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Report of the Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology
Review of the functions and the work of the Group of Experts, and
procedures for the renewal of the membership of the Group of Experts

**Review of the functions and the work of the Group of Experts,
and procedures for the renewal of the membership
of the Group of Experts**

Note by the secretariat*

Summary

The Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) has undertaken a review of the activities of the Group of Experts (GoE). The Bureau also held consultations with relevant stakeholders, and met the GoE to exchange views on their mandate and expected outputs from their programme of work. In order to assist the CST in advancing its work, the CST Bureau has proposed the formation of an independent coordinating group of experts to work under the authority of the CST. In the proposal, the CST Bureau envisages the formation of ad hoc working groups to handle thematic areas as identified by the CST, with specific terms of reference and a mandate approved by the Conference of the Parties.

* The submission of this document was delayed due to the short time available between the fifth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention and the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties.

CONTENTS

	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. MANDATE	1-3	3
II. REVIEW OF THE WORK AND THE FUNCTIONS OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS	4-14	3
A. The launching phase	4-6	3
B. The development of activities	7-11	3
C. The outcomes of the work of the Group of Experts	12-14	5
III. CONSULTATIONS	15-17	6
IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	18-21	6

Annexes

I. Synthesis of scientific and technological support provided by the Group of Experts to the Convention	8
II. Proposal for a Coordinating Independent Group of Experts.....	9

I. Mandate

1. The terms of reference of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) were adopted by decision 15/COP.1. The role of the CST, as defined in article 24 of the Convention, is to provide the Conference of the Parties (COP) with information and advice on scientific and technological matters relating to combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought, in order to ensure that its decisions are based on the most up-to-date scientific knowledge.
2. The need for good procedures to provide information to the CST has been recognized since the beginning of the Convention process. After extensive consultations with a view to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the CST, a Group of Experts (GoE) was established during COP 5 and a programme of work for the GoE was developed at COP 6. However, the GoE has shown a rather low capacity to provide the expected input to the Convention process. By its decision 15/COP.7, the COP requested the Bureau of the CST to review the functions and the work of the GoE as well as procedures for the renewal of its membership, and to report to the CST at its eighth session.
3. The Bureau of the CST has reviewed the overall work programme of the GoE, and its findings are presented in this document.

II. Review of the work and the functions of the Group of Experts

A. The launching phase

4. The GoE comprises 25 members selected by the Bureau of the CST, with the approval of the COP (decision 17/COP.5, annex), with a geographical representation covering all the regions of the Convention. However, the balance between disciplines was not adequate; there was an under-representation in socio-economic fields. Moreover, difficulties in communication among members in the English language have been reported.
5. The first meeting of the GoE took place in Hamburg, Germany, from 4 to 7 November 2002, to develop a programme of work. The second meeting was held in Bonn, Germany, from 2 to 7 June 2003, to review the results of the activities carried out by its members since November 2002. The development of the work programme was reviewed and the work programme was endorsed with some recommendations.
6. The COP at its sixth session noted with satisfaction the work of the GoE and confirmed the orientations taken by the Group by adopting, by its decision 15/COP.6, a two-year (2003–2005) programme of work for the GoE; 11 activities were selected as priorities. The programme of work emphasizes applied research, synthesis work and networking around concrete implementation issues.

B. The development of activities

7. The third meeting of the GoE was held in Beijing, China, from 11 to 15 October 2004. The GoE divided into working groups to deliberate on the various topics of the programme of work. These discussions yielded conclusions and recommendations, together with activity

proposals that the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) forwarded to various funding agencies for consideration. But there was no positive response from the donors contacted. The Group members voiced their concern, feeling that their work was not being appreciated. They stressed that by formulating proposals, this stage of their work had reached a definite conclusion. There was an obligation to bring forward results at the next meeting, but in order to achieve results, financial assistance would be required. The Group noted that counterpart funding in terms of infrastructure would be available from many of their respective organizations and institutes.

8. The fourth meeting of the GoE, held in Ispra, Italy, from 19 to 23 September 2005 was hosted by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission. The main objective of the meeting was to develop and complete proposals to be forwarded to the CST at its seventh session for consideration. The work of the meeting focused on three priority issues:

(a) Development of a clear communication strategy between the activities of the GoE, end-users and the research community, including a web-based glossary of terms, as well as a mechanism for an interactive and thematic data/metadata network;

(b) Development of an integrative assessment methodology for poverty and land degradation;

(c) Proposing effective methodologies for the assessment of desertification at global, regional and local levels, in order that the Convention may be implemented in consultation and interaction with other related ongoing efforts.

9. During the Ispra meeting, the Group recalled that there had been no financial planning to provide budgetary resources for its work. A formalized partnership, however, was deemed necessary in order to support the work of the GoE in a sustainable way. It was also agreed that decisions made by the CST on the work of the Group should be backed up by budgetary allocations to facilitate the work envisaged.

10. The COP at its seventh session, noting the progress made in the implementation of the programme of work, decided to give priority to four issues: land degradation and poverty, the thematic data/metadata network, benchmarks and indicators, and desertification early warning systems. By its decision 20/COP.7, the COP decided that, when allocating funds within the science and technology budget line, work on benchmarks and indicators would be given priority, but no funds were made available to the secretariat for any such work. A few direct contributions from some Parties and institutions to support the activities of some of the experts were appreciated and useful.

11. During its fifth meeting, in Bonn, on 23 and 24 April 2007, the GoE discussed and endorsed its final report to be submitted to the eighth session of the COP. It also made several recommendations on the future work on science and technology in support of the CST and the COP.

C. The outcomes of the work of the Group of Experts

12. The main products of the work of the GoE are:
- (a) An improved draft country profile;
 - (b) A comprehensive review of national reports submitted to the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) at its third session;
 - (c) A comprehensive review of national reports submitted to the CRIC at its fifth session;
 - (d) A publication on “Opportunities for Synergy Among the Environmental Conventions: Results of National and Local level Workshops”;
 - (e) A proposal for a communication strategy in the form of a draft interactive and thematic data/metadata network (THEMANET);
 - (f) A draft integrative assessment methodology for poverty and land degradation;
 - (g) A draft report on early warning systems for preventing desertification;
 - (h) A draft evaluation of guidelines to update the *World Atlas of Desertification*;
 - (i) A draft report on effective methodologies for the assessment of desertification at the global, regional and local levels, so that the Convention can be implemented in consultation and interaction with other related ongoing efforts;
 - (j) A draft report on the identification of perceived gaps between biophysical, socio-economic and cultural knowledge and activities to combat desertification, their causes and ways of eliminating them;
 - (k) Benchmarks and indicators for monitoring and assessment of desertification;
 - (l) A presentation of case studies on conservation and rehabilitation of degraded land.

13. However, it is also noteworthy that the GoE played a crucial role in awareness raising, capacity-building, and dissemination of information and advice in several international workshops, conferences, meetings, training, projects and programmes worldwide. The GoE took an active part in the activities of the International Year of Deserts and Desertification (IYDD), being part of scientific and organizing committees of several major events. Additionally, several members of the GoE actively participated in global assessments such as the Global Environment Outlook (GEO-4), the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, and the Desert Outlook. The results of this sound involvement of the GoE at the international level is difficult to assess, but it should be kept in mind during the review of the functions and the work of the GoE, as having been an important and time-consuming contribution to the UNCCD implementation process.

14. In general, the GoE, by its advisory role to the Convention, had an important impact on the deliberations at CST 6, CRIC 3, CST 7 and CRIC 5. It also substantially increased the visibility of the scientific community at sessions of the COP, the CRIC and the CST, underlining the urgent need to increase the involvement of this scientific community within the UNCCD process, at all levels.

III. Consultations

15. Pursuant to decision 15/COP.7, the Bureau of the CST reviewed the institutional arrangements and modus operandi of a number of scientific advisory bodies within the United Nations, in order to learn about how they provide inputs to the relevant decision-making bodies within the United Nations system. Two reports entitled *International Scientific Advisory Processes on the Environment and Sustainable Development* – the first, dated 1998, prepared for United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, and the second, dated 2000, prepared for the United Nations System-Wide Earthwatch Coordination and the United Nations Environment Programme, both by Jan-Stefan Fritz – were consulted.

16. The Bureau of the CST attended a meeting with the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in order to acquaint itself with the specific modus operandi of the STRP. The scope of the meeting was to develop suggestions on the profile and terms of reference for scientific national focal points, to review a series of measures to enhance regional networking within the Convention, to follow the relevant COP decisions, and to establish procedures for reporting on tasks accomplished. A lesson learned was that the STRP work programme has a task-based budget, that the process of developing indicators of effectiveness is a continuous one, and that mid-term meetings are useful for the STRP process.

17. CST Bureau members attended several other meetings where various of relevant stakeholders were consulted on their needs and offered opinions in terms of scientific and technical support for further Convention implementation. The meetings/sessions attended were: the COP Bureau meeting (Bonn, January 2006), the Ramsar STRP (Gland, June 2006), the launching meeting for DesertNet (October, 2006), the international workshop on climate and land degradation (Arusha, December 2006), a meeting of DeSurvey users (Maastricht, February 2007), IIWG meetings, UNCCD regional group meetings and CRIC 5. Consultations were also pursued with the UNCCD secretariat. A synthesis of this work is attached in annex I.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

18. This overview shows that the activities of the GoE have always been consistent with the functions and programme of work of the Group as defined by the COP. During its first active period the Group agreed on activities to be implemented and began its work, but the work could not continue because of financial constraints. Therefore, a decrease in the motivation of the Group members was registered. The involvement of some members of the group has been haphazard to some extent.

19. More generally, however, the GoE has shown low capacity to provide the expected inputs to the process of implementation of the Convention. There are several reasons for this, including: the large number of tasks and low prioritization of work; lack of specific resources earmarked for the Group's work tasks; lack of a demand-driven approach; low morale affecting the participation of some members; and lack of finance to take forward the GoE proposals – some donors felt that the mode of individuals working on their own specific research projects misleads the process, and may not yield the desired products for the CST and the COP, hence the reluctance to provide financial support.

20. Nevertheless, the GoE members produced a valuable review and analysis of work on the issues in their work programme.

21. In order to assist the CST to improve its efficiency and effectiveness, and taking into account the consultations and the result of the review of the functions and the work of the GoE, the Bureau of the CST Bureau developed a "Proposal for a Coordinating Independent Group of Experts" (see annex II), that the committee may wish to consider.

Annex I

**Synthesis of scientific and technological support provided
by the Group of Experts to the Convention**

Issue	Objectives/questions
<p>How to reinforce, strengthen and reframe the scientific contribution of the international community for the implementation of the Convention</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are international relevant capacities and capabilities properly engaged in the implementation of the Convention in terms of providing their scientific inputs, but is there a critical mass of institutions and experts? • Scientific advisory process of the Convention is enough open, flexible, and independent from scientific point of view • Are the scientific targets sufficiently relevant for the Parties? • Are the scientific targets clear enough? • What are the needs and concerns of the donors in terms of science advice? • Is there enough opening for scientific and technological capacity-building? • How should the scientific process be oriented in case of specific issue of land degradation, drought and desertification, globally or/and regionally?
<p>What mechanisms, means and ways should be developed for effective transfer of technologies / best practices / know-how for the improvement of livelihoods of people in affected areas?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up mechanisms to ensure transfer of technologies in agriculture, land management, etc, by approaching financial, institutional, legislative and economic mechanisms, ways and means • Disseminate and train on the best examples
<p>How to develop environmental, financial and capacity synergies between combating desertification, land degradation, climate change impact, mitigation and adaptation activities, and biodiversity to ensure sustainability in affected areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What level to approach – global, regional, national or project? • What are the incentives for synergetic approach?
<p>How better to share the outputs of the scientific nature to concerned people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is targeted for what results? • What is the strategy for communication and dissemination?

Annex II

Proposal for a Coordinating Independent Group of Experts

A. Introduction

1. A Coordinating Group of Independent Experts (CIGE) will be established under the Committee on Science and Technology (CST). It will comprise five expert members with a balanced geographic, discipline and gender distribution.
2. The CIGE will deal with scientific and technological issues, including biophysical and socio-economic issues, relating to the implementation of the Convention, using a multidisciplinary approach.
3. The CIGE will respond in an efficient and low-cost manner to the scientific, technical and technological issues raised by the Conference of the Parties (COP), upon the recommendation of the CST. Its outcomes will serve as a basis for intergovernmental negotiation within the UNCCD process for further enhancing the implementation of the Convention.

B. Institutional set-up

4. The expert members of the CIGE will be internationally recognized scientists willing to contribute to the advancement of science and technology for the implementation of the Convention. They will be identified through a rigorous process, including an international call for nominations/expressions of interest from Parties. The final selection will be made by the Bureau of the CST.
5. The mandate of the CIGE will cover a period of four years.
6. Ad hoc working groups (AHWGs) will be established under the CIGE by the COP, to perform tasks assigned by the COP. Those tasks will be clearly defined in terms of mandate, organization and time frame by precise terms of reference defined by the COP, taking into account global and regional activities and emerging issues. The COP may establish as many AHWGs as are necessary to fulfil the tasks requested by the Parties, based on priority lists.
7. Some activities in the CIGE programme of work may also be undertaken by well-known institutions and organizations that would offer to host a working group according to terms of reference established by the COP.
8. It is the responsibility of the Bureau of the CST and the CIGE to select the members of the AHWG as defined by article 24 of the Convention. The selected scientists should be able to bring together a critical mass of expertise. If an institution or organization offers to host a working group, it is the responsibility of that institution/ organization to set up a proposal and submit it to the Bureau of the CST and its CIGE for consideration.

C. Operations of the Coordinating Independent Group of Experts

9. The CIGE will coordinate the activities of the AHWGs and organize international reviews of the work. It will facilitate contacts between the AHWGs and the international community; assist the Bureau of the CST in identifying thematic areas for further work of the AHWGs; and report to the COP through the CST. The Convention secretariat will facilitate the work of the CIGE.

10. A member of the CIGE will be elected, in consultation with the Bureau of the CST, to chair the group. He or she will manage the CIGE, ensuring the fulfillment of defined tasks.

11. The CIGE, together with the Bureau of the CST, will review the work of the AHWGs and of any institutions/organizations undertaking activities of the CIGE programme of work, in order to ensure that the results are in conformity with the terms of reference.

12. The CIGE will meet at least once a year, if possible in conjunction with meetings of the Bureau of the CST.

D. Operations of the ad hoc working groups

13. The AHWGs will not develop research but will collect, adjust, update, restructure and adapt knowledge for a specified purpose, based on available experiences and knowledge. The CST may request an AHWG to perform some targeted research work on specifically identified knowledge gaps. The working procedure will include conceptualization, work on drafts produced by AHWG members, and dedicated workshops with selected participants (for the purpose of reviewing and/or improving the AHWG's products). AHWGs should be open to voluntary contributions of international experts who make themselves available to help perform tasks according to the terms of reference established by the COP.

14. Each AHWG will elect from among its members a group facilitator. He or she will manage the AHWG to ensure that it completes the activities defined in the terms of reference.

E. The Committee on Science and Technology process

15. Specific terms of reference based on Parties' first priority needs will be drafted by working groups at sessions of the CST. AHWGs established by the COP, as well as those hosted by institutions or organization, will inform the Bureau of the CST about their work plan within three months after the COP session.

F. Financial support

16. Financial support for the CIGE and for the AHWGs will be provided in the core budget of the secretariat under the budget line of the CST. Sponsors may also directly provide financial support. Host organizations or institutions may offer their total or partial support to the work of the AHWGs.

G. Specific products of the Coordinating Independent Group of Experts

17. The CIGE will be demand-driven and product-oriented. The products will be defined by the COP in the terms of reference and will include methodologies, scientific and technical reports, scientific bulletins, assessment guides, demonstration activities, recommendations and good practice, toolkits, innovative tools and mechanisms for technological transfers, and patterns for capacity-building at local and national level.

