



Convention to Combat Desertification

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Consideration of best practices

Consideration of best practices: accessibility of information on best practices

Note by the secretariat

Summary

By its decision 15/COP.10, the Conference of the Parties (COP) decided that future sessions of the Committee for the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) should review the accessibility of the information on best practices.

By the same decision, the COP requested the secretariat to identify recommended databases for information collected on the themes identified in decision 13/COP.9, with a view to transferring the existing sustainable land management best practices in the performance review and assessment of information system (PRAIS) to the recommended database.

The COP also requested the Bureaux of the CRIC and the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) to work together in defining ways to promote the analysis and dissemination of best practices, according to the respective mandates of the two Committees, for consideration at COP 11.

The Bureau of the CRIC advised that the proposed selection of recommended databases be considered at CRIC 11, with a view to providing recommendations to COP 11 in that respect. The Bureau also requested the secretariat to provide a concept for data sharing and access to information submitted by Parties, with a view to providing recommendations to COP 11 and any decision that the COP may wish to take on this subject.

The present document therefore contains three sections, the first dealing with the identified recommended databases; the second with a policy framework to make data and information submitted by Parties accessible to the wider public; and the third on how the CRIC and the CST can promote the analysis and dissemination of best practices, according to their respective mandates.

This document also sets out recommendations on possible actions by Convention institutions and the subsidiary bodies, as well as by relevant partners.

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I. Introduction and background information

1. By its decision 13/COP.9, the Conference of the Parties (COP) requested Parties and observers to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) to report regularly to the COP including on best practices in the implementation of the Convention. In accordance with decision 11/COP.9, annex, the Committee for the Review of Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) is mandated, among other tasks, to compile and disseminate such best practices.

2. UNCCD best practices are compiled according to seven thematic topics as set out in decision 13/COP.9, annex V:

- (a) Sustainable land management (SLM) technologies, including adaptation;
- (b) Capacity-building and awareness-raising;
- (c) Desertification, land degradation and drought, and SLM monitoring and assessment/research;
- (d) Knowledge management and decision support;
- (e) The policy, legislative and institutional framework;
- (f) Funding and resource mobilization;
- (g) Participation, collaboration and networking.

3. Parties initiated the reporting on best practices on thematic topic (a) above in late 2010 and their submissions are being recorded through the performance review and assessment of implementation system (PRAIS), the on-line reporting platform of the UNCCD.

4. By its decision 15/COP.10, the COP decided to increase accessibility to information on best practices and requested the secretariat to identify recommended databases for each thematic topic, to which data and information stored in the PRAIS database should be further transferred.

5. By the same decision, the COP also requested the Bureaux of the CRIC and the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) to work together in defining ways to promote the analysis and dissemination of best practices, according to the respective mandates of the two Committees, for consideration at COP 11, and furthermore requested the secretariat to continue to facilitate these consultations.

6. The Bureau of the CRIC considered the issue of accessibility of best practices at its intersessional meetings in February and September 2012, and provided further guidance to the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) on the implementation of these provisions.

7. The present document reports on the secretariat's work in implementing decision 15/COP.10 and the results achieved so far, for consideration and any recommendations the CRIC may wish to make to COP 11.

II. Identification of recommended databases

8. Decision 15/COP.10 requests the secretariat:

- (a) To identify a recommended database for new information for each of the thematic topics of UNCCD best practices;

(b) To support the Parties and other reporting entities in the submission of best practices to the recommended primary database (and the Global Mechanism in the case of theme 6);

(c) To transfer the existing sustainable land management best practices in the PRAIS to the recommended database, once it is identified, for each theme and then to replace the existing PRAIS best practices with a link to the recommended database.

9. The Bureau of the CRIC provided further guidance on the implementation of relevant provisions of the above decision. In this regard, at its meeting on 17 and 18 February 2012,¹ the Bureau requested that identification of primary organizations and databases be conducted through a call for expression of interest, and that detailed criteria be drafted by the secretariat, against which the interested organizations and databases would be screened. Guidance provided by the CRIC bureau included the following:

(a) The secretariat should implement the procedure to identify recommended databases for thematic topics 1 and 6 in 2012, while the procedures for identification of databases on the other thematic topics would follow the calendar agreed upon by COP 10;

(b) The results of the identification process would be addressed at CRIC 11 in view of a final decision to be taken at COP 11;

(c) On a temporary basis and in order to allow continuous reporting, submissions of best practices on thematic topic 1 would be stored in the PRAIS database until the CRIC advises and the COP takes a final decision on the recommended databases.

10. At its meeting on 17 and 18 September 2012,² the Bureau of the CRIC made the following recommendations:

(a) The secretariat shall produce and then submit to the Bureau of the CRIC for its consideration, a revised document on detailed criteria for the identification of recommended databases, clustering the proposed criteria into: (i) Filters; (ii) Technical criteria; (iii) Descriptions;

(b) The secretariat shall launch a call for expression of interest as soon as the detailed criteria are cleared by the Bureau of the CRIC, with a view to proposing a list of recommended institutions and/or databases for thematic topics 1 and 6 to be set out in an official document for CRIC 11;

(c) The secretariat shall inform candidate institutions on specific commitments that they shall make if selected by the COP, with regard to: (i) the compilation of additional information received by Parties; (ii) maintenance of the database and ensuring data integrity for an agreed minimum period; (iii) facilitating access to and circulation of information in accordance with an agreed data sharing policy; and (iv) providing such services at no cost or estimating the financial and human resources required in this regard.

11. Draft detailed criteria for the identification of recommended databases were prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the Bureau of the CRIC.

¹ Available at <<http://www.unccd.int/en/about-the-convention/the-bodies/The-CRIC/Pages/CRIC%20Bureau.aspx>>.

² As in footnote 1 above.

12. The call for expressions of interest was opened on 21 November 2012.³ At the time the present document was being prepared, details of the responses to the call were not yet available. Consequently, the roster of institutions and organizations that have responded to the call and which meet the basic requirements, is published in a separate document, ICCD/CRIC(11)/13/Add.1, issued in the English language only.

13. The output of this process will also enable the secretariat to publish website links to existing databases relevant to themes (a) and (f) (see para. 1 above) in order to provide Parties with access to as many best practices as possible, as also requested in decision 15/COP.10, paragraph 3.

14. Institutions and organizations which have expressed their interest in this process and which meet the basic requirements as spelled out in the call, upon recommendation by the CRIC, may be invited by the COP to provide a number of services for a tentative period of six years (2013–2018), including:

(a) Receiving and hosting the PRAIS database on theme (a) of the UNCCD best practices;

(b) Establishing and hosting a database on theme (f) of the UNCCD best practices;

(c) Compiling additional information received by Parties and other reporting entities on best practices on themes (a) and (f) of UNCCD best practices;

(d) Maintaining such database(s) and ensuring the integrity of the data, and making data and information available according to the classification adopted by the COP, through web-based platforms;

(e) Facilitating access to, and ensuring circulation of, information on relevant best practices, while observing the data-sharing policy that the COP may decide to adopt with regard to communication of information on best practices;

(f) Sharing data and information on UNCCD best practices with other similar institutions/databases which will be recommended by the COP.

15. Based on the response to the call for expressions of interest, and taking into consideration that the ultimate goal of this process is to improve accessibility to information on UNCCD best practices and make it available to the widest audience possible, the CRIC may also consider inviting interested institutions and organizations to combine efforts and facilitate the circulation of relevant information through dedicated networks and platforms.

III. Policy framework for data access

A. Background

16. The PRAIS quantitative and indicators-based reporting, the establishment of an on-line facility and the digitalization of data from national reports has opened the way for information provided by Parties to be widely shared and used – beyond the preliminary analysis report published as part of the CRIC official documentation.

17. The question of open access to data is currently debated in many international forums and is becoming part of the global agenda, including on environmental and

³ See <<http://www.unccd.int/en/programmes/Reporting-review-and-assessment/Pages/Identification-of-primary-databases-for-UNCCD-best-practices.aspx>>; and: <<http://global-mechanism.org/en/news/call-for-expression-of-interest-on-unccd-best-practices>>.

sustainable development issues. Many specialized agencies, programmes and financial institutions of the United Nations are taking action and developing their policy and guidelines on data access. The UNCCD, building on solid assets – the quantitative reporting system and data gathered so far – could also consider adopting a specific policy with regard to access to data officially communicated by Parties, including through the PRAIS.

18. So far, access to raw data provided by Parties and other reporting entities within the PRAIS was only granted to the GM⁴ and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO),⁵ in order to assist in the preparation of the preliminary analysis documents for the assessment of implementation by the CRIC. A liability clause was established in order to ensure that data will be used for the sole purpose for which it was transferred and under the condition that no other use will be made of such data and that such data will not be shared with third parties.

19. At its meeting in February 2012, the Bureau of the CRIC addressed the question of access to data within the framework of discussions relating to: (a) the establishment of public query functions on the PRAIS portal; and (b) the transfer of the data set on best practices to an external database/institution. In this regard, the Bureau recommended that:

(a) The issue of access to data will be addressed as part of one agenda item of CRIC 11;

(b) The secretariat will test query functions on the 2008–2009 data sets in consultation with the Bureau of the CRIC;

(c) On a temporary basis and in order to allow continuous reporting, submissions of best practices on SLM technologies, including adaptation will be stored in the PRAIS database until the COP, further to advice from the CRIC, takes a final decision on the recommended databases.

B. Communication of information under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification: legal background

20. Provisions relating to the communication of information and review of implementation are contained in many articles of the Convention⁶ and COP decisions.⁷ The review of information by the CRIC is actually conceived as an information-sharing platform, supported and facilitated by the Convention institutions and subsidiary bodies.⁸ The secretariat has, among its main functions, the specific tasks of assisting affected countries in the compilation and communication of information required under the Convention; and compiling and transmitting reports submitted to it.⁹

⁴ See decision 13/COP.9, attachment, Compilation and synthesis of reports, paragraph 22.

⁵ On the basis of a Cooperation Agreement between the UNCCD secretariat and FAO on partnership to compile and analyse the performance and impact indicators of the PRAIS reporting system (December 2012).

⁶ See article 16 (Information collection, analysis and exchange); article 22 (Conference of the Parties), paragraph 2 (b); article 26 (Communication of information), paragraph 1.

⁷ See decision 3/COP.8, annex (The Strategy), Operational objective 1 (Advocacy, awareness raising and education), Outcome 1.1; decision 11/COP.9, annex, Terms of reference of the CRIC; decision 13/COP.9 (Improving the procedures for communication of information and the quality and format of reports to be submitted to the COP), paragraph 2.

⁸ See decision 3/COP.8, annex (The Strategy), paragraph 13, regarding the mandate of the CST and paragraph 15 regarding the role of the CRIC.

⁹ Article 23 (Permanent secretariat), paragraphs 2 (b) and (c).

21. The COP further instructed that reports submitted to the secretariat shall be in the public domain, and that the secretariat shall keep in databases and/or directories, and regularly update, information provided in accordance with the procedures on communication of information and make available copies of the reports to any interested Parties and other entities or individuals.¹⁰ However, there are no specific provisions with regard to access to raw data and data sharing.

22. As far as the legal framework on access to data and data sharing is concerned, the secretariat has posted generic “terms of use” on its website; these terms of use contain principles and rules on warranty disclaimer, exclusion of liability, attribution, endorsement restrictions, and so forth. This framework provides guidance and safeguards all the information contained, provided or presented on the UNCCD website. At present these principles and rules also apply to information available in the PRAIS portal.

C. Reference to information access policies in other United Nations institutions

23. While there is general consensus within the scientific community on the utility and, ultimately, the need to grant open access to data for research purposes and to the results of research, not all United Nations institutions have adopted or published a consistent approach to data sharing and data access.

24. Two general approaches to information access have been adopted by United Nations institutions:

(a) Information disclosure policy: some United Nations institutions have adopted such an approach with a view to making information about its business and operations available to the public, to encourage public participation in their activities and ultimately increase trust and support for the organization.¹¹ Data and information are published, including through websites and other online applications, under some conditions and with some restrictions including for reasons of confidentiality and security. Such policies are mostly meant to increase transparency and trust although they are not always limited to this. Similar policies are also adopted by financial institutions and development banks, because of their mandate and the use of public funds, to ensure good governance, transparency and accountability for their operations.¹² In general, data and information published are generated by, and hence are the property of, the organization;

(b) Open access policy: other organizations adopt and support an “open data” approach,¹³ according to the principle of promoting universal access with equal opportunities to scientific knowledge and the creation and dissemination of scientific and technical information.¹⁴ Data and information are published and made freely available

¹⁰ Decision 11/COP.1, paragraphs 21, 22 and 23.

¹¹ For instance, the United Nations Development Programme Information Disclosure Policy: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/operations/transparency/information_disclosurepolicy>.

¹² For instance, The World Bank Policy on Access to Information: <<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2010/07/12368161/world-bank-policy-access-information>>.

¹³ For instance, see the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization Policy Guidelines for the development and promotion of open access: <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002158/215863e.pdf>>.

¹⁴ World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), Geneva (2003) declared that “the ability for all to access and contribute information, ideas and knowledge is essential in an inclusive Information Society”. It further emphasized that sharing of global knowledge for development can be enhanced by removing barriers to equitable access to information: <<http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop.html>>.

with basically no conditionality, but a disclaimer and a general obligation to quote the source. In general, data sets are generated from external sources or voluntarily provided by external providers with no ownership rights by the organization.¹⁵

25. Mainly relevant to any data access policy that can be adopted by UNCCD, are the practices followed by other United Nations institutions managing databases of information provided by signatories party to multilateral environmental agreements and programmes, and in particular the secretariats of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)¹⁶ and of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).¹⁷ The CRIC may review this procedural framework and facilitate a common approach to data sharing.

¹⁵ FAO's Statistics Division (FAO/ESS) has set up "FAOSTAT", an online facility that provides time-series and cross sectional data relating to food and agriculture for some 200 countries. The national version of FAOSTAT, CountrySTAT, will offer a two-way data exchange facility between countries and FAO as well as a facility to store data at the national and sub-national levels.

¹⁶ CBD does not have a formally established data access policy. Its Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM) is only interested in public information; therefore, everything that is submitted from CBD Parties and partners is publicly disseminated. The information provider remains the owner of the information it shares with the CBD secretariat, and the secretariat does not alter that information. This practice is followed for national documents (strategies and reports) and for information documents submitted to CBD meetings. The CBD COP, at its 11th session, noted the recommendations in document UNEP/CBD/COP/11/INF/8 entitled "A review of barriers to the sharing of biodiversity data and information, with recommendations for eliminating them" (<http://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/wgri/wgri-04/information/wgri-04-inf-13-en.doc>), and called upon CBD Parties and other stakeholders "to consider how they can most effectively address barriers to data access that are under their direct control".

¹⁷ The UNFCCC secretariat is handling a large number of different official data and databases, including information contained in national communications and greenhouse gas inventory databases (GHG Data, which provides access to the most recent GHG data reported by country Parties; KP Data, which contains GHG data relating specifically to the Kyoto Protocol; the data are as reported by Annex I Parties that are Parties to the Kyoto Protocol). Within the data-related work in relation to greenhouse gases, the following practices are used for ensuring proper data sharing within and outside the organization: (a) All data submissions from Parties are made available publicly on the UNFCCC website. This applies to the following reporting under UNFCCC: - National GHG inventories from Annex I Parties (http://unfccc.int/national_reports/annex_i_ghg_inventories/national_inventories_submissions/items/6598.php); - National communications from Annex I Parties (http://unfccc.int/national_reports/annex_i_natcom/submitted_natcom/items/4903.php); - National communications from non-Annex I Parties (http://unfccc.int/national_reports/non-annex_i_natcom/submitted_natcom/items/653.php); (b) GHG inventory data from Annex I Parties, which are the most data-intensive part of reporting under UNFCCC, are processed internally at UNFCCC, including their placement into the records management system (FileNet), which is only accessible internally; (c) processed GHG inventory data are made publicly available in the form of a searchable online database on the UNFCCC website (UNFCCC data interface, <http://unfccc.int/di/FlexibleQueries.do>). From that database, users may view and download data in accordance with their requirements (using various static and user-defined queries); (e) a portion of most representative data is reported annually to UNFCCC COP in the form of two data reports, the GHG data report under the Convention (see for example, <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2011/sbi/eng/09.pdf>), and the compilation and accounting report under the Kyoto Protocol (<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2011/cmp7/eng/08.pdf>); (f) the UNFCCC secretariat provides a part of its data (selected data series for most representative data) for use within the United Nations system, in the framework of two United Nations projects: the UNData portal (<http://data.un.org/>) and the Millennium Development Goals (<http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Default.aspx>).

D. Elements to be considered in outlining a data sharing policy

26. Some elements that Parties may consider in the approach to a data access policy are as follows:

(a) Objectives of data access are recognized. Data providers should appreciate the benefits in sharing information, rather than merely complying with the obligations to report. Data and information provided by Parties in response to specific obligations of the Convention and relevant decisions of the COP are in the public domain, and this is the basis for the open-ended review process conducted by the CRIC. Beyond the review process, this information is also useful for awareness-raising and advocacy purposes at the global, regional and national levels, as well as for scientific research;

(b) Data to be shared is clearly identified. Parties should be informed of the nature, property and value of the information to be shared. Intrinsically, information reported by Parties has an added value compared to information gathered from other sources, including internationally recognized sources: it has been validated through national processes and released through internal clearance procedures;

(c) Information is reliable. Open access to information provided by Parties should be concomitant with vetted quality of data and data quality management. Coherence and reliability of data could be increased through improved methodology and common procedures of data collection, and published metadata. Appropriate data quality management and specific expertise are also required to facilitate open access to and full benefits of the PRAIS datasets;

(d) The repository of the information is known. Authenticity of data and information communicated by Parties in accordance with relevant provisions of the Convention and COP decisions should be preserved and guaranteed through ways and means agreed upon by Parties. The objective should be to ensure that access to PRAIS data is managed in conformity with United Nations rules and regulations and with possible data access policy and any other instrument that the COP may adopt in this regard. The secretariat shall act as repository of the information and ensure data integrity as part of its core function and mandate;

(e) The data access policy is public. Parties and other reporting entities should be informed of how data and information are shared and which are the terms and conditions that apply (principle of prior informed consent). Prior agreement of Parties may be required on procedures for, mechanisms of and eventually restrictions, in data sharing in order to ensure data integrity and correct use of information communicated by them;

(f) The data access policy is applied gradually. A step-by-step approach may be required to understand utility and increase confidence in data sharing facilities and tools, including web-based information technology (IT) platforms. Many United Nations agencies have developed their tools and their policies on data access through consultations with their governing bodies, which has taken perhaps some additional time but increased trust of members and users on data and information released.

IV. Promotion of the analysis and dissemination of best practices

27. By its decision 15/COP.10, the COP requested the Bureaux of the CRIC and the CST to work together in defining ways to promote the analysis and dissemination of best practices, according to the respective mandates of the two Committees, for consideration at COP 11.

28. In response to this provision, a joint meeting of the two Bureaux took place in Bonn, Germany, on 18 February 2012.¹⁸ This meeting was presented with an abstract of document ICCD/CRIC(9)/9 on the review and compilation of best practices in sustainable land management technologies, including adaptation, and in particular its section III on making use of the information on best practices. According to this document: (a) the CRIC would establish an experience-sharing platform on best practices and advise on measures, including policy measures, to be considered by the COP; and (b) the CST could develop a knowledge management system that would assist in the collection, identification and selection of good practices, with a view to facilitating replication and scaling-up of best practices.

29. The Bureau of the CRIC informed the meeting on the procedure agreed for the identification of the recommended primary databases and the suggested interaction between the two subsidiary bodies regarding the best practices.

30. The Bureau of the CST indicated that cooperation between the two subsidiary bodies on best practices, particularly on the first thematic topic (sustainable land management technologies, including adaptation), would be useful although the exact manner of interaction is yet to be defined.

31. The joint meeting made the following recommendations:

(a) Further guidance on the classification of best practices may be provided by the COP, upon recommendation by the CRIC and the CST as relevant and according to their respective mandates;

(b) The Chair of the CST shall inform the Chair of the CRIC of the outcome of the discussion at the level of the Bureau of the CST at the next meeting of the Bureau of the COP;

(c) The Bureau of the CRIC will share the draft criteria for the selection of the primary recommended databases with the Bureau of the CST for comments.

32. Upon further guidance by Parties at CST S-3 and CRIC 11, the Bureaux of the subsidiary bodies may convene another joint meeting before COP 11 in order to continue considering the issue of interaction between the bodies with a view to promoting the analysis and dissemination of best practices on the implementation of the Convention.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

33. **The CRIC may consider making the following recommendations to the COP:**

(a) Request the secretariat and the GM to identify detailed services that primary recommended institutions and databases may be invited to deliver in order to assist the CRIC in compiling and disseminating best practices on thematic topics (a) and (f) (decision 13/COP.9, annex V), and the tentative period for which such services should be rendered;

(b) Invite the institutions which have expressed interest in supporting the work of the CRIC on best practices to join efforts, and to propose to CRIC 12 and COP 11 a framework of cooperation amongst them aiming at the best circulation and usage possible of best practices on the two themes of best practices; and request the secretariat to consult with them in this regard;

¹⁸ The report on the joint meeting of the Bureaux of the CRIC and the CST is available at <http://www.unccd.int/en/about-the-convention/the-bodies/The-CRIC/Pages/CRIC%20Bureau.aspx>.

(c) Request the secretariat to propose an approach to accessing data and information provided by Parties and other reporting entities, including through the PRAIS system, for consideration at CRIC 12 and a possible decision at COP 11;

(d) Urge the Bureaux of the CRIC and the CST to continue consultations on interaction between subsidiary bodies on ways to promote analysis and dissemination of relevant best practices, including through convening joint meetings of the Bureaux, with a view to presenting a common position on this matter for consideration at COP 11.
