendations on the role and responsibilities of science and technology correspondents for consideration by the CST at its second special session (CST S-2) and its tenth session (CST 10).

4. Following up on this decision, the CST Bureau agreed that the consultation process should be carried out through the national focal points and that the secretariat should send a questionnaire to national focal points to gather their input on the matter. This questionnaire, which is contained in the annex to this document, was sent to national focal points in April 2010. The secretariat received 27 responses by the deadline.

5. At CST S-2, held in Bonn, Germany, from 16 to 18 February 2011, the CST considered the survey results presented in document ICCD/CST(S-2)/5. Because of the limited number of respondents to the questionnaire sent in 2010, coupled with the increased number of science and technology correspondents, it was recommended at CST S-2 that the questionnaires be circulated again in order to allow greater participation.

6. Parties were also invited to regularly update the list of science and technology correspondents through the official channels and it was emphasized that the process of communication with science and technology correspondents needed to be clarified.

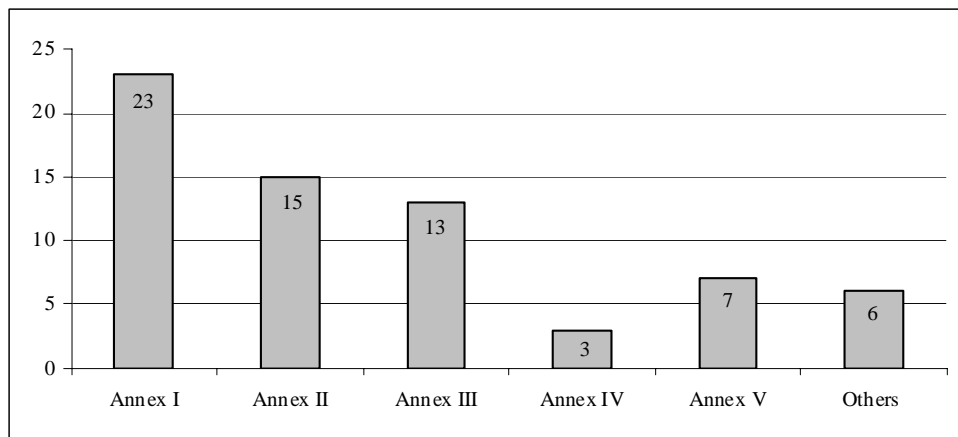
II. Analysis and interpretation of results

7. With the agreement of the CST Bureau, the secretariat re-circulated the questionnaire to all national focal points in April 2011. Parties that had responded in 2010 were invited to update their reply if they saw a need to do so. A reminder was sent before the deadline for replies, to further increase the level of participation to the survey.

8. By mid-June 2011, at the time of the preparation of this document, 44 Parties had replied. Four of those Parties had already participated in 2010, meaning that a total of 67

Parties (about one third of all Parties) have replied to the survey (see figure 1). Eight Parties that had not nominated a science and technology correspondent at the time of the survey nevertheless participated in the survey.

Figure 1
Number of questionnaire replies by Convention annex



9. All replies received in 2010 and 2011 were recorded and analysed, sorting answers into various groups and categorizing the different opinions on the basis of general meaning. Categories of answers used in graphs or tables are only for analytical purposes and are further explained or specified in the text, where the different perceptions, views, description and reflections are indicated in detail

A. Current role and responsibilities of science and technology correspondents

Question 1. What role does the science and technology correspondent presently play and what responsibilities does he/she have in your country in assisting the national focal point?

10. Two-thirds of the participating countries reported that the role of their science and technology correspondent was in general providing scientific and technical advice to the national focal point on the implementation of the Convention.

11. Replies mentioned that science and technology correspondents are available to provide ad-hoc scientific expertise for specific questions and to contextualise them with regard to broader questions and interlinkages in international environmental governance. Some Parties also mentioned that the function of their science and technology correspondent was to support and advise clients within the public sector, the private sector and civil society on issues relating to land degradation and multilateral environmental agreements. In line with this, it was also mentioned that the position of science and technology correspondents includes providing recommendations concerning issues related to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) based on external and independent scientific advice. It was also mentioned that the science and technology correspondents presently play a role in enhancing the implementation of The Strategy by providing assistance to their national focal point on issues relating to desertification as well as planning, implementation and monitoring of national action programmes.

12. Seventeen Parties reported that science and technology correspondents presently act as a link between UNCCD and the country by transferring information received to the stakeholders. In the same manner, science and technology correspondents take part in

enhancing networks with the scientific community at different levels and assist the national focal point in dialogue for developing relationships between scientific, academic and political bodies. Likewise, they are responsible for channelling the scientific information in each specific topic and strengthen existing relations between policy and sciences.

13. Thirteen Parties reported that their science and technology correspondent provided scientific and technical input into reports and other papers prepared. Some Parties also mentioned that science and technology correspondents are currently responsible for generating bio-physical and socio-economic data and for conducting baseline surveys and scientific studies concerning sustainable land management practices.

14. Thirteen Parties reported that their science and technology correspondent participated in awareness raising activities. For example, it was reported that they plan publications and disseminate them to stakeholders based on implemented best practices

15. Eight Parties reported that the role and responsibilities of science and technology correspondents included attending UNCCD and other scientific meetings. It was also reported that science and technology correspondents supported the national focal point in negotiations at sessions of the COP. Some Parties also mentioned that their science and technology correspondent participated in e-forums organized by the secretariat.

16. Some Parties pointed out that the role and responsibilities of their science and technology correspondent was not clear, but that they were providing considerable support to the national focal point and that cooperation between the two was close. Similarly, five countries mentioned that their science and technology correspondent had no institutionally authorized role and responsibilities, which is why they were currently not performing any recognized official job. The figure also includes countries that do not nominate their science and technology correspondent but that participated in the survey.

B. Most important achievements of science and technology correspondents

Question 2. What have been the most important achievements/outcomes of the contribution of the science and technology correspondents at national, subnational and/or regional level?

17. Fifty-six Parties reported important contributions by their science and technology correspondents (see table 1). The other 11 responses stated that there are not yet any considerable achievements to report due to financial and time constraints or due to the new nomination of science and technology correspondents.

18. In addition, some Parties mentioned as important achievements that their science and technology correspondent assisted in implementing the Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands (LADA) project, supported the updating of the roster of independent experts and worked on impact indicators.

Table 1
Most important achievement of science and technology correspondents

<i>Achievements</i>	<i>Frequency^a</i>
Prepared country report or national action programme	21
Awareness raising	13
Coordination and information sharing with various institutions	11
No considerable achievements	11
Providing information through research and coordination with researcher	9
Participate at UNCCD and other meetings	8

^a Some responses included several answers.

C. Problems in cooperation with science and technology correspondents

Question 3. What do you consider as problems in the cooperation with the science and technology correspondents?

19. Twenty-five of the participating 67 Parties did not report on any problems encountered.

20. The most frequently cited problem in the cooperation with science and technology correspondents is the lack of adequate funding to carry out UNCCD activities (17 Parties). Many Parties reported that science and technology correspondents work on an honorary basis, which is why there were often time conflicts with the routine work of science and technology correspondents. The time constraints of science and technology correspondents are the second most frequently cited problem.

21. Nine Parties noted that there were problems in coordinating different activities by different bodies at different levels. Five Parties mentioned a communication gap between national focal points and science and technology correspondents, between the science and technology correspondents from different countries, and between science and technology correspondents and scientists and other possible stakeholders.

22. Other issues raised are uncertainty on the role of science and technology correspondents, lack of UNCCD and national support, and lack of political will in supporting the work of science and technology correspondents.

D. Proposed role and responsibilities of science and technology correspondents

Question 4. What role and responsibilities should the science and technology correspondents bear in your opinion?

23. The majority of responses agreed on the need for science and technology correspondents to play an active role in providing technical advice on issues relating to national action programmes, the objectives of The Strategy, national reporting and the development of impact indicators. It was also noted that modalities for the integration of science and technology into national action programmes would need to be identified.

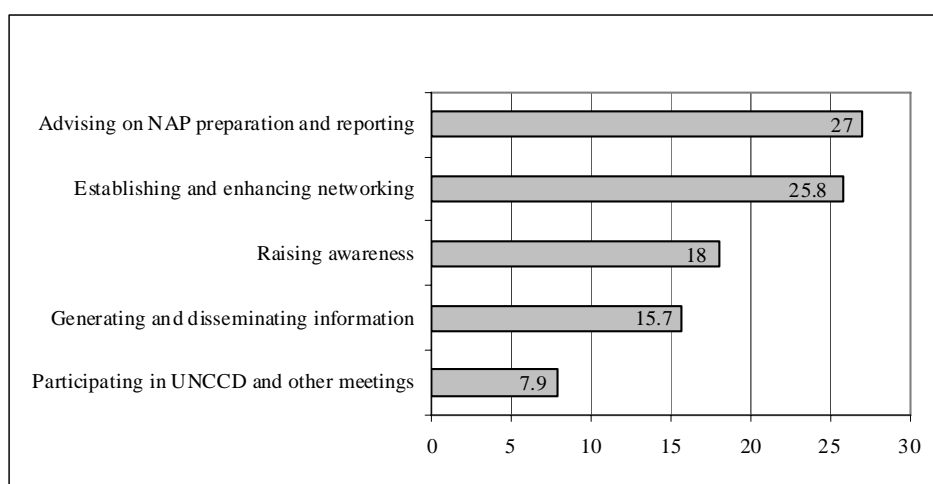
24. It was proposed that science and technology correspondents should take a leading role in preparing national reports on impact indicators and that they should actively participate in initiatives concerning the implementation process of the convention. It was also mentioned that they should work on best practices on desertification/land degradation

and drought (DLDD), sustainable land management and the development of impact indicators.

25. In line with the need to integrate science and technology into national action programmes, it was noted that science and technology correspondents should establish and enhance networking with the scientific community and generate and disseminate information. In addition, it was proposed that science and technology correspondents could organize and lead scientific forums that involve stakeholders, in order to raise awareness. Finally, it was mentioned that science and technology correspondents should participate in UNCCD and other scientific meetings.

Figure 2

Proposed role and responsibilities of science and technology correspondents in percent



E. Best ways of involving the scientific community in the implementation of the Convention

Question 5. How do you think science and the scientific community could best be involved in the implementation of the Convention?

26. The proposals made by Parties are summarized in table 2.

Table 2

Ways to involve science and the scientific community in implementation of the Convention

<i>Suggested ways of involvement</i>	<i>Frequency^a</i>
Establishing networks of scientific community and other United Nations conventions	32
Organizing international conferences and forums	12
Awareness creation	12
Making use of science and technology in NAPs	8
Prioritizing, coordination, conducting and funding of a research programme	6
Involvement of stakeholders	5

^a Some responses included several answers.

27. In addition to the suggestions contained in table 2, some Parties suggested that scientific awards for applied research relating to land degradation and desertification could help in involving the scientific community in the implementation of the Convention. It was also suggested to formulate recommendations for research and education policy in order to promote research relevant to the implementation of the Convention.

28. Some Parties expressed their views on how international, scientific advice could be organized in the Convention process through international forums or an international panel, and how science and technology correspondents could participate in the process.

F. The role of science and technology correspondents in scientific networking

29. The last question of the survey enquired whether science and technology correspondents should play a role in enhancing scientific networking. All responses agreed to this.

30. Some replies noted that financial support would be needed to enable science and technology correspondents to successfully engage in scientific networking. It was also suggested that science and technology correspondents could coordinate a national scientific network and provide linkages at regional and global level. Moreover, it was suggested that science and technology correspondents should create a network among themselves first, before engaging in wider networking with the scientific community at large.

G. Other comments and recommendations

31. At the end of the questionnaire, Parties were invited to make comments or to provide recommendations. Mentioning that continuous capacity building in terms of knowledge and information sharing for science and technology correspondents is critical for their scientific inputs for policy makers, countries recommended that the secretariat has to encourage and invite science and technology correspondents to different UNCCD-related events. Similarly, they strongly recommended the UNCCD secretariat should take a leading role in convincing policy makers in implementation of the convention.

32. It was also noted that the role and responsibilities of science and technology correspondents should not be overloaded, taking into consideration the voluntary status of science and technology correspondents and that their activities are additional to their normal workload.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

33. The majority of Parties agreed with the role and responsibilities of science and technology correspondents mentioned in paragraph 2. Some Parties identified additional responsibilities of their science and technology correspondent.

34. The CST 10 may wish to consider the analysis of the feedback on the role and responsibilities of science and technology correspondents, consider and endorse the above-mentioned roles and responsibilities of science and technology correspondents, and make recommendations to the COP for a decision on the matter.

35. The CST may wish to consider recommending to the COP that science and technology correspondents should provide scientific support for the implementing of the Convention, especially through planning, implementation and monitoring national action programmes in affected countries. This will include:

(a) **Enhancing relationships and networks with the scientific community at local, national, regional and global levels with the support of national focal points;**

(b) **Assisting national focal points in establishing a dialogue with scientists and technologists at national level;**

(c) **Assisting national focal points in measuring progress in the achievement of the strategic objectives of The Strategy and the reporting process.**

36. Any further responsibilities for science and technology correspondents should be proposed by the national focal points to their respective science and technology correspondents.

37. National focal points should clearly communicate to their science and technology correspondent, in writing, the kind of operational and/or financial support that could be made available to the science and technology correspondent.

Annex

Consultation questionnaire

Past and present situation:

1. What role does the science and technology correspondent (STC) presently play and what responsibilities does he/she have in your country in assisting the national focal point (NFP)?
2. What have been the most important achievements/outcomes of the contribution of the STC at national, subnational and/or regional level?
3. What do you consider as problems in the cooperation with the STC?

Revision of the role and responsibilities of STCs

4. What role and responsibilities should the STCs bear in your opinion?
5. How do you think science and the scientific community could best be involved in the implementation of the Convention?
6. Should the STCs play a role – as proposed in Annex I^a – in the enhancement of scientific networking?

Please let us have any other comments and recommendations from your side

^a This refers to the role and responsibilities of science and technology correspondents agreed upon by the CST Bureau in the aftermath of CST S-1, as contained in paragraph 2 of this document.
