



Conference of the Parties

Eleventh session

Windhoek, Namibia, 16–27 September 2013

Item 16 of the provisional agenda

Special segment: interactive dialogue sessions

Note on the high-level segment during the Conference of the Parties at its eleventh session

Summary

At the high-level segment of the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 11), ministers and other heads of delegation will hold plenary discussions in the form of three ministerial round tables which relate to the following topics:

- (a) Round table 1: Role of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in achieving a land degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development;
- (b) Round table 2: Overcoming the hurdles of scaling up and disseminating good practices in the context of the UNCCD implementation process;
- (c) Round table 3: Economics of desertification/land degradation and restoration: considering cost-benefit analyses for scaling up investments in avoiding land degradation and restoring/regenerating degraded land.

It is anticipated that the high-level segment will bring 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. Decision 38/COP.10 on the programme of work for the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 11) proposed organizing an interactive dialogue session among high-level officials from Parties attending COP 11. The high-level segment of COP 11 will be held on 23–24 September 2013 in Windhoek, Namibia.
2. The high-level segment will be organized by the host country in consultation with the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties (COP) and the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Ministers and heads of delegation from the 195 Parties to the UNCCD will bring political momentum to the deliberations of Parties and guide negotiators as appropriate.
3. 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

4. During the high-level segment, there will be a general plenary session in the form of three ministerial round-table discussions. For each ministerial round table, it is anticipated that there will be two co-chairs and one keynote speaker. A maximum of five panel members will be invited to make introductory remarks and engage in an interactive dialogue. Co-chairs and panel members will be proposed taking into account geographical distribution. A moderator will be invited to facilitate the discussions and interactions between panel members and the audience.
5. The opening ceremony of the high-level segment on Monday, 23 September will start with a welcoming statement by the President of COP 11 followed by a message from the United Nations Secretary-General and a statement by the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD.
6. 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 of America, 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 11.
7. The topics for consideration at the round table discussions will include the following:
 - (a) Round table 1: Role of the UNCCD in achieving a land degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development;
 - (b) Round table 2: Overcoming the hurdles of scaling up and disseminating good practices in the context of the UNCCD implementation process; and
 - (c) Round table 3: Economics of desertification/land degradation and restoration: considering cost-benefit analyses for scaling up investments in avoiding land degradation and restoring/regenerating degraded land.

III. Round table 1: Role of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in achieving a land degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development

8. In line with decision 8/COP.10, the secretariat has actively prepared for and participated in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) to ensure that due regard was paid to desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD) issues. The conference took place in June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro and, pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 64/236, had at its core two main themes: (1) a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and (2) the institutional framework for sustainable development. Rio+20 constituted a historic opportunity for the UNCCD to raise the profile of its core mandate, namely to “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” (see the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) (The Strategy)).¹

9. The outcome document of Rio+20 “The future we want”² was a marked success for the UNCCD, recognizing the economic and social significance of good land management. Stressing the global dimension of DLDD challenges, world leaders agreed and reaffirmed their resolve “in accordance with United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, 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”.

10. “A land degradation neutral world (LDNW) is simply a world where we (1) prevent or avoid the degradation of healthy and productive lands through sustainable land management (SLM) and sustainable forestry management practices, including agroforestry, sustainable agriculture and livestock practices, water management, and soil conservation, and (2) where feasible, regenerate land that is already degraded”.³

11. Since Rio+20, the challenges posed by DLDD issues to sustainable development were further reiterated by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 67/211 in December 2012, which stated that avoiding additional land degradation while restoring degraded land is crucial in order for the rural poor to achieve food security and access to energy and water. Member States also emphasized the need to give appropriate consideration to the issues of DLDD in the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda. In addition, an Open Working Group (OWG) was established in January 2013 to develop sustainable development goals (SDGs). To support the intergovernmental process, a United Nations Task Team co-chaired by the United Nations Development Programme and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs was set up, and the UNCCD secretariat was invited to take the lead in drafting the Issues Brief on DLDD. The third session of the OWG convened in May 2013 to discuss DLDD issues along with food security and nutrition, sustainable agriculture, water and sanitation. The prominence accorded to DLDD issues by the OWG reflected the concerted efforts of the UNCCD secretariat on advocacy and outreach.

12. Moving forward, it has been proposed to define the overarching SDG on an LDNW as “sustainable land use for all and by all” and to make it operational. A number of possible concrete targets have been suggested during the third session of the OWG, among which

¹ Decision 3/COP.8.

² United Nations General Assembly document A/RES/66/288.

³ Available at <<http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1803stissuesdlld.pdf>>.

are: (1) zero net land degradation by 2030 or achieving net restoration of degraded lands by 2030; (2) zero net forest degradation by 2030; and (3) drought policies and drought preparedness measures put in place in all drought-prone regions/countries by 2020.

13. It is considered that a goal of an LDNW can contribute significantly to the underlying causes dealt with by the other two Rio conventions on climate change and biodiversity since land degradation and its related effects contribute substantially to biodiversity loss and exacerbate climate change impacts. The interdependence and interrelation between these issues can be channelled to encourage effective policy and investment approaches among the three Rio conventions.

14. Parties to the UNCCD have already agreed upon the use of a standardized set of performance indicators and they are considering eleven impact indicators, two of which are mandatory indicators on changes in land cover status and the proportion of the population living above the poverty line. Establishing a global database for measuring and monitoring the extent of DLDD impacts on land productivity, the environment and populations will be essential for policymakers and decision makers in prioritizing land management and regeneration efforts, and for identifying appropriate interventions for halting and reversing land degradation trends.

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

(a) What does ‘going land-degradation neutral’ mean and imply for the drylands in general, and more specifically for your country? How will it impact implementation at local and national level? What is the impact on national policies and strategies for poverty eradication and sustainable development?

(b) What are the goals and targets at national level? How can global goals and targets provide impetus to and strengthen existing policies and national/subregional frameworks for the implementation of the UNCCD? What should be done in that context at global and regional level?

(c) What kind of guidance is needed for a target-setting approach and the translation of the DLDD commitments made at Rio+20 into concrete activities within the Convention framework?

IV. Round table 2: Overcoming the hurdles of scaling up and disseminating good practices in the context of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification implementation process

16. A lot is happening in countries affected by DLDD, particularly at local level. Recent reports and publications inform on good practices that are based on local knowledge. Rural communities and some individual farmers have managed to improve their living conditions and ecosystems using simple practices and production systems that cope with the realities of the drylands.

17. SLM specialists and research centres have highlighted examples of rural communities in the southern part of the Niger and in the Yatenga region of Burkina Faso. The story of “the man who stopped the desert”, Mr. Yacouba Sawadogo from Burkina Faso, is often mentioned. During difficult periods of drought in Burkina Faso in the 1980s, which forced many local inhabitants to migrate, Mr. Sawadogo improved and applied traditional farming practices to regenerate his degraded farmland and protect its soil fertility.

18. According to Mr. Chris Reij of Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, Yacouba's influence has been more powerful than that of most international and national experts, having contributed to soil rehabilitation and the regeneration of tens of thousands of hectares of land through his reforestation method.⁴ Mr. Sawadogo's reforestation model has been internationally promoted and his good practices shared with other community-based organizations in the Sahel as well as policymakers and cooperation partners.

19. For Latin America, Las Gaviotas in Colombia is also recognized as another successful story. It describes Mr. Paolo Lugari, who envisioned the transformation of a community dryland into a 19,800 acre reforestation success.⁵ Since the 1960s, Lugari has targeted the area of Las Gaviotas to pilot the creation a community and ensure its sustainability in a dryland environment. The success of the Las Gaviotas project has generated interest from researchers and other DLDD practitioners.

20. The progress achieved through the transformation of the Loess Plateau in China is another success story portrayed as a good practice. What started out as modest efforts to impede erosion from further diminishing vegetative areas, led in part by Wang Youde, has now become a globally referenced case study on the rehabilitation of degraded land and sustainable farming practices.

21. According to the World Bank, which has led two projects at the Loess Plateau, incomes have doubled as a result of increased agriculture, land vegetation has increased from 17–34 per cent, and local employment rates have increased by 17 per cent.⁶ Youde has been recognized in his country as a hero who has inspired others and contributed to the sustainable use of the Loess Plateau.

22. These examples illustrate that despite limited resources, positive changes are occurring in the drylands as a result of good practices, knowledge-sharing and the use of techniques that are adapted to the drylands.

23. Across regions, communities are catalysing change through modest initiatives at local level. Sharing good practices has proven to result in positive outcomes and significant change in the living conditions of the rural people in affected countries.

24. The identification, collection and dissemination of good practices are embedded in the text of the Convention. As evidenced by several COP decisions^{7,8,9} the Committee on

⁴ Mark Dodd, *The Man who stopped the desert* (1080 Films).

⁵ Sergio Romero. "An isolated village finds the energy to keep going", *The New York Times*, 15 October 2009. Available at

<www.nytimes.com/2009/10/16/world/americas/16gaviotas.html?pagewanted=1&_r=2&ref=earth>.

⁶ The World Bank, "Restoring China's Loess Plateau", 15 Mar 2007. Available from <www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2007/03/15/restoring-chinas-loess-plateau>.

⁷ Decision 15/COP.1 requested that the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) make recommendations for promoting participative research on relevant traditional and local technology. Decision 15/ COP.10 and decision 21/COP.10 requested the Bureaux of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention and the CST to work together in defining ways to promote the analysis and dissemination of best practices, according to their respective mandates, for consideration at COP 11.

⁸ Decision 20/COP.6 encouraged Parties to submit reports on case studies illustrating best practices and innovative research relating to land degradation, vulnerability and rehabilitation, while decision 13/COP.9 requested that Parties and observers to the UNCCD report regularly to the COP on topics including best practices via PRAIS (performance review and assessment of implementation system). The same decision requests that best practices should be collected and clustered under seven thematic topics.

⁹ According to decision 11/COP.9, good practices submitted through the PRAIS online portal are

Science and Technology and the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention play a key role in connection with good practices, thereby progressively positioning the Convention to become a central actor in the collection and dissemination of information on good practices in the drylands.

25. The current development within the UNCCD of a knowledge management integrated system, which will inventory good practices happening in the drylands, is of high importance. It is expected that the UNCCD will also create conditions conducive to easy access of the collected information and know-how.

26. While most of the good practices were developed locally, many will not survive or reach national audiences without government intervention. Scaling up what works is the responsibility of all involved actors and stakeholders, but a major responsibility lies with governments who are expected to set up sound policies and create an enabling environment, including through supporting and promoting the sharing of the good practices identified, encouraging DLDD innovation and establishing knowledge exchange programmes. Supporting the increased adoption of good practices may include:

- (a) Providing smart subsidies that provide support, incentivize SLM practices and reduce negative trade-offs across the landscape with regard to ecosystem services;¹⁰
- (b) Enacting legislative reforms that aim to preserve traditional knowledge, access to land and land rights, and/or SLM practices;¹¹ and
- (c) Sponsoring and engaging in South–South and North–South knowledge exchanges.

27. Questions for discussions by ministers and other heads of delegation include:

- (a) Why are local-level good practices and successes so often overlooked? What framework is needed for governments to accompany successful practices at the grassroots level to nationally address desertification and land degradation?
- (b) How can the UNCCD and other relevant international organizations help in the global efforts to scale up recognized good practices to address DLLD?
- (c) Drought is becoming more frequent and more widespread. Building the preparedness and the resilience of communities and ecosystems to drought are proven smart development investments. Most of the drought-prone developing countries and their development partners are still operating in crisis management mode. Building on the outcomes of the High-level Meeting on National Drought Policies, what measures are required to accelerate the development and effective implementation of national drought policies and to build resilience in countries affected by recurrent drought cycles?

required to be made available in the public domain. Decision 15/COP.10 established a proposed schedule for reviewing these best practices.

¹⁰ Global Mechanism and International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development, “Promoting sustainable land management through trade: examining the linkages between trade, livelihoods and sustainable land management in degraded areas. A background paper”, March 2007; and United States Environmental Protection Agency, “Subsidies for environmentally friendly agriculture and land management”, Available from <<http://yosemite.epa.gov/ee/epa/eed.nsf/fa6512c6e51c4a208525766200639df2/36e6779d83b0d64585257746000aff36!OpenDocument>>.

¹¹ For example, the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 of Australia. See also Piers Blaikie. *Chain of Explanation for Soil Erosion* (1989).

V. Round table 3: Economics of desertification/land degradation and restoration: considering cost-benefit analyses for scaling up investments in avoiding land degradation and restoring/regenerating degraded land

28. Recent estimates from the International Food Policy Research Institute (2011) indicate that land degradation over the next 25 years could reduce global food production by up to 12 per cent, resulting in an increase of up to 30 per cent in world food prices. Land degradation causes a variety of socioeconomic impacts, including global food insecurity, impoverishment, unemployment and forced migration. The UNCCD held its 2nd Scientific Conference in April 2013 in Bonn, Germany. The theme, as approved by decision 16/COP.9, was the “Economic assessment of desertification, sustainable land management and resilience of arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas.” The discussion focused on the impacts of inaction in addressing DLDD and the benefits of action with an emphasis on the environmental, social and economic gains of SLM, the maintenance of ecosystem services and increased resilience. The Scientific Conference also stressed the importance of translating the scientific findings into recommendations for use by policymakers.

29. The widespread consensus remains that economic issues related to DLDD are not adequately addressed because there is no comprehensive definition of the total economic cost of land degradation. Past land degradation economic assessments were mostly limited to the agricultural use of land. Total value, however, includes: (1) the use value, which consists of direct use (e.g. agricultural production) and indirect use (e.g. carbon sequestration, water purification.); and (2) the non-use value (e.g. the existing resources). The difficulty of tackling land degradation is compounded by many of its off-site costs. Since off-site impacts are generated some distance away from the actual land degradation site, they are easier to overlook and undervalue unless this interconnection is made explicit.

30. In order to enact suitable policies and attract the necessary investments to prevent and/or reverse land degradation, a strong focus needs to be placed on all costs and benefits of conserving land or converting land from agricultural use to alternative land uses.

31. Economic valuation can be useful as a means to design economic instruments that can send the right price signals as well as rectify off-site costs incurred through inappropriate land-use practices and/or avoid future ones. It can offer policymakers and decision makers common metrics for direct comparisons and help pinpoint which projects yield the largest net benefit, especially in the light of competing national priorities and limited financial resources. Economic instruments can also institutionalize the principle of having those who engender land degradation or damage soil productivity pay the costs either to those directly affected or through investing within the same area for the restoration and regeneration of the degraded land.

32. Institutional arrangements in which land users make decisions can determine whether actors choose to adopt SLM practices as well as the type and the level of their involvement in the process. With the better understanding of specific local/national settings, cost-benefit analysis can lead to a more balanced negotiating power between stakeholder groups. By demonstrating the full value of land, cost-benefit analysis can help both decision makers and land managers (i.e. farmers or land owners) assess current and future land-use practices and enable the analysis of trade-offs associated with different land-use patterns. Among the strongest incentives for land users are property rights structures (i.e. tenure and land accessibility) to ensure long-term ownership of land or secured land-use rights and provide incentives to invest in land productivity. Equally strong attention needs to be directed toward gender, as well as the access to and ownership of land by women. Property settings can mitigate land degradation by enabling stakeholders to derive direct benefits

from engaging in SLM. For example, farmers in the Niger started actively protecting or planting trees once they were given user right and a mandate to own those trees (interim report of the Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) initiative). Therefore, it is crucial to identify and understand the required institutional arrangements in order to devise sustainable and efficient policies to combat land degradation.

33. The private sector remains one of the key stakeholders in land management, which, when done properly, can lead to stable, predictable and profitable activities. Companies are already feeling the impact of land degradation – both directly (i.e. raw materials) and indirectly (the industry value chain) – through increased cost structure and decreased profitability. Given the global setting of the business environment, the connections between different industrial sectors and raw materials mean that a company’s brand and business may suffer even from an indirect exposure to land degradation through other operators in the value chain. Water supply crises and food shortage crises ranked second and third, respectively, as global risks in terms of potential impacts in the Global Risks 2012 report of the World Economic Forum. Both risks could be related to land degradation processes in many ways, but land degradation is yet to be perceived as a major risk for the sustainability of industry as well as for the global economy.

34. A 2013 report for the ELD initiative by Finnish consultancy company Pöyry and financed through the Changwon Initiative studied industries that are most at risk from the impacts of land degradation. Among them are basic resource industries (e.g. forestry), food and beverage, construction and materials, personal and household goods, and leisure and travel. Focusing on these sectors in particular can lead to a more targeted approach in encouraging companies to engage in green growth. However, unless a company is directly and imminently under pressure for raw materials, it is unlikely to have a standard procedure for assessing land degradation risks to its business. The economics of land degradation is to benefit business by identifying investment opportunities linked to the preservation and sustainable management of land services in order to affect all levels of decision-making (“Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul.” (Margaret Thatcher)). As a next step, the industries would need guidance on how to integrate land degradation issues into standard protocol and use the new tools for measuring and reporting on their impacts on sustained economic growth.

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

(a) How can the UNCCD forge a global partnership with relevant stakeholders (farmers, business community, scientists, civil society organizations, etc.) to increase knowledge and understanding of the economics of land degradation?

(b) What will it take to turn the evidence provided (at the UNCCD 2nd Scientific Conference as well as under the ELD partnership) into change in decision-making at all levels? How can the business value chain and operations with regard to their impact on the health of the land, especially in the drylands, be positively influenced?

(c) The costs of inaction versus the benefits of action: What can political authorities do to promote investments in SLM? How could the ELD country case studies contribute to promoting investments in SLM?

VI. Expected result

36. A summary of the outcomes of the ministerial round-table discussions will be presented by 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 11. The summary from the President will be transmitted to the COP at its eleventh session for further consideration.
