



Convention to Combat Desertification

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Special segment: interactive dialogue sessions

Background document on the high-level segment during the Conference of the Parties at its tenth session

Note by the secretariat

Summary

At the high-level segment of the tenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP), ministers and other heads of delegation will hold plenary discussions in the form of three ministerial round tables, where they will discuss responses to emerging challenges as they relate to desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD):

(a) Round table 1: Desertification/land degradation and drought and food security: preserving the resource base for our food security. Participants will discuss the long-term development of sustainable agricultural (and food) systems that can withstand external and climatic shocks while minimizing the impacts of agriculture on land productivity and forests;

(b) Round table 2: UNCCD in the context of Rio+20: addressing desertification/land degradation and drought as a cornerstone of the green economy. Participants will discuss tackling DLDD issues as a prerequisite to global sustainability. It is expected that the President of the United Nations General Assembly will formally convey to the COP the conclusions of the high-level meeting on DLDD to be held on 20 September at the eve of the 66th United Nations General Assembly;

(c) Round table 3: Harnessing science knowledge for combating desertification/land degradation and drought: the path to improvement. Participants will discuss the interface between science and policy, with the aim of generating guidance to enhance the level of the scientific process within the UNCCD.

It is anticipated that the high-level segment will bring a political momentum to the deliberations of country Parties on the best options to foster the implementation of the Convention.

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I. Background

1. The high-level segment of the tenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 10) will be held on 17–18 October 2011 in Changwon, Republic of Korea.
2. The high-level segment will be organized by the host country in consultation with the COP Bureau and the secretariat. Ministers and heads of delegation from the 194 Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) will bring a political momentum to the deliberations of Parties and guide negotiators as may be appropriate, including on issues spelled out in the UNCCD 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) (The Strategy).
3. Following a momentum sparked at COP 8 with the adoption of The Strategy, and strengthened at COP 9, it is expected that the COP in Changwon will set a new landmark in the UNCCD process.
4. In order to assist delegations in preparing for the high-level segment, the secretariat has prepared this information note addressing some of the questions that ministers and heads of delegations will be invited to consider during their deliberations.

II. Organization of the high-level segment

5. During the high-level segment, there will be general plenary session in the form of three ministerial round table discussions.
6. For each ministerial round table, it is anticipated that the President of COP 10 will invite a maximum of five panel members to make introductory remarks and engage in an interactive dialogue. Panellists will be identified taking into account geographical distribution. A moderator will be invited to facilitate the discussions and interactions between panellists and the floor.
7. The opening ceremony of the high-level segment on Monday 17 October will start with a welcoming statement by the President of COP 10. This will be followed by a message from the United Nations Secretary-General and a statement by the UNCCD Executive Secretary.
8. Following the opening ceremony, statements at ministerial level will be made on behalf of each of the regional and interest groups (Africa; Asia; Latin America and the Caribbean; the European Union; JUSCANZ (Japan, United States, Switzerland, Canada, Australia, Norway and New Zealand); and Central and Eastern Europe. Names of speakers will be communicated to the UNCCD secretariat before or during the first week of COP 10.
9. The topics for consideration at the round table discussions will include the following:
 - (a) Round table 1: Desertification/land degradation and drought and food security: preserving the resource base for our food security. Ministers and other heads of delegation will discuss the long-term development of sustainable agricultural (and food) systems that can withstand external and climatic shocks while minimizing the impacts of agriculture on land productivity and forests;
 - (b) Round table 2: UNCCD in the context of Rio+20: addressing desertification/land degradation and drought as a cornerstone of the green economy. Ministers and other heads of delegation will discuss tackling desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD) issues as a prerequisite to global sustainability. It is

expected that the President of the United Nations General Assembly will formally convey to the COP the conclusions of the high-level meeting on DLDD to be held on 20 September at the eve of the 66th United Nations General Assembly;

(c) Round table 3: Harnessing science knowledge for combating desertification/land degradation and drought: the path to improvement. Ministers and other heads of delegation will discuss the interface between science and policy, with the aim of generating guidance to enhance the level of the scientific process within the UNCCD.

III. Round table 1: Desertification/land degradation and drought and food security: preserving the resource base for our food security

10. In 2010 the number of undernourished people in the world was 925 million, of which 98 per cent live in developing countries. Because of harsh conditions due to complex interactions between climatic and human factors, many drylands in developing countries are structurally food insecure.

11. The current famine in the Horn of Africa demonstrates the need to develop more drought-resilient production systems that increase the capacity of farmers and herders to cope with prolonged drought.

12. The 2008 World Development Report on agriculture¹ made it clear that investments in agriculture have fallen dramatically during the past two decades, but it also shows that investments in agriculture can have a significant impact on poverty reduction. Moreover, during the past 30 years much progress has been made on developing a wide range of sustainable land management (SLM) practices in drylands. Some of these practices are now used at large scale and have led to “win-win” situations in the sense that they improve the environment, increase agricultural production and reduce rural poverty. Food security of the rural poor in drylands areas can be improved through measures for scaling-up a wide range of proven SLM practices. This will produce multiple impacts ranging from improving household food security to increased drought resilience.

13. Within the international agenda on food security, the UNCCD, with its 194 Parties working on soils and land issues, has a key role to play in urging Governments to develop national policies and to increase investments in SLM technologies and practices to restore the productivity of degraded land, reduce rural poverty and improve national food security.

14. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), food security is achieved when “all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”.² Such conditions are not available for 1/6th of the world population of which the great majority live in drylands regions.

15. In accordance with The Strategy, much has already been achieved in drylands, but much more remains to be done. It is vital to identify and analyse successes in agriculture and SLM, to explore strategies for scaling-up, and to identify how constraints to scaling-up can be reduced or removed.

¹ World Development Report 2008. Agriculture for development (op. 2007). Washington (D.C.): World Bank. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2008/Resources/WDR_00_book.pdf>.

² Rome Declaration on World Food Security – World Food Summit – 13–17 November 1996. <<http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/w3613e/w3613e00.htm>>.

16. Policies and strategies for effective decentralization of decision-making are required. A growing number of countries have already gained some experience in this regard, which could be shared among countries. Local-level governance of resources also implies the building of governance institutions at village and inter-village level for joint management of new productive assets.

17. There is considerable potential for sharing experience with best practices in SLM. At national level it is urgent to formulate national strategies, which take into account the existing successes with SLM. However, sharing of experience among countries in a region is desirable for all Parties to learn from experience and insights.

18. Questions for discussion by ministers and other heads of delegation could include:

(a) Improving land productivity. What are the main challenges, faced by Governments, to improving and ensuring food security for the inhabitants of drylands?

(b) Formulating national policies and a legislative framework aiming to improve soil productivity. What are the recommended policy measures to induce more land users to invest their labour and skill in improving SLM?

(c) Achieving food security through strengthened synergistic activities. How can effective action programmes be built to combat desertification in the drylands?

IV. Round table 2: UNCCD in the context of Rio+20: addressing desertification/land degradation and drought as a cornerstone of the green economy

19. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) will be organized in pursuance of General Assembly Resolution 64/236. It will take place in Brazil on 4–6 June 2012 to mark the 20th anniversary of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, and the 10th anniversary of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. It is envisaged as a conference at the highest possible level, including Heads of State and Government, and will result in a focused political document.

20. Discussion on this topic at the high-level segment at COP 10 will provide Parties with an appropriate context to exchange views and explore ways to contribute to positioning the UNCCD at Rio+20, bearing in mind that the UNCCD arose from the 1992 UNCED.

21. The UNCCD is a unique instrument in that it incorporates both environmental and societal elements. It is therefore paramount that a robust scientific underpinning based on expertise from multiple disciplines supports and informs efforts to implement the Convention.

22. The objectives of Rio+20 are to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, to assess progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes from major summits on sustainable development, and to address new and emerging challenges. Rio+20 will focus on two main themes: a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and the institutional framework for sustainable development.

23. Challenges to sustainable development that should be addressed at Rio+20 include issues of: access to renewable energy; water conservation; food security; ocean ecosystems; urbanization; population dynamics; and disaster preparedness. Land issues are central to the

majority of the above. Can Rio+20 bring about a shift in global understanding of the shared priority for the land agenda, and get to grips with the challenges of DLDD?

24. The institutional framework for sustainable development needs to be streamlined and strengthened. One proposal is to establish a world agency for the environment; another proposal focuses on streamlining United Nations agencies along the lines of the “One UN Initiative”.

25. Questions for discussion by ministers and other heads of delegation could include:

(a) What mechanisms should be further considered to effectively contribute to addressing DLDD issues within the framework of green economy?

(b) Twenty years from UNCED to Rio+20, are we ready to take enhanced action on DLDD issues?

V. Round table 3: Harnessing science knowledge for combating desertification/land degradation and drought: the path to improvement

26. The UNCCD High Level Policy Dialogue that took place in Bonn, Germany, in May 2008 based its content and deliberations on decision 3/COP.8, which outlined the operational objectives of The Strategy. The meeting concluded that a more thorough inclusion of critical scientific activities and findings, including a meaningful interface between science and policy should be set up and pursued to further enhance the implementation of the Convention. Furthermore, decision 18/COP 9 called for measures to enable the UNCCD to become a global authority on scientific and technical knowledge pertaining to desertification/land degradation and on mitigation of the effects of drought. Specific objectives of The Strategy underline these aspirations.

27. The proposed dialogue between policymakers and scientists during the high-level segment is conceived as part of the follow-up process to the conclusions and recommendations from the UNCCD 1st Scientific Conference and related decisions taken by Parties at COP 9. The dialogue will aim at:

(a) Harnessing science knowledge and contributing to the implementation of The Strategy by harmonizing views and generating an integrated perspective on critical issues of DLDD that are relevant for land-related decision-making and policy formulation at all levels;

(b) Thinking through solutions for the improvement of land-related policies;

(c) Promoting public awareness of scientific knowledge that critically links DLDD to major global challenges (such as food security, poverty, climate change, water scarcity, biodiversity and forced migration).

28. The dialogue is expected to contribute to better communication of scientific knowledge to policymakers and to increase the understanding of links between the UNCCD and several other challenges.

29. Questions for discussion by ministers and other heads of delegation could include:

(a) How can the UNCCD set the science-policy nexus and provide decision-makers with relevant information on sustainable land use practices in affected ecosystems?

(b) What type of policy incentives should be put in place to reward land users for their contribution to global welfare through improving the condition of affected ecosystems?

(c) What mechanisms should be considered in order to effectively enable state of the art science and technology knowledge to better inform the implementation of the UNCCD at all levels?

VI. Purpose of the “Changwon Initiative”

30. As President of COP 10, the Republic of Korea, through the Korean Forest Service, will take advantage of the high-level segment at COP 10 to introduce an initiative that will be presented to Parties as the “Changwon Initiative”. This aims at capitalizing on the potentials of the UNCCD to contribute to worldwide efforts to promote sustainable development.

31. The purpose of the “Changwon Initiative” would be to further mobilize Parties and partners to interact in their efforts towards effective implementation of the Convention and the delivery of the related global benefits.

32. The objective of the “Changwon Initiative” is to complement major activities undertaken since the adoption of The Strategy in 2007. A special focus is put on the need for target-setting and the consolidation of partnerships, to enhance the implementation of the Convention.

33. In order to maximize its potential for inducing change, the “Changwon Initiative” encompasses key areas of focus, including: enhancing the level of scientific exchange within the UNCCD so as to make it a global authority on scientific and technical knowledge pertaining to DLDD; mobilizing the business community and the private sector for enhanced implementation of the UNCCD; and promoting good practices through the launching of the “Land for Life” award.

VII. Expected result

34. A summary of the outcomes of the ministerial round table discussions, together with the discussion on the Changwon Initiative, will be presented within the final recommendations from the President of the COP. Inputs would also be provided by a representative of the business community, taking into account the outcomes of the UNCCD business forum that will be held in the margins of COP 10. The summary from the President will be transmitted to the COP 10 plenary for further consideration.
