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The United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010–2020)

Report on activities supporting the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010–2020)

Note by the secretariat

Summary

Decision 31/COP.10 requested the secretariat to collate a list of events, actions and activities to develop a programme in support of the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (UNDDDD), and to extend its partnership network to include representatives of civil society, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations. The Parties also requested the secretariat to report to the Conference of the Parties at its eleventh session on voluntary actions and activities carried out by stakeholders to mark the UNDDDD.

This document describes the implementation of this decision. It highlights the development and outcome of the compilation text (ICCD/COP(11)/MISC.1) as well as the activities undertaken by the UNDDDD Inter-Agency Task Force in support of the Decade. It concludes with recommendations for action.

Contents

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Background	1–4	3
II. Planned actions, activities and events by Parties, observers and intergovernmental organizations	5–17	3
A. Process	5–7	3
B. Programme of work	8–17	4
III. Activities undertaken by Parties and observers	18	5
IV. Activities undertaken by the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification Inter-Agency Task Force	19–25	5
V. Future activities planned by the Inter-Agency Task Force	26–28	6
VI. Financial and technical support	29–30	7
VII. Conclusion and way forward	31–34	7

I. Background

1. Acknowledging the persistence of desertification despite past and ongoing global efforts, as well as the slow progress in eradicating poverty among drylands populations, the United Nations General Assembly, by its resolution 62/195, declared 2010 to 2020 the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (UNDDDD).

2. By General Assembly resolution 64/201 of 21 December 2009, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) secretariat was designated as the focal point of the Decade, in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and other relevant bodies of the United Nations, including the United Nations Department of Public Information (UN DPI). The Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) of the UNDDDD was established in 2010 to provide leadership and support the implementation of the resolution and decisions. The IATF developed its strategy for the decade and presented it at the tenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 10).

3. By decision 31/COP.10, Parties requested the secretariat to collate a list of events, actions and activities to develop a programme in support of the UNDDDD based on submissions by Parties, observers and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), to extend its partnership network to include representatives of civil society, IGOs and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and to implement the programme with technical, financial and voluntary contributions. The secretariat was requested to report to the Conference of the Parties (COP) at its eleventh session on voluntary actions and activities carried out by stakeholders to mark the UNDDDD.

4. This document presents a summary of the submissions by stakeholders and the IATF's plans, as well as a report on the activities carried out by the IATF and by the reporting entities based on their 2012–2013 submissions through the performance review and assessment of implementation system (PRAIS). Detailed information providing a breakdown of activities by country and year is compiled in document ICCD/COP(11)/MISC.1.

II. Planned actions, activities and events by Parties, observers and intergovernmental organizations

A. Process

5. In a letter dated 31 October 2011, the Executive Secretary notified all Parties, IGOs and accredited civil society organizations (CSOs) of decision 31/COP.10 and invited them to submit their proposals and contributions in the form of actions, activities and events by 31 December 2011 to be compiled by 30 January 2012 and finalized with the IATF by March 2012. The letter also included a submission form; this and the background documents were also posted prominently on the UNDDDD webpage until 31 March 2012.

6. Due to the low number of submissions received by the 31 December 2011 deadline, the submission deadline was extended to 15 February 2012. The secretariat compiled the submissions received by that date. After review by the IATF, they were posted on the UNDDDD website on 31 March 2012 and circulated to the IATF for distribution.

7. During the reporting period, the IATF also held consultations by teleconference and meetings during UNCCD meetings and agreed on the few flagship products to be developed to enhance the visibility of the UNDDD and its related campaigns.

B. Programme of work

8. Twelve Parties submitted reports to the UNCCD on their planned activities for the Decade. Reports were also submitted by ten other organizations, including United Nations agencies and NGOs.

9. By and large, Parties propose to integrate their plans for the Decade into their own national agendas relating to desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD), and to fulfil the priorities of the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) (The Strategy) as part of their Decade-related activities. Many Parties plan to integrate their national action programme (NAP) in their national development planning and at regional and/or local level to develop investment frameworks.

10. Many Parties propose to conduct public awareness-raising activities through media campaigns and publications, as well as events to observe the annual World Day to Combat Desertification (WDCD) on 17 June. They also propose to hold expositions celebrating the cultures of the drylands, developing programmes for children, and recognizing best practices in sustainable land management (SLM) by presenting awards or scaling up successful projects. In order to build knowledge and capacity for SLM, some Parties suggested organizing exchanges between experts and arranging visits to successful projects.

11. Most submissions focused on activities to be undertaken in 2012 and 2013 and generally fall under the following six categories:

1. Observances around the world

12. Four countries planned to hold observances of the Decade in 2012 and 2013. Another two would host an observance but did not specify a date. Two CSOs also planned to hold global observance events, one in 2012 and the other in 2015.

2. Development and planning research

13. Some Parties planned to align their NAP with The Strategy and integrate it into community development planning at local level or into water, hydration and irrigation management policies. Some Parties plan to identify and assess the capacity at national and local levels to tackle DLDD issues.

3. Building capacity for desertification/land degradation and drought

14. Most countries plan to organize workshops or seminars on DLDD issues to build capacity as a way to ensure countries are committed to their NAPs and to aligning them with The Strategy. Workshops and seminars are viewed as forums for participatory development, training in SLM and the sharing of research results. Two IGOs proposed to host an international conference on the ‘Sustainable Management of Marginal Drylands – reviewing 10 years of research on land conservation and sustainable development’ in June 2013.

4. Best practices and sustainable land management

15. Proposals for action include developing accessible databases on SLM and best practices, holding contests to identify best practices in SLM, and organizing study tours of

SLM projects to identify best practices for scaling up. Concrete activities on caring for the land, such as constructing gullies, rehabilitating windbreaks to avoid soil erosion and establishing conservation farming villages are also envisioned.

5. Awareness-raising

16. The channels proposed for raising awareness on issues related to the availability, management, quality and access to water and sanitation include the media, marketing campaigns, films, and global forums.

6. Cultural and educational activities

17. A variety of cultural events are proposed for the Decade, for example national festivals celebrating drylands, sporting events, museum exhibits and events including education programmes targeting children and youth.

III. Activities undertaken by Parties and observers

18. For the 2012–2013 reporting period, 85 reports were submitted through PRAIS. Four developed country Parties reported that they had supported Decade-related activities and 43 affected developing country Parties reported that they were implementing Decade-related activities. Nineteen affected developing country Parties reported they were not implementing Decade-related activities. Another fourteen countries did not respond to this question. Of the twelve Parties that submitted their plans for the UNDDD programme, five reported carrying out Decade-related activities and one reported it was not undertaking UNDDD activities. The other seven did not respond to the question.

IV. Activities undertaken by the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification Inter-Agency Task Force

19. During this reporting period, the IATF met five times, online and offline, to develop and implement planned activities. The Decade website serves as the entry point, public face and primary venue for public education and interaction on UNDDD. It was revamped to enhance visibility and integrate a web campaign targeting children and youth. The IATF also organized observances and side events.

20. The theme chosen by the IATF for 2012, ‘The Management and Use of Land in a Green Economy’, which was developed with UNEP support, drew attention to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) held in June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The IATF organized two side events and launched an online youth and children’s campaign to raise awareness about land restoration and the Rio+20 outcomes. In the run-up to the WCD, the heads of agencies represented in the IATF (Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), IFAD, UNEP, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO)), as well as the head of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) issued video messages to promote the Day.

21. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012, the IATF helped organize the side event titled, ‘Re-greening for Resilient Landscapes: pastoralists and farmers stewarding ecosystems and economic returns in drylands’. It was co-hosted by the Governments of Algeria and Niger, and organized in partnership with World Vision International, International Partners for Sustainable Agriculture

(IPSA)/Citizens Network for Sustainable Development, Savory Institute (SI), UNCCD and World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF).

22. In December 2012 at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Doha, Qatar, the IATF supported another side event titled ‘Grasslands climate change mitigation and adaptation potential’ to (1) demonstrate the mitigation and adaptation potential associated with rehabilitation of degraded grasslands and the role of livestock keepers in reversing degradation; (2) present the use and measurement methods associated with national action plans (low emission development strategies, NAPs, nationally appropriate mitigation actions) using projects in selected countries as examples; and (3) inform a decision on agriculture at the UNFCCC COP 18. It was co-organized by the Government of Mongolia, the UNCCD secretariat, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Livestock Research Institute, ICRAF, Embrapa (Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation), the International Union for Conservation of Nature, SI and UNIQUE forestry land use GmbH.

23. Also in December 2012, the IATF in partnership with Bonn International Model United Nations launched an online campaign for children and youth titled ‘Going Land Degradation Neutral’ to raise awareness about the Rio+20 outcomes on desertification, land degradation and drought. The publicity materials, including the website design, video, articles and quizzes, were developed and produced by young people on a voluntary basis. They were also involved in publicizing the online campaign.

24. Developed with substantive input from UNDP and WMO, the theme for the 2013 observance of the Decade, ‘Drought and Water Scarcity’, reinforces the messages of the 2013 WDCD and the International Year of Water Cooperation. The slogan of the 2013 WDCD is ‘Don’t let our future dry up’.

25. During the High-level Meeting on National Drought Policy held in Geneva in March 2013, the IATF organized a side event on the theme to kick off the campaign for the WDCD. In April, the IATF organized a side event titled, ‘Dry forests: Drought, water scarcity and the global development agenda’ at the United Nations Forum on Forests in Turkey. The IATF also participated in a panel at the UNCCD side event on communications held in Bonn to publicize the theme for the year.

V. Future activities planned by the Inter-Agency Task Force

26. At the time of writing of this report, additional activities were planned for the observances of the WDCD and UNDDD in 2013. They include (1) an observance day to be held during the Conference on Desertification and Land Degradation, which was organized by UNESCO and United Nations University (UNU) and held in Ghent, Belgium on 17–18 June; (2) a joint press release on the WDCD; (3) the dissemination of an electronic pocketbook on drought and desertification through social media; (4) side events at COP 11; (5) a film festival open to the public; and (6) the publication of the second ‘Land for Life’ book.

27. For 2014–2015, the IATF expects to further develop the UNDDD website to include a section for public education, increase interaction with the public and mobilize new actors, including children/youth and the private sector, for UNDDD activities. An electronic pocketbook containing key facts and basic information on each year’s theme will be published and disseminated broadly for education and general public information, and side events will be held alongside key meetings and conferences. The ‘Land for Life’ book – which targets unreached constituencies, especially policymakers and the private sector – will be published as funding becomes available in order to provide further insight into the award-worthy projects shortlisted under the Land for Life Award.

28. A communications publication targeting advocates and policymakers is planned for publication every two years. It aims to build on human interest stories to show the progressive transformation of the lives and livelihoods of particular individuals and villages that use improved land use practices. The biennial publication is designed to focus on the same issues throughout the Decade, but also to give special attention to a key theme on the broader United Nations agenda during that period.

VI. Financial and technical support

29. The UNDDD activities undertaken by the IATF in 2012 and 2013 were largely implemented with the support of in-kind contributions from the IATF members, particularly staff time to produce the materials and to speak at meetings. The second 'Land for Life' publication was also developed with in-kind support. The first Land for Life book was published in 2011 with support from the GEF.

30. Financial constraints continue to limit the IATF's potential global reach, the full implementation of its activities, and the development of partnerships with private sector stakeholders that have offered only partial sponsorship for activities such as exhibitions and the dissemination of films. Given the key role played by the UNDDD website in public outreach, it is particularly important to acquire the necessary technical assistance for its maintenance and development.

VII. Conclusion and way forward

31. **The UNDDD programme had input from only twelve countries, but about four times that number actually implemented UNDDD-related activities during that period. This is an encouraging development, but three key challenges remain. First, the reports lack detail regarding the nature of activities undertaken and whether these were driven by a country, an observer or an NGO. Second, the absence of information regarding the planned activities at country level constrains the IATF's ability to build on these initiatives to enhance the visibility of the Decade. Lastly, a majority of the proposals submitted for the UNDDD programme were for 2012 and 2013, but the Decade runs until 2020.**

32. **The IGOs, including the IATF, continue to operate without any financial and technical resources. As a result, some avenues with potential for outreach such as children and youth, education and information-sharing through the web and global observances are underutilized. The global community's current focus on poverty, agriculture and land in the context of the sustainable development goals and the outcomes from Rio+20 is an opportunity to raise awareness on possible changes for people and areas affected by desertification and those living in the hyper-arid areas. Until now, the IATF has given limited attention to awareness-raising on desert ecosystems, in large part due to constraints in technical capacity.**

33. **General Assembly resolution 64/201 requests the Secretary General to report to the General Assembly at its sixty-ninth session on the status of implementation of the resolution. The sixty-ninth session will take place in September 2014 before the next session of the COP due to take place in 2015.**

34. **In view of the above, Parties may wish to consider the following actions:**

(a) **Invite Parties, observers, CSOs and IGOs that have not yet done so to transmit to the secretariat proposals and contributions in the form of activities and events planned for 2014-2015 and beyond to mark the UNDDD;**

(b) Encourage Parties, observers, CSOs and IGOs implementing UNDDD activities to specify in their reports the nature of activities carried out;

(c) Invite donor countries, multilateral funds, including the GEF and the World Bank, the private sector and other partners of the Convention to provide financial and technical support, as well as voluntary contributions, for the elaboration and implementation of the UNDDD programme, including the activities of the IATF; and

(d) Request the secretariat to continue coordinating UNDDD observance activities in line with the mandate given by the General Assembly.
