



United Nations

ICCD/COP(12)/2



Convention to Combat Desertification

Distr.: General
3 August 2015

Original: English

Conference of the Parties

Twelfth session

Ankara, Turkey, 12–23 October 2015

Item 2 (d) of the provisional agenda

**Post-2015 development agenda: implications for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
Implementation of the comprehensive communication strategy and the United Nations Decade for Deserts and
the Fight against Desertification (2010–2020)**

Implementation of the comprehensive communication strategy and the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010–2020)

Note by secretariat

Summary

The comprehensive communication strategy was developed in response to decision 3/COP.8 to serve as a tool for the effective implementation of The Strategy.

By its decision 4/COP.11, the Conference of the Parties (COP) requested the secretariat to report on progress made in the implementation of the comprehensive communication strategy at the twelfth session of the COP. This report is contained in the present document.

By its decision 7/COP.11, the COP requested the Executive Secretary to report to the COP at its twelfth session on the implementation of that decision. Furthermore, by its decision 39/COP.11, the COP decided to include an item on the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010–2020) in the agenda for COP 12. A report on activities supporting the Decade is also contained in the present document for the consideration of the COP at its twelfth session.

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I. Background

1. The importance of addressing the information and communication needs of various partners involved in the global partnership under the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) (The Strategy) was recalled by the Parties at the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 11). “Advocacy, awareness-raising and education” is one of the operational objectives of The Strategy. The comprehensive communication strategy (CCS), developed as a result of decision 3/COP.8, is the guiding document for strategic actions for effectively supporting the implementation of The Strategy.

2. At COP 11, Parties reviewed the progress made in the implementation of the CCS, as reported in document ICCD/COP(11)/2 and the implementation of the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010–2020) (UNDDD) as contained in document ICCD/COP(11)/19. In its decisions 4/COP.11 and 7/COP.11, the COP requested the Executive Secretary to report at COP 12 on progress in the implementation of the CCS and UNDDD.

3. During this reporting period, the CCS implementation has been supported by a new wave of political attention given to sustainable land management (SLM) in response to the decision of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) to “strive to achieve a land-degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development”. The implementation of the CCS was geared towards the infiltration of the new term “land degradation-neutrality” in connection with the ongoing awareness raising effort to accord land and soils the attention and priority they deserve in political and economic decisions at the local, national and international levels, in order to support the optimal deployment of The Strategy.

4. This report provides a summary of the activities coordinated principally by the secretariat under the CCS and the UNDDD, with assessments of the outcomes of these activities.

II. Implementation progress

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

5. During the biennium, the decision 7/COP.11 was addressed in three ways: (i) by supporting outreach on the World Day to Combat Desertification (WDCD) in order to make it visible around the world; (ii) by producing engaging visual and published materials; and (iii) by collaborating with the IATF on the basis of shared interests and availability of in-kind support.

6. During the **2014 and 2015 World Days**, the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) of the UNDDD provided financial and various forms of in-kind support for awareness-raising. For detailed involvement of the IATF in these World Days, please see Section **B. World Day to Combat Desertification**.

7. During the biennium, three publications, one film and short videos were produced. Following the 2013 Namib Declaration to “Empower Women in SLM”, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Global Policy Centre commissioned a study on inequality and inclusive growth. The purpose of this study is to identify the policy,

institutional and capacity spheres needed to advance the gender equality and women's empowerment agendas in the drylands, focusing on land rights, resilience to climate change and participation in decision-making processes. The results of the study will be presented at a side event during the twelfth session of the COP and will give an update on the development of further UNCCD work on gender.

8. At the time of preparing the present report, two additional outputs were under development. A new issue of the *Land for Life* book: a collaborative initiative of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the International Fund for Agricultural Development, UNDP, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Global Mechanism (GM), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), UNCCD and World Bank/TerrAfrica. As with the previous two publications, the focus remains on the benefits of SLM when land is rehabilitated. However, resource constraints have confined case study information gathering principally to Africa, the Northern Mediterranean and Asia.

9. The publication will be complemented by short videos and a film demonstrating how the benefits at the household level contribute to the global public good. It is expected that follow-up stories from these individuals and households will be gathered every two to three years for the remainder of the UNDDDD. As the public is more interested in stories about helping people than about improving the land in general, the objective of the multi-media project is to change the narrative about desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD) by demonstrating the human face of land rehabilitation and restoration using captivating and user-friendly approaches.

10. The secretariat, in partnership with Tudor House, is publishing *Living Land* to reach policy makers through a fully illustrated 200-page book documenting global efforts to combat desertification mid-way through the UNDDDD. The document will be launched at the twelfth session of the COP and distributed at the 21st session of the COP to the UNFCCC in Paris.

11. In terms of coordination, the secretariat worked with the IATF in various different teams or in direct partnership, consistent with their organizational mandates and interests, and the form and potential of in-kind contributions. The IATF has been particularly effective and efficient in reaching out through social and mainstream media, supplying case studies and stories for advocacy, supporting the organization of the global World Day events and contributing to gender-related work.

B. World Day to Combat Desertification

12. "Land Belongs to the Future – Let's Climate Proof It" was the tagline for the **2014 World Day to Combat Desertification**. The theme "ecosystem based adaptation" was developed in cooperation with IUCN and UNDP. The campaign¹ kicked off on Africa Environment Day/Wangari Maathai Day on 3 March 2014 in Lesotho. Worldwide, 45 governmental, intergovernmental and civil society organizations sent their observance event reports² to the secretariat. Brazil, Eritrea, Peru and Portugal recognized their national dryland champions during the observance event. At the secretariat headquarters in Bonn, the observance ceremony was held alongside the "Colours of the Earth" art exhibition.

¹ The kick-off event report is available on the secretariat's website: <www.unccd.int/en/media-center/MediaNews/Pages/highlightdetail.aspx?HighlightID=287>.

² They are available on the secretariat's website: <www.unccd.int/en/programmes/Event-and-campaigns/WDCD/Pages/Events-around-the-World-2014.aspx>.

13. The global observance was hosted by the World Bank in partnership with the GEF, TerrAfrica and Connect4Climate. The World Bank also financed the production of the film on the restoration of degraded land in Ethiopia. For the 2014 WDCD, the heads of the IATF partner agencies sent videoed and written messages.³ Through the social media campaign led by Connect4Climate, over 2,200 tweets were generated on the event and over 9 million accounts worldwide were reached. The United Nations Department of Public Information and the United Nations Environment Programme also supported the mass and social media outreach through their networks. Other global observance activities included the announcement of the Land for Life Award winners, a photographic exhibition by George Steinmetz, an online Q & A session linked to the UNCCD Capacity-Building Marketplace, the launch of a publication on land degradation by the GEF, and a concert by the Senegalese band, Titi & Baribagass.

14. “No such thing as a free lunch – Invest in healthy soils” was the tagline for **the 2015 World Day to Combat Desertification** in view of the role of land in the new sustainable development goals. The Day also contributed to the observance of the International Year of Soils. At the time of preparing the present report, 36 governmental, intergovernmental and civil society organizations had sent their observance event reports to the secretariat.⁴ The global observance⁵ of the Day was held at the Milan Expo, hosted by the Italian Development Cooperation, in partnership with the UNCCD, the GM, World Bank/TerrAfrica, Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael and the United Nations Expo team. The event featured statements by high-level officials, including the Minister of Environment and Tourism of Namibia, visual and verbal testimonies and a concert by Titi & Baribagass.

15. Also to commemorate the WDCD, the secretariat launched its first Short Writing Contest in 2015 with a view to understanding the different ways in which people around the world describe their relationship to the land. During the week of 2015 World Day, the secretariat’s web page received close to 100,000 visits – more than five times as many visits as in the same period in 2014. By way of comparison, there were 8,000 page views in May 2007, 22,400 in May 2010 and 56,000 in May 2013. The WDCD post reach and likes on Facebook were significantly higher than on normal days.

16. The partnership approach to the global observance proved to be especially successful in maximizing available resources. The thematic approach helped in receiving necessary support from the organizations and groups that were interested in the subject. In the case of the 2015 WDCD, the linkage between the theme and the venue helped in targeting the right audience. The involvement of the government was critical to ensure the mobilization of relevant stakeholders for global observance.

C. Land for Life Award

17. The 2014 Land for Life Award, the third in the series since its launch at COP 10 in 2011 as part of the Changwon Initiative, was a collaborative initiative by the UNCCD, Korea Forest Service, Elion Resources Group of China and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. In-kind support was offered by the IUCN. The Award recognizes excellence and effort in SLM, and inspires leadership in the restoration and

³ Those messages can be found at <www.unccd.int/en/programmes/Event-and-campaigns/WDCD/wdc%202015/Pages/Messages.aspx>.

⁴ The reports are available from the secretariat’s website: <www.unccd.int/en/programmes/Event-and-campaigns/WDCD/wdc%202015/Pages/Events-around-the-World-2015.aspx>.

⁵ The report of the global observance event is available from the secretariat’s website: <www.unccd.int/en/programmes/Event-and-campaigns/WDCD/wdc%202015/Pages/WDCD-Report.aspx>.

transformation of degraded lands. The Award provides winners with visibility and support to expand their work, thus encouraging others to follow in the footsteps of successful land management initiatives.

18. Due to unclear prospects, the total prize money for the 2014 Award was reduced to US\$ 70,000. The prize was shared equally between two winners that were announced at the WCD global observance - the Conservation Organisation for Afghan Mountain Areas (Afghanistan) and the Green Asia Network (Republic of Korea). In addition, the village of Adi Shimhabty in Eritrea received a special mention from the jury. A total of 76 applications were received in 2014, with 50 direct applications and 26 nominations. A volunteer team of experts helped screen applications, and the jury was presented with a shortlist of 15 semi-finalists. In the absence of relevant high-level meetings with which to tie in the Award ceremony in 2014, the ceremony was held during the WCD global observance in Milan, Italy, on 17 June 2015.

19. Over the years, the Land for Life Award has expanded to broaden awareness-raising activities, such as publicizing the award-winning projects in the Land for Life book and offering video promotions using the successful stories in the media, etc. In order to integrate the Award into the ongoing UNCCD advocacy to help reach the Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) target, there is a need to re-strategize the programme so that policy makers at various levels see LDN as a viable, environmental, economic and social policy option through the Land for Life programme.

D. Further coordination of comprehensive communication strategy activities by the secretariat

20. Decision 4/COP.11 requested the secretariat to further align its CCS with the decisions taken by Parties at the eleventh session of the COP. The decision also requested the secretariat to focus its CCS awareness-raising actions on the mandate of the Convention and on the mission and objectives of The Strategy. In view of these decisions, the following actions were undertaken.

21. **Mainstream media** remain the leading means for reaching the public and influencing policy makers. During the biennium, media advisories, press releases, media kits, and key messages from the Executive Secretary and the United Nations Secretary-General were issued ahead of the events. Ministerial-level press conferences and interviews with UNCCD stakeholders were held at major occasions. On United Nations days, the secretariat published opinion editorials targeting the issue of focus for each event, such as International Women's Day, Migrants Day, World Food Day and the General Assembly. On average, an opinion editorial⁶ was published every two months, of which nine were optioned by the world's most prestigious publishers and news agencies such as the Guardian, the Huffington Post, Le Monde and Reuters. Staff members were featured in live radio and television interviews. The secretariat also sponsored the global science publisher SciDev to cover the UNCCD 3rd Scientific Conference in Cancún, Mexico.

22. In addition to these ad hoc relationships, the secretariat had two formal partnerships – with Xinhua News Agency and Greenradio World. Through the partnership with Greenradio World, the secretariat supported community radio stations in accessing and disseminating SLM practices to local communities and trained more than 200 journalists at community radio stations on SLM in Africa. Partnerships with media organizations focus

⁶ A selection of noteworthy articles is available at:
<**Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**www.unccd.int/en/media-center/Pages/mediahome.aspx>.

on collaborations in joint projects of mutual interest with no financial contribution to the products developed. Partnerships with media houses are particularly valuable in raising the profile of DLDD and, with it, continued coverage of the subject long after the partnership is over.

23. The secretariat provided training for journalists in order to expand their capacity to report on Convention issues and to disseminate appropriate land-use practices at the local level. In 2014, the secretariat participated in two regional training events organized by the African Union and the UNDP-Equator Initiative. In 2015, the secretariat conducted media training for journalists in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in collaboration with the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC CEE) and the Drought Management Center for South and Eastern Europe (DMCSEE) in Hungary. As the journalists in the CEE region are not familiar with the Convention and its role as a policy tool in addressing land-related issues, media activities on DLDD in the region need to be continued within the context of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and climate agreements.

24. During the biennium, there was increased coverage of the issues of DLDD and LDN by main media in both developed and developing countries. The demand for information and interviews from these media was also increasing. These positive changes signal increasing opportunities to raise awareness of the links between climate change and land degradation. To catch the momentum of the media interest, the secretariat needs to strengthen its in-house capacity to keep up with the demand.

25. The level of outreach through **the UNCCD website** has been consistently increasing since its renewal in March 2012. From January 2014 to May 2015, the average number of monthly unique visitors grew from 47,253 to 57,155, representing a 21 per cent increase. The bi-weekly “UNCCD News alert” helps to bring new e-mail subscribers to the website’s news articles and to rapidly disseminate all new information from the secretariat to its stakeholders. The multi-media approach of linking the website to/from email newsletters (UNCCD alert, Capacity Building Marketplace) and social media (Twitter, Facebook, Weibo) may have contributed to the increased number of visitors.

26. **Social media** are used by the secretariat’s communication outreach to engage and increase stakeholders. Unlike the website, the secretariat uses social media to stimulate interactions on the issues of desertification and land degradation, rather than UNCCD activities per se. As shown in Table 1, the outreach through all social media tools has increased. It is assumed that the increase in the number of Facebook “likes” is the result of intensive campaigns to increase Facebook followers and partnerships. Weibo updates have been infrequent during this reporting period due to the lack of in-house language capacity. Web and social media are excellent outreach tools, especially to the general public and those who are not familiar with the desertification issue, but they require constant information feeds. The secretariat could further stimulate public interest in LDN issues through social media if more human resources were available.

Table 1

Social media outreach

<i>Social media tool</i>	<i>Outreach June 2013</i>	<i>Outreach June 2015</i>	<i>Approximate increase</i>
Facebook (www.facebook.com/UNCCD)	5,780 likes	13,504 likes	134%
Twitter (@UNCCD)	3,132 followers	6,328 followers	102%
	52,000 accounts reached (seven-day average)	94,768 accounts reached (seven-day average)	82%
Weibo (Weibo.com/UNCCD)	26,254 fans	33,760 fans	28%

27. **The UNCCD library service** is one of the most significant means of outreach to UNCCD stakeholders. “*Land Scan*” and “*Be among the first to know*” e-mail newsletters communicate the latest news on SLM and important developments in this area. They also help to increase visitors to the website through the weblinks embedded in the messages. From January 2014 to June 2015, “*Land Scan*” sent out 2,286 news items. The library service intends to strengthen its service through the newly-created “Knowledge 4Land (K4Land)” page⁷ which collects knowledge products and biblio references relating to land.

28. The CCS stresses the importance of maximizing the use of electronic technologies but also recognizes the importance of **printing materials** in view of the fact that a substantial number of the critical and potential end-users, particularly in developing countries, often face technological challenges. During this reporting period, 20 booklets were published for awareness-raising purposes. These materials were mostly aimed at communicating the new concept of land degradation neutrality derived from Rio+20. The high demand for such publications from Parties and other stakeholders, especially around the WDCD, indicates the usefulness of printing materials.

29. The secretariat took part in awareness-raising and communication activities in other conferences, including: Caux Dialogue on Land and Security (30 June–4 July 2014, 10–14 July 2015, Caux, Switzerland), Global Soil Week (27–31 October 2013, Berlin; 19–23 April 2015, Berlin), Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum (30 June–2 July 2014 and 22–25 June 2015; 22–24 October 2015), United Nations Day (24 October 2015, Bonn, Germany) and DesertifActions (10–13 June, 2015, Montpellier, France). Participation in non-United Nations events was particularly effective in reaching out to a new audience.

30. Decision 4/COP.11 invited Parties, the international community, civil society organizations, the private sector and other major cooperating partners to continue providing voluntary support to **the UNCCD recognition programmes**. These programmes are: Land for Life Awards; Dryland Champions, Global Dryland Champions; Drylands Ambassadors and UNCCD photo contests. These programmes have been supporting the awareness-raising and outreach activities by adding credibility to the messages and gaining support for the issues we promote.

31. UNCCD **Drylands Ambassadors** strengthen UNCCD outreach to unique target groups and render the work of the Convention more visible. During the biennium, Drylands Ambassador and former President of Finland Tarja Halonen delivered keynote speeches at the targeted UNCCD and other international events as well as global and domestic initiatives in which she is involved. Dr Dennis Garrity played an active ambassadorial role at major SLM-related events. The engagement of Drylands Ambassadors is determined by the skills and expertise of each ambassador and the resource availability. The Drylands Ambassadors have sufficient clout to influence a wide range of decision makers and media organizations, but their involvement remained limited by financial resources during this reporting period.

32. Few countries participated in **the national dryland champion programme** during the reporting period. The programme has been developed by the secretariat and is administered by the UNCCD national focal points on a voluntary basis, aiming, *inter alia*, to offer national/global recognition to those who have made a significant contribution to preventing land degradation and restoring degraded lands. Given its potential for generating increased engagement and recognizing the achievements of individuals, organizations and businesses, the programme could be a useful tool for many countries that

⁷ The K4Land page is available at:
<www.unccd.int/en/resources/Library/knowledge_products/Pages/default.aspx>.

have yet to participate in the programme in terms of sharing the best practices from the field.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

33. In view of the post-2015 development agenda, there is a need to develop a compelling communications narrative for action and to structure communications around key strategic themes, while complying with decision 4/COP.11 about focusing on the Convention's mandate and The Strategy's mission and objectives. A thematic approach could be taken in terms of engagement in WCD themes and related advocacy events. Programmes such as Drylands Ambassadors and Land for Life could be linked to this thematic approach.

34. The last biennium has seen growing interest from the media and the public in the issues of drought, groundwater depletion and land degradation. This can be further strengthened by boosting the capacity of journalists to report on issues, and the continued involvement of all relevant intergovernmental organizations and international financial institutions in collaboration with the IATF. We should make the most of the "Land as a new SDG target" momentum by engaging mainstream and social media.

35. In view of the above, Parties may wish to consider the following:

(a) Promoting the importance of land in achieving the new SDGs through awareness-raising events and activities including the WCD, UNDDD and the Land for Life programme.

(b) Supporting and promoting the training of national and community-level journalists to enable them to report effectively and competently on land and water degradation issues and innovative emerging solutions in order to stimulate the dissemination of sustainable land-use techniques and practices, popularize initiatives on LDN, and report on the progress made in improving the conditions of the populations and ecosystems affected by land degradation.

(c) Supporting and making the most of the global observance of the WCD for national awareness-raising by hosting the observance event in cooperation with the secretariat.

(d) Identifying opportunities such as the national dryland champion programme where the best SLM practices at grassroots level are recognized, in order to share these practices beyond the national level.

(e) Identifying inspiring human-interest stories and testimonies from the LDN projects for promotion and dissemination through the *Land for Life* multi-media products in order to build awareness and public support for LDN by maximizing the expertise and strengths available through the UNDDD-IATF.

(f) Strengthening the secretariat's capacity to leverage the increasing number of UNCCD social media followers so that they become not only the supporters but the doers of sustainable land management.

36. The annex to this document contains an estimate of the financial requirements for implementation of the activities referred to in paragraph 35 above, to be funded from extrabudgetary resources.

Annex

Financial requirements for the implementation of the activities to be funded from extrabudgetary resources

The table below indicates the budget requirements for the implementation of the activities referred to in paragraph 35 of this document.

Table
Activities and cost estimates

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Estimated cost (euros)</i>
Promote inspiring stories through multi-media platforms (Land for life book, Short videos, Testimonies, Photo & Satellite Images)	50,000*
Provide communication support for policy messages (Brochures, Events, Visual presentation materials)	10,000*
Strengthen outreach and engagement through social media platforms	45,000*
Provide media training for national and community-level journalists	25,000*
Disseminate SLM practices in Africa, Asia & Latin America in collaboration with Green Radio Network	20,000*
Involve Drylands Ambassadors in advocacy & lobbying at targeted events	10,000*
Organize global observance of the World Day to Combat Desertification	50,000*
Land for Life programme (Knowledge-sharing support, publications/publicity materials, award ceremony)	270,000**
Total extrabudgetary resources	480,000

* *The activity will be implemented at reduced scale if resources are not secured.*

** *Funds secured*