

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Conference of the Parties

Committee on Science and Technology

Eleventh session

Windhoek, Namibia, 17–20 September 2013

Contribution of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification to the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services process

Summary

Pursuant to decision 20/COP.10, the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) was requested to plan both long-term and short-term measures to enable the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) to provide scientific support for the Convention to become a global authority on scientific and technical knowledge pertaining to desertification/land degradation and mitigation of the effects of drought. By the same decision, the Conference of the Parties (COP) at its tenth session also decided to set up an ad hoc working group, taking into consideration regional balance, to further discuss the options for the provision of scientific advice focusing on desertification/land degradation and drought, taking into account its regional approach. It was expected that this working group would also consider ongoing scientific advisory processes such as the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and make recommendations on possible ways for the CST to collaborate with these processes in accordance with their respective mandates while avoiding duplication.

This document contains the contributions made so far by the secretariat and the Bureau of the CST to the IPBES. A number of questions, as expressed by the UNCCD secretariat in its letter of 28 February 2013, still remain open and would need careful consideration and guidance by the COP at its eleventh session (COP 11). The CST may wish to consider the present report and make proposals for adoption at COP 11.

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I. Introduction

1. By its decision 20/COP.10, the Conference of the Parties (COP) requested the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) to plan both long-term and short-term measures to enable the UNCCD secretariat to provide scientific support for the Convention to become a global authority on scientific and technical knowledge pertaining to desertification/land degradation and mitigation of the effects of drought. By the same decision, the COP at its tenth session also decided to set up an ad hoc working group, taking into consideration regional balance, to further discuss the options for provision of scientific advice focusing on desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD), taking into account its regional approach. It was expected that this working group would also consider ongoing scientific advisory processes such as the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and make recommendations on possible ways for the CST to collaborate with these processes in accordance with their respective mandates while avoiding duplication.

2. IPBES at the second session of the plenary meeting on modalities and institutional arrangements, held in Panama City,¹ from 16 to 21 April 2012, had decided that the Chairs of the scientific subsidiary bodies of the multilateral environmental agreements relating to biodiversity and ecosystem services, amongst which the UNCCD, would be granted observer status in the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP) of the Platform that will carry out the scientific and technical functions in the implementation of the IPBES.

II. Contribution to the process of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

3. Against this background, the secretariat and the Bureau of the CST communicated with IPBES on several occasions during the current process of defining the activities of the Platform, in order to ensure that the respective scientific processes in UNCCD and IPBES were informed of progress made in establishing coherence and synergies between ongoing and future scientific processes.

4. The Chair of the CST and the representative of the UNCCD secretariat participated in the third ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on IPBES, held from 7 to 11 June 2010, in Busan, Republic of Korea. The meeting was hosted jointly by the United Nations Environment Programme and the Government of the Republic of Korea. In the period following COP 10, the secretariat and the Bureau of the CST represented the Convention in the IPBES process as given in the following paragraphs

5. Panama City, 16–21 April 2012: The secretariat representative attended the second session of the plenary meeting on modalities and institutional arrangements for the IPBES. On the same occasion, the UNCCD secretariat representative provided information on both the launch of the procedure to set up, and define the tasks of, the Ad Hoc Working Group to Further Discuss the Options for the Provision of Scientific Advice Focusing on Desertification/Land Degradation and Drought Issues (AGSA), and on the results of the deliberations undertaken by the Bureau of the CST in February 2012 on possible demands to be brought to the IPBES for consideration in its work programme. In this context it was explained that the Bureau of the CST had reached agreement on some possible topics to be considered, such as: (i) biodiversity conservation and land use in the areas affected by

¹ UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/9, Appendix II.

DLDD; (ii) biodiversity, soils and lands in the affected areas; and (iii) ecosystem services in the affected areas, which would be further discussed in subsequent meetings of the Bureau.

6. The first meeting of the Plenary of the IPBES Platform plenary (IPBES-1), hosted by the Government of Germany, was held in Bonn from 21 to 26 January 2013. The Bureau of the CST, the UNCCD secretariat, as well as the AGSA were represented at IPBES-1.

7. The representative of the UNCCD secretariat addressed the plenary and reported that the AGSA had taken up its activities in July 2012 and would present its final report (which is also relevant to further UNCCD-IPBES interaction and cooperation) to the COP at its eleventh session (COP 11) for further consideration by the Parties.

8. Bearing in mind the observations made during the IPBES plenary discussions and in the review period of IPBES-1 documents by stakeholders (open until 28 February 2013), the secretariat, with input from members of the Bureau of the CST, prepared a letter highlighting the following:

- IPBES procedures for receiving and prioritizing requests (decision IPBES/1/3, working document IPBES/1/5), including differences in the timelines of the science-policy processes of UNCCD and IPBES
- timeframe of the draft process for scoping potential assessments (IPBES/1/INF/6)
- preparation and review of the assessment report and its timeframe (IPBES/1/INF/3)

For the full text of the letter sent to the IPBES secretariat on 28 February 2013, see annex I below.

9. In the following months of its intersessional working period, the IPBES had launched a call for submission of requests/inputs/suggestions on scientific and technical matters that would require the Platform's attention and action. Further to discussion between the Chair of the Bureau of the CST and the IPBES secretariat, the Bureau discussed the issue of a possible assessment request and, bearing in mind that the COP would be in a position to provide official guidance on cooperation with the IPBES only at its next session, decided to forward to the IPBES a preliminary submission of a general thematic assessment topic in line with the preliminary results of the UNCCD 2nd Scientific Conference. The submission is entitled "Assessment and valuation of SLM in maintaining and enhancing ecosystem services and biodiversity by combating DLDD in affected areas".

10. In his letter of 17 May 2013 (see annex II, below), the Chair of the CST emphasized the preliminary nature of the topic and recalled that it was for the COP at its eleventh session to provide guidance on the official contribution to the IPBES process.

11. The IPBES secretariat acknowledged and welcomed the preliminary submission by the Bureau of the CST and explicitly invited the Chair of the CST to attend the first IPBES MEP meeting in Norway 1–6 June 2013.

12. First joint meeting of the IPBES Bureau and MEP , 1–6 June 2013, Bergen, Norway:²

13. A Vice-Chair of the Bureau of the CST attended the meeting as observer on behalf of the Chair of the CST, who could not attend the meeting in person due to other

² Available at:
<www.ipbes.net/images/1st%20Bureau%20and%20MEP%20meetings%20June%202013%20Bergen%20-%20Meeting%20report.pdf>.

commitments. IPBES Bureau and MEP members welcomed UNCCD attendance and acknowledged the relevance and importance of the UNCCD contributions.

14. During the meeting, MEP and Bureau members considered the following elements of the intersessional work programme:

- IPBES conceptual framework
- Work programme for 2014–2018
- Scoping process
- Procedures for preparation and approval of reports
- Indigenous knowledge
- MEP regional approach
- Stakeholder engagement, and
- Strategic partnerships.

15. In the discussion on the work programme it became clear that there were a total of five submissions with direct reference to land degradation issues which were made by the Bureau of the CST, France, Germany, Italy and Norway. The IPBES MEP and Bureau proposed bundling these submissions into one possible thematic assessment preliminarily entitled “Assessment of degradation and restoration of land and fresh-water resources and/or of biodiversity and agriculture”.

16. It was agreed that the work programme would be further developed based on the current discussions of MEP and the Bureau of the IPBES. Further details of the bundling of submissions and obligations would be developed in parallel within the on-line review process open to stakeholders until 28 June 2013, and further considered at the second meeting of the MEP and the Bureau of the IPBES, scheduled for August 2013.

17. This indicates the interest of the IPBES MEP and the Bureau of the IPBES to give high priority to topics of interest to UNCCD in their work programme but discussions are still under way and final decisions will be taken only at IPBES 2, scheduled for early December 2013 in Antalya, Turkey.

18. Discussion on the IPBES scoping process for prioritizing the request submitted through the assessment process revealed general concern that the draft scoping process as presented would prolong timelines for deliverables, in some cases by up to a year, as was already expressed by the Executive Secretary of UNCCD in his letter of 28 February 2013. Suggestions as to how to address this issue included providing the MEP and the Bureau of the IPBES with a mandate (within the procedures to be agreed by Plenary) to expedite the scoping processes intersessionally, as well as providing a pre-scoping involving the proponents of assessments. To engage UNCCD efficiently in such a scoping process would require clear guidance from the UNCCD COP to the CST and the secretariat, taking into consideration the AGSA report.

19. Regarding the draft procedure for the preparation, review, acceptance, adoption, approval and publication of assessment reports and other Platform deliverables (IPBES/MEP-1/6), a number of questions, as expressed by UNCCD in the above-mentioned letter of 28 February 2013, still remain open and would need careful consideration and guidance by the COP at its eleventh session.

20. This may be further elaborated in future discussions between UNCCD and the IPBES on developing a strategic partnership, in which the IPBES seems to be open to

elevating the status of United Nations bodies and multilateral environmental agreements from other potential strategic partners.

Annex I

Letter from the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification to the secretariat of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services



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Date: 28 February 2013
 Ref.: KMST/ED-002
 cc.: LG, MND

Dear Mr. Ash,

On the behalf of the Chair of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) for the CST Bureau, I would like to congratulate you on the results of the first meeting of IPBES' Plenary (IPBES-1, Bonn, 21-26 January 2013) and to thank the interim IPBES secretariat for the organization of the productive meeting. The CST Bureau has been following the deliberations and would like to contribute to the upcoming IPBES process with the following comments from the UNCCD's perspective.

Regarding the procedure for IPBES to receive and prioritize requests (Decision IPBES/1/3, working document IPBES/1/5), the CST Bureau considered that preparing all documentation needed to accompany a request (paragraph 7) will require some additional scientific support and advice before making the request itself. As mandated by the COP10, the provision of scientific advice focusing on desertification/land degradation and drought issues is currently being discussed by the established UNCCD ad hoc Working Group (AGSA).

Additionally, the different timing of the IPBES and the UNCCD processes is a point of concern from the CST Bureau. Any possible request mandated by UNCCD COP decisions could only be decided upon every two years, according to the regular intervals of the COP ordinary session, for submission to an annual IPBES plenary six months before the session. All together, this might bear the risk of considerable delay in the process from decision to submission of a request from a multilateral environmental agreement.

The draft process for scoping potential assessments (IPBES/1/INF/6) to be revised and prepared by the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP) for IPBES-2 raised questions with regard to the complex nature of the scoping process. In particular the timeframe for the iterative scoping process (cf. INF/6, Appendix, Possible IPBES scoping process flow chart) possibly involving multiple plenary sessions for final approval would fit rather for regular long-term assessment but not for short term emerging issues.

Mr. Neville Ash,
 Head of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Branch
 and Interim IPBES Secretariat, UNEP
 P.O. Box 30552
 Nairobi- Kenya

CC: Mr Antonio Rocha Magalhaes
 Chair, CST Bureau

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Another point of concern is the preparation and review of the assessment report and its timeframe (IPBES/1/INF/3). The IPBES should consider allowing flexible and timely reporting modalities from the IPBES assessment panel to the institution which submitted a request as well as suitable options of interaction for the said institution to allow for regular feedback between IPBES and the institution on the on-going implementation of its submitted request.

The opportunity to further contribute to and participate in the IPBES process is fully appreciated and I wish you every success for the upcoming IPBES inter-sessional process.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Luc Gnacadja', written over a circular blue stamp.A circular blue ink stamp. The outer ring contains the text 'SECRETARIAT OF THE CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION' in capital letters. In the center, the acronym 'UNCCD' is printed in a larger, bold font.

Luc Gnacadja
Executive Secretary

Annex II

Letter submitted by the Chair of the Committee on Science and Technology to the secretariat of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services



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Date: 17 May 2013

Subject: CST Bureau contribution to the IPBES

Dear Mr. Ash,

Reference is also made to the letter dated 28 February 2013 sent to the IPBES with comments related to the scoping process (attached as ready reference).

I would like to remind that UNCCD COP11 will provide guidance on the official contribution to the IPBES process. The results of the COP decision on this matter will be then brought to the attention of the IPBES secretariat for further processing that it might wish to undertake, in particular, in line with paragraph 10 of annex IV of the final report of the IPBES-1.

In the meantime however, in line with the invitation to submit request for issues to be considered, the above mentioned matter has been discussed among the CST Bureau members. All CST Bureau members have agreed to forward to the IPBES the preliminary topic on *“Assessment and valuation of SLM in maintaining and enhancing ecosystem services and biodiversity by combatting DLDD in affected areas.”*. I am, therefore, pleased to forward to you this expression of interest for a UNCCD CST Bureau submission to the IPBES work programme.

We would be grateful if this message could be brought to the attention of the IPBES process.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Antonio Rocha Magalhaes
 Chair of the UNCCD Committee on Science & Technology

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