



Convention to Combat Desertification

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Follow-up to the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)

Consideration of the follow-up to the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development relevant to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Note by the secretariat

Summary

In decision 8/COP.10, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary to actively prepare for and participate in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), and to contribute to the compilation document within the context of the Rio+20 Conference themes, with a view to ensuring that due regard is paid to desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD) issues. The Executive Secretary fulfilled this mandate by participating in the preparatory processes for Rio+20 and in the conference itself, and by ensuring that DLDD issues would feature predominately in the outcome document “The Future We Want”.¹

Furthermore, the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) closely monitored the deliberations of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the Rio+20 outcomes and participated in the work of the United Nations Task Team, which was established to assist the Co-Chairs of the General Assembly Open Working Group (OWG). The third session of the OWG met in New York from 22 to 24 May 2013 and took up the issues of DLDD, along with food security and nutrition, sustainable agriculture, water and sanitation.

¹ A/RES/66/288.

As a follow up to Rio+20, and pursuant to paragraph 11 (c) of decision 9/COP.10 requesting the Executive Secretary to advise on any other emerging issues and strategic approaches that require an advocacy policy framework, Parties may wish to consider taking a decision on an impact target-setting approach within the legislative framework of the Convention in order to leverage the momentum generated by Rio+20 and the unique standing accorded to the Convention. As an initial step in considering for adoption options for incorporating the Rio+20 provisions on DLDD issues in the UNCCD process, including an impact target-setting approach, Parties may wish to consider establishing an intersessional expert group to further develop scientifically sound and socially inclusive methods and indicators to better address DLDD issues. These and other concrete actions of the Parties to move towards a land degradation neutral world would also provide opportunities to more effectively implement the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018).

The present note prepared by the secretariat contains the follow-up to the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development relevant to the UNCCD as requested in paragraph 8 of decision 8/COP.10 as well as possible action under paragraph 11 (c) of decision 9/COP.10 which requested the Executive Secretary to advise on any other emerging issues and strategic approaches.

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I. Mandate

1. The mandate to prepare for, participate in, and follow up on the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) (Rio+20) is essentially derived from decisions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) and complemented by guidance of the Bureau of the COP. In particular, the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (The Strategy) provides the required directive to forge a global partnership to reverse and prevent desertification/land degradation. It also builds on the outcome of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on “Addressing desertification, land degradation and drought in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication” held in New York on 20 September 2011.

II. Preparations for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)

2. In decision 8/COP.10, the COP requested the Executive Secretary to actively prepare for and participate in Rio+20, and to contribute to the compilation document within the context of the Conference themes, with a view to ensuring that due regard is paid to desertification, land degradation and drought.

A. Contribution to the compilation document

3. At its second preparatory meeting in March 2011, the Rio+20 Preparatory Committee invited all Member States, United Nations organizations and relevant stakeholders to provide inputs and contributions in writing by 1 November 2011 for inclusion in a compilation text to be presented by the Bureau for the Preparatory Process of the UNCSD to Member States and other participants for their comments and further guidance at the second intersessional meeting of the UNCSD, held in New York from 15 to 16 December 2011.

4. As requested by the COP, the secretariat provided inputs to the compilation document. The secretariat’s submission highlighted the importance of land/soil in the context of a green economy and sustainable development, poverty eradication and food security. It stressed the importance of productive land/fertile soil for sustainable development and outlined the scope of the challenge. The inputs pointed out that despite the fact that land is our most significant non-renewable geo-resource, each year an estimated 24 billion tons of fertile soil are lost. More specifically, 12 million hectares of productive land are lost in the world’s drylands every year due to desertification and drought, costing the opportunity to produce 20 million tons of much needed grain; this issue remains a blind spot for the international community. The inputs called for a global policy response that prioritizes the desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD) crisis. The submission also warned that, in order for the green economy in the context of sustainable development to be meaningful to the vast majority of developing countries, there is a need to mainstream DLDD issues. In its submission, the secretariat also joined many Parties in suggesting some policy decisions to be adopted by the Rio+20 Conference.

5. The secretariat participated in other relevant preparatory activities leading up to Rio+20.

B. Participation of the Executive Secretary in the Africa Regional Preparatory Conference for Rio+20 and the Ministerial Policy Dialogue

6. Immediately after the tenth session of the COP, the Executive Secretary travelled to Addis Ababa, where he was invited to moderate the Ministerial Policy Dialogue on Rio+20 on the theme “Progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments and new and emerging challenges” on 24 October 2011. During this meeting, the African Ministers established the position of the Continent vis-à-vis Rio+20, which was endorsed at the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government (AU Assembly) meeting in Addis Ababa from 29 to 30 January 2012.

7. The African position, which was communicated to the UNCSD secretariat, devoted a great deal of attention to DLDD issues, and reflected the importance and commitment that African leaders attached to addressing them.

C. Participation in the 2nd Intersessional Meeting of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

8. The 2nd Intersessional Meeting of UNCSD took place from 15 to 16 December 2011 in New York. The main task before it was to elicit the views of stakeholders on the structure, format and content of the outcome document. Delegations commented on the compilation document and provided guidance for the zero draft outcome document. Issues that came up during the discussions included the need to renew commitments to sustainable development and the Rio Principles, and to address the challenges and obstacles impeding sustainable development and progress in implementing the outcomes of previous summits.

9. Several priority themes were flagged, including food security and sustainable agriculture; energy; access to clean drinking water; land degradation; urbanization challenges; public health; oceans; sustainable cities; sustainable consumption and production; and means of implementation.

D. Participation in the retreat convened by the President of the General Assembly on the Rio+20 outcome

10. On 17 and 18 December 2011, the President of the General Assembly convened a retreat on “Paving the way for a Successful UNCSD (Rio+20)”. The retreat, which took place in Glen Cove, New York, was attended by various Ambassadors/Permanent Representatives and other high-profile officials. The United Nations Secretary-General gave a welcome address at the start of the retreat.

11. A representative from the UNCCD secretariat made a presentation underlining the importance for the UNCSD to give DLDD issues the priority they deserve, since addressing them is conducive to the sustainable development of affected populations and the conservation of their ecosystems. He further highlighted the fact that the world could not go carbon neutral without land degradation neutrality. In his summary of the proceedings, the President of the General Assembly listed the zero net land degradation (ZNLDD) goal as one of the innovative ways for the world to tackle DLDD issues.

III. Consideration of desertification/land degradation and drought issues at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)

12. The secretariat actively participated in the proceedings of Rio+20. The outcome document “The Future We Want”, which was agreed upon by Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives attending Rio+20, recognized the economic and social significance of good land management, including soil, and particularly its contribution to economic growth, the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable agriculture and food security, the eradication of poverty, women’s empowerment, mitigation of climate change and water availability.

13. Stressing the global dimension of desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD) challenges, world leaders recognized the need for urgent action to reverse land degradation. In view of this, they agreed to “strive to achieve a land degradation neutral world (LDNW) in the context of sustainable development”. Furthermore, they reaffirmed their resolve, in accordance with the UNCCD, to take coordinated action nationally, regionally and internationally, to monitor, globally, land degradation and restore degraded lands in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas.

14. The Rio+20 Conference resolved to support and strengthen the implementation of the UNCCD and The Strategy, including through mobilizing adequate, predictable and timely financial resources. It noted the importance of mitigating the effects of DLDD in order to contribute to sustainable development and poverty eradication, including by preserving and developing oases, restoring degraded lands, improving soil quality and improving water management. In this regard, the Rio+20 Conference recognized the importance of and promoted partnerships and initiatives for safeguarding land resources. It also encouraged capacity-building, extension training programmes and scientific studies and initiatives aimed at deepening understanding and raising awareness of the economic, social and environmental benefits of sustainable land management policies and practices.

15. With regard to the science–policy interface, the Rio+20 Conference took note of decision 20/COP.10 to establish an ad hoc working group, taking into account regional balance, to discuss specific options for the provision of scientific advice to Parties to the UNCCD.

16. Expressing deep concern regarding the devastating consequences of cyclical drought and famine in Africa, in particular in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel region, the Rio+20 Conference called for urgent action through short, medium and long-term measures at all levels, and reiterated the need for cooperation through the sharing of information at the global, regional and subregional levels regarding climate and weather as well as regarding forecasting and early-warning systems relating to DLDD and to dust storms and sandstorms. In this regard, the Rio+20 Conference invited States and relevant organizations to cooperate in the sharing of related information and forecasting and early-warning systems. The full text of the document “The Future We Want” is available at www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/288&Lang=E.

IV. Actions undertaken by the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)

17. The UNCCD secretariat ensured that the outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference were mainstreamed in the follow-up proceedings and events that took place in various intergovernmental processes and other relevant forums at global, regional and national levels.

A. Consideration by the General Assembly of the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in the context of the Rio+20 outcomes

18. The General Assembly considered the annual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Convention. The Executive Secretary introduced the report to the General Assembly on 8 November 2012, which subsequently adopted resolution 67/211 on 21 December 2012. In that resolution, the General Assembly recalled the importance of the outcomes of Rio+20 for the Convention, stressing that DLDD are challenges of a global dimension that continue to pose serious impediments to sustainable development in all countries – in particular developing countries, especially Africa – and called for urgent action through short, medium and long-term measures at all levels. The General Assembly also recognized the need for urgent action to reverse land degradation and, in view of this, agreed to strive to achieve a LDNW in the context of sustainable development, calling for appropriate consideration to be given to DLDD issues in preparing the post-2015 development agenda.

B. Consideration of desertification/land degradation and drought issues in the sustainable development goals negotiation process

19. As mandated by world leaders at the Rio+20 Conference, the process to develop sustainable development goals (SDGs) through an inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process was agreed upon by the General Assembly, and in this respect, an Open Working Group (OWG) was established in January 2013. To support the intergovernmental process, a United Nations System Task Team, co-chaired by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), was set up. The main task of the Task Team was to prepare Issues Briefs which harmonize the views of the United Nations system on themes to be considered by the OWG. The UNCCD secretariat was invited to join the team and take the lead in drafting the Issues Brief on DLDD.

20. The third session of the OWG met from 22 to 24 May 2013 to discuss DLDD issues along with food security and nutrition, sustainable agriculture, water and sanitation. The prominence accorded to and the early consideration of DLDD issues by the OWG reflected the concerted efforts of the UNCCD secretariat in advocacy and outreach regarding the Member States' commitment at Rio+20 to "strive to achieve a land-degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development". The UNCCD secretariat was tasked with taking the lead in drafting a concise Issues Brief, which formed the basis for discussions at the third session of the OWG and included stocktaking, recommendations for a relevant SDG, and an outline of proposals for a way forward. The Issues Brief was peer-reviewed by other United Nations entities and circulated by the Task Team to Member States so as to

form the basis for discussions at the third session of the OWG. The full text of the Brief can be found here: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1803stissuesdldd.pdf>.

21. The Executive Secretary was invited to introduce the Issues Brief to the OWG along with representatives from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP). Stressing that the percentage of total land area that is degraded has increased from 15 per cent in 1991 to 24 per cent in 2008, and highlighting the nexus between poverty and land degradation, the Executive Secretary emphasized the need to strive towards a LDNW and proposed an SDG on sustainable land use by all and for all with targets aiming to achieve ZNLD by 2030, zero net forest degradation by 2030 and drought policies and preparedness measures put in place in all drought prone countries by 2020. As for the post-2015 global development agenda, he called for land stewardship to be front and centre in the agenda with the aim of catalysing policy and mobilizing resources in order to improve the conditions of the underperforming assets of the poor – most notably land – and also secure their food-energy-water security.

22. Drylands Ambassador Dennis Garrity was invited to address the OWG as a panellist. In his presentation, he emphasized that 40 per cent of degraded lands were found in areas with high instances of poverty, and that land degradation directly affected 1.5 billion people, with disproportionate effects on women and children. On setting a target for a zero net rate of land degradation, he called for reducing the rate of degradation on currently non-degraded land and increasing the rate of regeneration of land that is already degraded. Presenting an example of community-based success in regenerating land in Niger, Drylands Ambassador Garrity stressed the need to align global goals with local communities. He highlighted the recent trend of reduced land-based carbon emissions and the increased capture of carbon by trees. He also noticed an ‘ecological consciousness’ developing with regard to the health of the land and indicated that states were responding to the issue by recognizing land degradation as a global challenge and a critical part of the SDG agenda.

23. In the subsequent interactive discussions, a number of groups and Member States – most notably the African Union, the Economic Commission of West African States, the European Union, the Group of 77, the Group of Least Developed Countries, Haiti, Iceland, Mexico, Peru, Poland and Romania, Republic of Korea and South Africa – expressed their appreciation to the Executive Secretary for the Issues Brief and articulated their support for the consideration of an SDG on a LDNW. The summary of the deliberations issued by the Co-Chairs immediately after the OWG meeting recognized (1) the close interdependence between food, land and water, and between energy, health, biodiversity and climate change; and (2) the need to address the drivers of land degradation, including unsustainable agricultural and livestock management practices as well as mining and industrial pollution. The summary noted that halting land degradation and increasing land restoration had co-benefits for sustainable water management, among other things, and re-affirmed the commitment to a LDNW.

C. Consideration of the outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference relevant to desertification/land degradation and drought issues by the African Union Assembly

24. The AU Assembly met in Addis Ababa from 26 to 27 May 2013 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the African Union (AU) (formerly Organization of African Union (OAU)). On that occasion, the delegation of Burkina Faso, in its capacity as the Chair of the UNCCD African Group, proposed an agenda item related to the

Convention. The African Union meetings took up the issue at the level of the Permanent Representatives' Committee (PRC), the Executive Council (ministerial), and the Assembly level (Heads of State and Government). In the related decision adopted by the Assembly, Heads of State and Government invited African governments to include DLDD as a priority in their sustainable development policies. They were urged to place DLDD at the centre of the debate on the post-2015 development agenda and to have an SDG on land-degradation neutrality. The Assembly also "paid homage" to the outgoing UNCCD Executive Secretary for having contributed in an "exceptional manner" to promoting the objectives of the Convention.

D. Other forums where the Rio+20 outcomes related to desertification/land degradation and drought were considered

1. Eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity

25. At the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held in Hyderabad, India from 6 to 19 October 2012, the UNCCD secretariat organized Land Day 6 and partnered with 14 United Nations agencies in the Ecosystem Restoration Day at the Rio Conventions Pavilion. The theme of Land Day 6 on 15 October 2012 was "Land-degradation neutrality: a response to the 2020 Aichi biodiversity targets", which focused on the interaction between biodiversity and desertification to demonstrate the benefits synergy has on achieving the Aichi Targets and land-degradation neutrality. During the Ecosystem Restoration Day held on 17 October 2012, the UNCCD partnered with the CBD, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UNDP, the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), FAO, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Society for Ecological Restoration (SER), and the Governments of India, the Republic of Korea and South Africa to call for concerted and coordinated long-term efforts to mobilize resources and facilitate the implementation of ecosystem restoration activities on the ground. The aim is to deliver multiple benefits that contribute to improved human well-being and socio-economic development while significantly reducing environmental risks and scarcities. The fourteen partners acknowledged that accelerated efforts are needed to restore and rehabilitate degraded lands, ecosystems and landscapes.

2. Fourth International Conference on Drylands, Deserts and Desertification: Implementing Rio+20 for Drylands and Desertification

26. The Conference was held in Sede Boqer, Israel from 12 to 16 November 2012 and included a one-day session titled "Operationalizing the zero net land degradation (ZNLD) target". An outcome report highlighting the conclusions and recommendations of the session was prepared. These include: (1) Although a ZNLD target, in practice, must be implemented at the local scale, its achievement will require a vertically integrated approach with top-down leadership and support; (2) There is a need to establish pilot projects at both the local and landscape scales while establishing long-term partnerships for achieving the ZNLD target at the global scale through the United Nations system; and (3) Some of the main challenges in operationalizing ZNLD are establishing baselines/indicators and monitoring and verification at all levels.

3. First Global Soil Week

27. The Global Soil Week was held from 19 to 22 November 2012 in Berlin. Organized by the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies and several partners including the

UNCCD secretariat, its main outcome was the recognition that soil is the nexus of food, energy and water, and that this realization needs to be considered in management approaches. Participants discussed the value of a SDG specific to land and soil and expressed the need to reinforce country-level accountability and context-specific targets and indicators. They also considered a set of SDGs and a protocol on land and soil attached to UNCCD as the preferred future steps.

4. Eighteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

28. At the eighteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC held from 26 November to 7 December 2012 in Doha, the UNCCD secretariat organized a round-table session during Agriculture, Landscapes and Livelihoods Day 5 entitled “Climate change resilience in dryland agro-ecosystems: improving food security and livelihoods in a land degradation neutral world”. The main outcomes of the session focused on the different dimensions of drylands agriculture and emphasized land restoration.

5. High-level Meeting on National Drought Policy

29. The meeting was jointly organized in Geneva, Switzerland from 11 to 15 March 2013 by UNCCD secretariat, the World Meteorological Organization and FAO in collaboration with other United Nations agencies, international and regional organizations, and key national agencies. The final declaration of the meeting encouraged governments around the world to develop and implement national drought management policies consistent with their national development laws, conditions, capabilities and objectives, guided by, inter alia, the following salient objectives as key elements of effective national drought policy: (1) to achieve proactive drought impact mitigation; (2) to develop preventive and planning measures; (3) to establish risk management practices; and (4) to foster scientific research, appropriate technologies and innovation, public outreach and resource management.

6. The UNCCD 2nd Scientific Conference

30. The Scientific Conference was held from 9 to 12 April 2013 in Bonn, Germany. It built on recent global initiatives addressing the shortage of economic data to promote and guide the restoration of degraded land, the ZNLD target, and the minimization of impacts from droughts. The main recommendations of the conference included: (1) improve scientific and technical knowledge on economic aspects of sustainable development, and that scaling up sustainable land management will require the involvement of scientists; (2) in order to restore degraded land worldwide, a clearer picture of available options is needed as well as a ‘toolbox’ for stakeholders and decision makers; (3) there is a need for a stronger focus on DLDD prevention through sustainable land management practices rather than on land rehabilitation; and (4) there is a need for deliberate efforts for investing in the enhancement of traditional and local institutions, and government effectiveness ought to be paired with efforts to achieve the goal of ZNLD.

7. Consultative meeting of experts on a Sustainable Development Goal on a land degradation neutral world and on the zero net land degradation target

31. The meeting was convened in Seoul from 26 to 27 June 2013 by the Government of the Republic of Korea and the UNCCD secretariat. The objectives of the meeting were to: (1) gather advice and recommendations on options for establishing an SDG on LDNW to be negotiated by a General Assembly High Level Forum from September 2013 to September 2014; (2) gather advice and recommendations on options for formulating and operationalizing a ZNLD target under the UNCCD framework, so as to provide concrete

and action-oriented targets that could be used to measure progress towards a LDNW; and (3) provide the rationale and necessary elements for the establishment of an ad hoc working group that would provide further advice and recommendations for achieving a LDNW and for formulating and operationalizing a ZNLD target under the UNCCD framework, including recommendations on the terms of reference of the ad hoc working group. The report of the meeting is contained in ICCD/COP(11)/CRP.1.

V. Observations and recommendations

32. In the aftermath of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on “Addressing desertification, land degradation and drought in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication”, Rio+20 constituted another historic opportunity for the UNCCD and increased the momentum to raise the profile of its core mandate. All efforts were made by both Parties and the secretariat to ensure that the outcomes of the Conference duly reflected the same. The outcome document adopted by the Rio+20 Conference devotes a great deal of attention to DLDD issues and provides a unique opportunity for concrete actions to more effectively implement The Strategy and “forge a global partnership to reverse and prevent desertification/land degradation and to mitigate the effects of drought in affected areas in order to support poverty reduction and environmental sustainability”.

33. In the Rio+20 outcome document, paragraphs 205–207 provide concrete actions for Parties to consider at COP 11. In paragraph 205, the Member States stress that DLDD issues are challenges of a global dimension. In paragraph 206, Member States undertook to strive to achieve a LDNW in the context of sustainable development. Parties at COP 11 may wish to consider the ways and means for achieving such a goal, including a target setting approach within the legislative framework of the Convention. In paragraph 207, the Convention is mandated to monitor, globally, land degradation and restore degraded lands in the drylands. In order for the UNCCD to effectively follow-up on these provisions from Rio+20 on DLDD issues also adopted by the General Assembly, Parties at COP 11 may wish to consider establishing an intersessional expert group to carry out the work necessary for the consideration of options for translating the provisions from Rio+20 on DLDD issues into the UNCCD process. This includes monitoring the status and extent of land degradation and restoration potential, the formulation of baselines and indicators that would support a target setting approach, and the corresponding institutional arrangements. The draft Terms of Reference for this intersessional expert group are contained in ICCD/COP(11)/CRP.1.

34. Parties at COP 12 may then wish to consider the results and recommendations of the intersessional expert group and adopt concrete targets to address DLDD issues.

35. Further, as the General Assembly is debating how to translate these commitments made at the Rio+20 Conference into actions at the global level, Parties at COP 11 may wish to, inter alia, invite the General Assembly to support the implementation of the Rio+20 outcomes related to DLDD in the negotiation process on SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda, taking into account the recent discussion on DLDD in the OWG. Parties at COP 11 may also wish to invite countries to participate in all Rio+20 Conference follow-up activities, including regional and thematic consultations being carried out at various levels as well as country and coalition-led initiatives. In this respect, Parties at COP 11 may request the Executive Secretary to facilitate preparation and participation in those activities.

36. The COP may wish to provide additional guidance as to how to translate the commitments made at the Rio+20 Conference into concrete activities within the Convention framework. Parties at COP 11 may also wish to invite the secretariat to facilitate action and create the enabling environment that would assist the Parties in operationalizing a target-setting approach for the benefit of all stakeholders.
