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Effective implementation of the Convention at national, subregional and regional level

Leveraging of synergies among the Rio conventions, including land-based adaptation to climate change and related advice from the Science-Policy Interface

Leveraging of synergies among the Rio conventions

Note by the secretariat

Summary

Decision 9/COP.11 calls for a review and assessment of the progress made by the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in promoting and strengthening relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies. This document provides a summary of a select number of such activities and highlights their efficacy in promoting and strengthening these relationships.

The review and assessment includes the various initiatives undertaken with: (1) the other Rio conventions and the Global Environment Facility with regard to the development of common indicators and other synergies in reporting processes and capacity-building; (2) other entities such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UN-Water, the World Meteorological Organization and the International Atomic Energy Agency on the issues of water, drought, forests and soil management; and (3) other organizations and institutions such as the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (the Ramsar Convention), the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the International Organization on Migration on UNCCD related collaboration.

Finally, following a brief conclusion, the document outlines recommendations for future work priorities for promoting and strengthening these relationships.

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I. Background

1. Decision 9/COP.11 calls for a review and assessment of the progress made by the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in promoting and strengthening relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies. This document provides a summary of a select number of such activities and highlights their efficacy in promoting and strengthening these relationships. Making significant progress towards the strategic objectives of the Convention requires strong and effective relationships that are able to leverage the appropriate synergies with other organizations that have overlapping or convergent missions. This includes not only the Rio conventions and other multilateral environmental agreements but also those organizations and institutions concerned with a variety of issues directly impacting land management and dryland communities.

2. At Rio+20 (the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in June 2012) and during the subsequent negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda, countries have once again reiterated the critical importance of halting and reversing desertification and land degradation, and mitigating the impacts of drought, including a commitment to strive to achieve a land degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development. It is this recognition of the role of sustainable land management in improving overall human well-being that necessitates strong partnerships with relevant organizations on issues such as economic growth, biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture and food security, eradicating poverty, women's empowerment and gender equality, climate change mitigation and adaptation, migration and security, and the improvement of water availability.

II. The Rio conventions and the Global Environment Facility

3. At its thirteenth meeting, held in New York, United States of America, on 24 September 2014, the Joint Liaison Group of the Rio conventions agreed to focus cooperation on issues where collective advances can be made while bearing in mind the respective independent legal status and mandates of the conventions. In particular, the Group agreed to promote work on the joint indicators that could be used for reporting, as this would establish a solid baseline from where to measure progress and drive investment.

4. In this regard, the UNCCD secretariat has begun work on developing joint indicators with the generous support of the Government of France. Building on the Convention's assets, particularly the monitoring and evaluation approach and the progress indicators adopted by decision 22/COP.11, the secretariat has proposed the use of three land-based indicators, namely trends in land cover, trends in land productivity or functioning of the land and trends in carbon stocks above and below ground, with the last-mentioned to be measured in terms of soil organic carbon stocks.

5. This approach was presented to the Adaptation Committee of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and discussed by the Committee at its sixth meeting, held from 29 September to 1 October 2014. The same proposal was tabled as an information note at the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).¹ An updated and revised version of this proposal was submitted to the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Indicators for the

¹ UNEP/CBD/COP/12/INF/40.

Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 for consideration at its second meeting, to be held on 14–17 September 2015.

6. In March 2015, the secretariat submitted a proposal to the United Nations Statistical Commission on the synoptic utilization of the three indicators referred to in paragraph 4 above in a tiered approach to measure progress on Sustainable Development Goal 15 and, in particular, target 15.3, which, in its current formulation, states: “By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land-degradation-neutral world”.² This was done in response to the request made by the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities on the development of an indicator framework for the post-2015 development agenda.

7. The tiered indicator framework proposed to the United Nations Statistical Commission has been tested on a voluntary basis since May 2014 within the purview of the “Land degradation neutrality” (LDN) project. With generous financial support from the Republic of Korea, the secretariat is assisting 16 affected country Parties from the five Regional Implementation Annexes, which agreed to test the implementation of an LDN approach in the formulation, alignment and implementation of their national action programmes. The project is being funded on the assumption that affected country Parties will develop a better understanding of land degradation trends by considering a combination of metrics with existing datasets.

8. More information on the LDN pilot project is contained in document ICCD/COP(12)/CST/3-ICCD/CRIC(14)/7, which also includes an analysis, conducted by the Science-Policy Interface (SPI), on the potential of these three land-based indicators for the joint monitoring and reporting of the Rio conventions. The SPI assessed the integrative potential of the land-based indicators relative to each other and with respect to land degradation, climate change and biodiversity, and further mapped them against the objectives and commitments of UNFCCC and CBD Aichi Biodiversity Targets 5, 7, 14 and 15.

9. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has decided to join forces with the UNCCD secretariat to develop joint indicators that may be suitable for reporting by the Rio conventions and for application by the GEF. The Panel has organized various meetings and workshops to further progress in the development of these joint indicators, including two side events at the fourth special session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST S-4) held on 9–12 March 2015 in Cancun, Mexico, where it launched the publication: *The Resilience Adaptation Transformation Assessment and Learning Framework: From Theory to Application*.³

10. The Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) of UNFCCC has also indicated its desire to work on the issue of joint indicators. The SBSTA Chair made a keynote presentation at CST S-4 and invited the UNCCD secretariat to present its joint indicator proposal at the seventh meeting of the SBSTA research dialogue, held on 4 June 2015 in Bonn, Germany.

11. Finally, CBD has initiated a scoping study entitled “Towards the production of an integrated information system and indicators for the three Rio conventions”. A Steering Committee, consisting of CBD, the United Nations Statistics Division, UNFCCC, the

² <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/7603Final%20draft%20outcome%20document%20UN%20Sept%20Summit%20w%20letter_08072015.pdf>.

³ O’Connell, D., Walker, B., Abel, N., Grigg, N. (2015). Available at <www.stapgef.org/the-resilience-adaptation-and-transformation-assessment-framework/>.

UNCCD, the United Nations Environment Programme and selected technical experts, has been established for oversight and review of the study to ensure consistency and coherence with other ongoing and related processes. A final report is expected at the end of 2015.

III. Collaboration with other entities

A. Relationship with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

12. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) remains a key partner for the implementation of the UNCCD, and is cooperating with both the UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) on various thematic areas. This has been underlined by the establishment of the GM Liaison Office at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy, in accordance with decision 6/COP.11. Following the opening on 1 April 2014 of the GM Liaison Office, which is in charge of implementing the GM programme “Liaison, land, security and resilience” (LLSR), a joint FAO/GM-LLSR task force has been established in order to coordinate activities and discuss areas of common interest.

13. The GM, including its Liaison Office, collaborated with FAO on a wide range of topics, including the following:

(a) As member of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, which is chaired by FAO, the GM played an active role in view of the participation of the Partnership in the eleventh session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), which concluded in May 2015 with an agreement to extend the international arrangement on forests to 2030. Discussions at UNFF 11 relevant to the UNCCD included the role and needs of low-forest cover countries, options to catalyse financing for UNFF implementation, possible cooperation with the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network, LDN and Sustainable Development Goals. The GM also collaborated with the German-funded FAO project “Strengthening criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management and their use in forest policy and practice”, highlighting the linkages with the LDN concept as well as the possibilities of enhanced cooperation among the secretariats of the Rio conventions on criteria and indicators;

(b) As observer to the Global Soil Partnership (GSP), whose secretariat is hosted by FAO, the GM represented the UNCCD during the second (2014) and third (2015) sessions of the GSP Plenary Assembly. During the assemblies, various interventions were made on behalf of the UNCCD highlighting the opportunities of cooperation between GSP and the UNCCD, including their respective scientific bodies, namely, the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) of GSP and the SPI of the UNCCD. The GM Liaison Office also represents the UNCCD at the Steering Committee for the International Year of Soils;

(c) As member and Chair of the Advisory Steering Committee of the FAO Forest and Landscape Restoration Mechanism, which was established during the 22nd session of the FAO Committee on Forestry, the GM cooperates with FAO in the area of forest and landscape restoration, in order to provide effective and coordinated support to Parties on ways to promote the implementation of forest and landscape restoration in support of LDN. In this context, FAO and the GM, in cooperation with the Government of the Republic of Korea, co-organized a workshop, held from 30 June to 1 July 2015, on private sector investment in forest and landscape restoration. In addition, FAO and the GM are preparing a discussion paper on sustainable financing for forest and landscape restoration, which will assess and discuss the opportunities and constraints of mobilizing additional finance for landscape restoration by all stakeholders and from all sources;

(d) As member of the Mountain Partnership, whose secretariat is hosted by FAO, the GM contributes to the international debate on linkages between desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD) and mountain development. As a contribution to the International Year of Soils, the GM Liaison Office provided support to the Mountain Partnership for the publication: *Understanding Mountain Soils – A Contribution from Mountain Areas to the International Year of Soils 2015*;⁴

(e) FAO and the GM have also cooperated closely in participating in the annual World Day to Combat Desertification. In 2014, an event called “Land for life – how sustainable land management can improve people’s livelihoods and resilience” was co-organized by FAO, the Italian Government and the GM in the context of the 149th session of the FAO Council. The global observance of the Day was held at the Milan Expo, hosted by the Italian Development Cooperation, in partnership with the UNCCD, GM, World Bank/TerrAfrica, Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael (KKL) and the United Nations Expo team;

(f) FAO and the GM Liaison Office are furthermore cooperating in a wide range of areas related to:

- (i) Liaison: to further strengthen the engagement of Rome-based agencies and institutions in UNCCD implementation;
- (ii) Land: to promote sustainable investments and management in land-based systems addressing DLDD;
- (iii) Security: to assess interlinkages between DLDD, food insecurity and forced migration as drivers for global insecurity;
- (iv) Resilience: to improve people’s livelihoods and resilience to food and water insecurity, drought and climate change.

14. As part of its work programme 2014–2015, the SPI also initiated collaboration with ITPS of GSP. The first joint meeting between the SPI and ITPS was organized during the 3rd Global Soil Week in April 2015. As a result, ITPS and SPI members agreed to establish a collaboration mechanism in order to avoid duplication of efforts and to maximize synergies. Furthermore, three major topics/entry points were identified to serve as an agreed basis for the collaboration: LDN, soil and land indicators and soil organic carbon. Detailed information on the collaboration between the SPI and ITPS is provided in documents ICCD/COP(12)/CST/6 and ICCD/COP(12)/CST/INF.4.

15. The UNCCD secretariat and the Department of Technical Cooperation of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), in conjunction with FAO, are currently collaborating on the IAEA’s regional project “RAF5063”. This project seeks to develop nuclear and isotope techniques that can produce quantitative data for sustainable land management. This will provide a better understanding of the key drivers of soil degradation so that policymakers can make wise decisions for sustainable soil conservation strategies and inform more effective climate change mitigation and adaptation programmes. The secretariat has brokered working relationships with a number of national focal points from Africa, Latin America and Asia with the aim of using the results of this project and others to inform national action programmes and assist efforts to combat land degradation.

⁴ <www.fao.org/3/a-i4704e.pdf>.

B. National drought management policies

16. Recognizing the impacts of droughts, pursuant to decision 9/COP.11, and being cognizant of the outcomes of the high-level meeting on national drought policy of 2013, the secretariat, the World Meteorological Organization, the UN-Water Decade Programme on Capacity Development, FAO and CBD jointly undertook capacity-building training workshops to assist affected countries to develop their national drought management policies. Phase one was comprised of six regional workshops that were held, one each in Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia and the Pacific, and three in Africa. The regional training workshops targeted senior government officials involved in both policy development and implementation, and the technical dimensions of drought management. The secretariat is now working with the other United Nations system agencies to define phase two of the capacity-building programme with a focus on national-level capacity development, in particular in relation to early warning systems, insurance and the role of sustainable land management to reduce impact and risk.

IV. Other international organizations and institutions

17. At the World Parks Congress held in November 2014, the secretariats of the UNCCD and the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention) made a common commitment to LDN in order to help to shape a more resilient future. The Ramsar Convention's principle of wise use of wetlands and the target on LDN go hand in hand, thus the efforts of the respective conventions would profit from better coordination and proactive collaboration that would help countries to implement integrated land and water use policies and planning at watershed and regional scales. The UNCCD secretariat participated in the twelfth meeting of the Ramsar Convention's COP, held in June 2015, to further strengthen cooperation in promoting holistic landscape management and ecosystem restoration.

18. In June 2015, the secretariats of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the UNCCD (including the GM) met to develop the IUCN-UNCCD Joint workplan 2015–2020 and specifically discuss how better to translate collaboration into concrete action, including synergies with local IUCN offices. The concept of nature-based solutions is very relevant to the UNCCD partnership with the IUCN and its delivery could be used to support countries' progress towards targets on LDN. The joint workplan includes proposals for enhancing outreach, joint resource mobilization and capacity-building for creating an enabling environment at the country level.

19. As a member of the Global Partnership for Forest and Landscape Restoration (GPFLR), which is coordinated by a secretariat that is hosted by IUCN, the GM actively engages with GPFLR members in promoting synergies and initiatives contributing towards the Bonn Challenge, an important international commitment to restore 150 million hectares of deforested land by 2020. In this regard, and back to back with the Bonn Challenge 2.0 event, which was hosted by the Government of Germany in Bonn in March 2015, the GM hosted a meeting of GPFLR on 19–20 March 2015 in preparation for the Bonn Challenge 2.0. It also hosted a meeting of the Forest Ecosystem Restoration Initiative on 21 March 2015, where the strategic direction and the next operational steps of the initiative were discussed and agreed upon.

20. As a member of the Collaborative Partnership on Mediterranean Forests, an initiative contributing towards the work of the FAO Committee on Mediterranean Forestry Questions (*Silva Mediterranea*), the GM also participated in a series of meetings organized back to back on 26–30 January 2015 in Rabat, Morocco. It was involved in the formal evaluation process of this partnership for the 2010–2014 period and in its steering

committee process, and helped to raise awareness among relevant partners of the Collaborative Partnership of Mediterranean Forests on the role that forest and landscape restoration efforts in the Mediterranean region can play in supporting LDN and land-based climate change mitigation and adaptation.

21. Recognizing the link between migration and DLDD, the UNCCD and the International Organization on Migration have begun a process of mapping hotspots to advance the understanding of DLDD drivers of forced migration and help to mitigate the human impacts. The partnership has so far delivered good results in West Africa in the context of the project “West Africa: Promoting SLM in migration-prone areas through innovative financing mechanisms”, which is funded by the Italian Government and managed by the GM in cooperation with the International Organization on Migration in Italy. The project focuses on the role of the diaspora and remittances as well as the possibility of upscaling innovative financing mechanisms promoting SLM in countries with out-migration in West Africa, namely, Burkina Faso, Niger and Senegal. At the global level, this partnership will explore land-based modalities and incentives to reduce forced economic migration.

22. As founding members of the TerrAfrica partnership, both the secretariat and the GM supported the implementation of the TerrAfrica workplan for 2014–2015, which included the finalization of integrated investment frameworks in a number of African countries, including Senegal and Burkina Faso. Both institutions provided inputs to the new proposed TerrAfrica Business Plan Framework 2016–2020, in order to ensure the alignment of the partnership to the UNCCD.

23. As representative of the secretariat in the Council of the International Land Coalition (ILC), which is hosted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the GM Liaison Office has participated since 2014 in all ILC Council meetings and in the Global Land Forum 2015, including the organization of an interactive session on promoting investments in landscape and degraded land as a means to improve land tenure. The GM provided inputs to the new ILC Strategy 2016–2021 and the road map for its implementation. Based on the provisions of the FAO *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security*,⁵ the GM provides technical support to ILC activities in the area of sustainable rangeland management and good governance, for instance showcasing best practices of conflict prevention around the access and use of land and water resources.

24. As a member of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, the GM provides support to Central African Parties as well as to the Central African Forests Commission and the Economic Community of Central African States in order to promote the implementation of national and subregional UNCCD action programmes in synergy with other development frameworks.

25. As a member of the Landscapes for People, Food and Nature Initiative (LPFN) and its working group on finance, the GM is upscaling its work on integrated financing strategies and integrated investment frameworks at the landscape level and with new partners. It provided inputs to the LPFN study *Financing Strategies for Integrated Landscape Investment*,⁶ which uncovered a wealth of models for financing sustainable land management in the context of integrated landscape management in order to promote integrated investments in land-based systems, including agriculture, ecosystems and rural development. In collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme, the

⁵ <www.fao.org/docrep/016/i2801e/i2801e.pdf>.

⁶ <www.ecoagriculture.org/documents/files/doc_594.pdf>.

UNCCD secretariat is working with the LPFN secretariat to promote an integrated landscape management approach and the target on LDN in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals.

26. By decision 23/COP.11, the SPI was mandated to “interact with existing multiple scientific mechanisms, in particular the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services” (IPBES). This was taken up in the SPI work programme 2014–2015 with a particular focus on the IPBES thematic assessment on land degradation and restoration. The SPI provided input to the initial and the full scoping of the assessment and selected SPI members participated in the scoping meetings. Furthermore, the SPI will be involved in the review of the assessment, which will be published in 2018. Detailed information on the collaboration between the SPI and IPBES is provided in documents ICCD/COP(12)/CST/6 and ICCD/COP(12)/CST/INF.3.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

27. In terms of next steps for synergies with the Rio conventions and the GEF, the principle of joint indicator use should be proposed and considered at the COPs of each of the respective Rio conventions and at formal meetings of the GEF by the end of 2016. As the UNCCD is holding its COP first, a UNCCD COP 12 decision on this matter could be shared with the secretariats of the other Rio conventions for consideration by their own constituencies.

28. Accordingly, Parties may wish to consider a decision that:

(a) Welcomes the initiatives undertaken by the Rio conventions and the GEF on the development of joint indicators;

(b) Endorses the use of a set of three land-based progress indicators for reporting by the Rio conventions which is fully coherent with the progress indicators/metrics adopted by decision 22/COP.11 and with the proposal made by the secretariat for a global indicator on trends in land degradation to monitor the target on LDN within the Sustainable Development Goals indicator framework, namely:

(i) Trends in land cover;

(ii) Trends in land productivity or functioning of the land;

(iii) Trends in carbon stock above and below ground (to be measured in terms of soil organic carbon stocks);

(c) Urges both the secretariat and the GM to continue their respective roles in the established partnerships and to seek new partnerships according to their respective mandates in order to further enhance the implementation of the Convention.
