



**Convention to Combat
Desertification**

Distr.: General
13 March 2013

English only

Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

Eleventh session

Bonn, 15–19 April 2013

Item 10 of the provisional agenda

Promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies

Concept note for an action plan for 2012–2018 for promoting and strengthening relations with organizations, institutions and agencies in implementing recommendations emanating from the United Nations Environment Management Group: Global Drylands: a United Nations system-wide response

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Conference of the Parties (COP), by decision 9/COP.10, paragraphs 14 and 15, took note of the proposed coordinated action of the United Nations system in the drylands, as contained in document ICCD/CRIC(10)/INF.1, and called upon the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the Environment Management Group (EMG), to work on a concrete action plan for 2012–2018 for promoting and strengthening relationships with other international organizations, institutions and agencies. The COP also encouraged the secretariat, in consultation with Parties, to provide the eleventh session of the COP with recommendations to follow up on the above-mentioned action plan.

In accordance with the mandate given by the COP at its tenth session and the relevant decisions of the 12th special session of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council and the 18th EMG senior officials meeting, the UNCCD secretariat is leading the development of this action plan under the Issue Management Group (IMG) on Land of the EMG.

Based on the suggestions received from other United Nations agencies in 2012 and 2013, this concept note for the development of the action plan will be submitted to the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) at its eleventh session for feedback from Parties. Based on feedback from the CRIC at its eleventh session, the concrete action plan will be developed and submitted to CRIC 12/COP 11.

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I. Foundations and policy context

1. The Global Drylands Report¹ resulted from the collaboration of 18 entities of the Environmental Management Group (EMG) of the United Nations² that came together in the Issue Management Group (IMG) on Land in order to develop a policy framework and a system-wide assessment of the challenges and development opportunities related to drylands populations and ecosystems. The report recognizes the growing urgency to focus on drylands, where 40 per cent of the human population lives and which have high-value natural resources and great economic potential. This potential, if developed, could have a significant impact on addressing the global issues of food security, poverty, climate change and loss of biodiversity. Unattended, however, the degradation of drylands would threaten the livelihoods and well-being of billions of people.
2. The EMG senior officials, at their meeting in September 2011, approved the report and submitted it to the Conference of the Parties (COP) at its tenth session.
3. The COP requested, by decision 9/COP.10, the development of a concrete action plan for 2012–2018 to promote and strengthen relationships between international organizations, institutions and agencies for the implementation of the recommendations of the Global Drylands Report.
4. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council, at its 12th special session, held in February 2012, encouraged the EMG to continue promoting coherence in environmental activities across the United Nations system, including the preparation of a United Nations system-wide action plan for the period 2012–2018 on the follow-up to the Global Drylands Report³ for consideration by the COP at its eleventh session.
5. “The future we want”, the outcome document of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20),⁴ highlighted the need for urgent action to reverse land degradation and achieve a land degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development. Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives reaffirmed their resolve, in accordance with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), to take coordinated action nationally, regionally and internationally, to monitor, globally, land degradation and restore degraded lands in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas.
6. The Rio+20 conference also stressed the importance of the further development and implementation of scientifically based, sound and socially inclusive methods and indicators for monitoring and assessing the extent of desertification, land degradation and drought,

¹ United Nations Environment Management Group, “Global Drylands: A UN system-wide response”, (2011).

² The United Nations system established the EMG in 1999 for the purpose of enhancing inter-agency coordination in the field of environment and human settlements. The EMG enables the formulation of effective, coherent and coordinated United Nations system responses to specific environment and human settlements challenges. One of the issues of the EMG is land degradation. With its global reach and large range of activities and expertise, a coherent and holistic United Nations system-wide response can help catalyse a transition towards increased sustainable management of drylands.

³ UNEP GCSS.XII/10: “Enhanced coordination across the United Nations system, including the Environment Management Group”.

⁴ Annexed to General Assembly resolution A/RES/66/288.

and the importance of promoting scientific research and strengthening the scientific base of activities to address desertification and drought in accordance with the UNCCD.⁵

7. As stated above, the recommendations of the Global Drylands Report were fully endorsed by the EMG senior officials at their meeting in September 2011, the UNEP Governing Council at its 12th special session and the COP at its tenth session. The recommendations call for, inter alia:

(a) Concrete actions to promote and strengthen collaboration between international organizations, institutions, agencies and stakeholders for the sustainable development of drylands;

(b) The management and control of drylands degradation, which threatens the well-being of communities on every continent;

(c) The strengthening of strategic partnerships with relevant stakeholders, building on established mechanisms and developing new cooperation initiatives with pertinent international agencies and bodies on these issues.

8. This concept note presents notions and outlines initiatives, within the above-mentioned policy context, to develop a concrete action plan to implement the recommendations made by the Global Drylands Report. The action plan would chart the role that the agencies of the United Nations system can coherently play for the sustainable development of drylands. The plan would include the following steps (see figure 1):

(a) Challenges and opportunities for enhancing coordinated efforts to further the development of drylands through sustainable land management (SLM) and ecosystem rehabilitation (see chapter II);

(b) A coordinated action platform to attain land degradation neutrality that links international/national and local elements around specific target areas in drylands (STADs) (see chapter III);

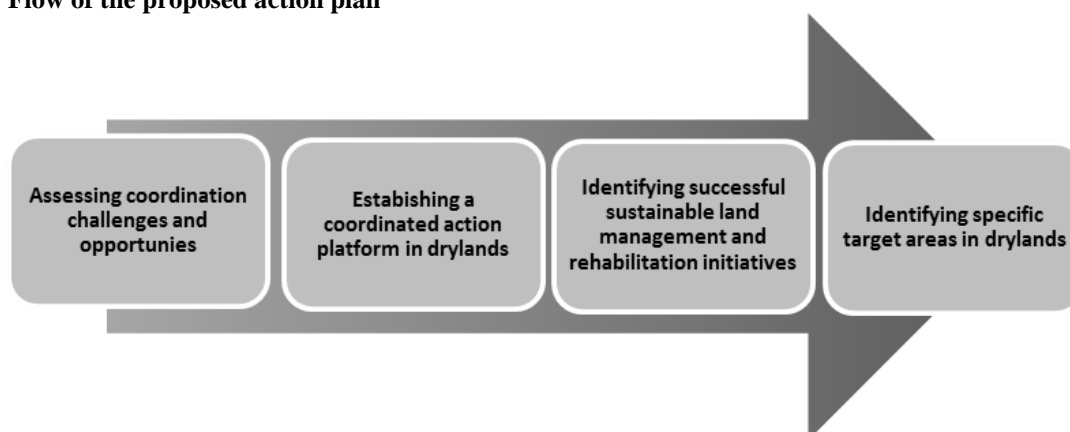
(c) A process to identify and select successful SLM and rehabilitation initiatives and possible exportable templates for mainstreaming and global scale-up (see chapter IV);

(d) Identification of a number of STADs to implement measurable and concrete SLM and land rehabilitation projects in drylands by 2018 (see chapter V);

(e) A road map for implementation of the action plan (see chapter VI).

⁵ “The future we want”, paragraph 208.

Figure 1
Flow of the proposed action plan



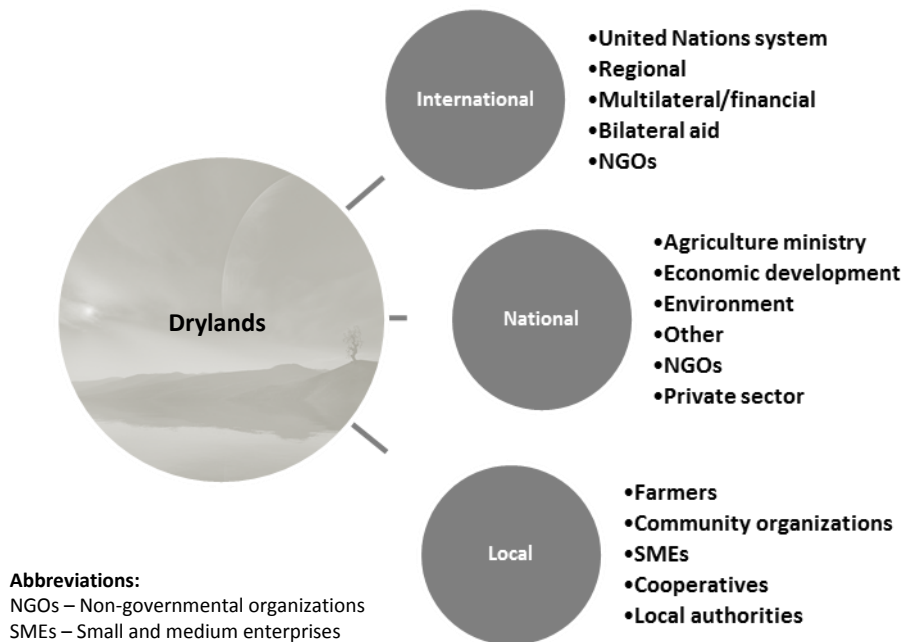
II. Challenges and opportunities for enhancing coordinated efforts

9. The Rio+20 summit recognized the need for an improved and more effective institutional framework for an effective implementation of sustainable development policies, plans and programmes. This framework, guided by the specific functions required and the mandates involved would address the shortcomings of the current system and promote synergies and coherence.

10. The challenge of effectively achieving a broad coordinating action on drylands management lies in the complexity of the issues involved. Drylands rehabilitation and SLM require particularly extensive interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary (cross-cutting) approaches. The usual channels for the exchange of scientific information and policy coordination are challenged by the presence of a multiplicity of actors at the local, national and international levels, with competing perspectives and agenda interests stemming from their respective fields, making convergence of effort and multidisciplinary coordination difficult. Furthermore, since populations in drylands are not concentrated and are remote from national and global markets and centres of decision-making, the institutional context and arrangements for internationally assisted projects may become dysfunctional⁶ (see figure 2).

⁶ James F. Reynolds and others, "Global desertification: building a science for dryland development", *Science*, vol. 316 (2007), p. 847.

Figure 2
Multiplicity of actors in drylands



11. To pursue synergy in actions addressing the degradation of drylands, frameworks such as the national action programme (NAP) mechanisms stipulated within the UNCCD process have been advanced, as well as many other initiatives such as the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative, UN-Water, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) land degradation focal area strategy, the advocacy for national drought policies (by the World Meteorological Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the UNCCD and others) and regional and national initiatives supported by the European Union (EU), multilateral banks and bilateral aid agencies.

12. However, there are still fundamental communication asymmetries and interlinking gaps among the different actors: local communities, usually in remote, isolated affected areas; focal points within multiple agencies of national governments and their liaison with numerous international environmental agreements; programmes and organizations of the United Nations system; and other organizations which are engaged in promoting or supporting actions within the context of drylands or interrelated cross-cutting issues.

A vivid example of the difficulty in coordination is reported by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) with respect to the Haiti Regeneration Initiative, which, inter alia, finds that one of the main reasons for the lack of effectiveness of international assistance and national initiatives in the field of natural resource management projects in that country is poor coordination between international actors and the government, and among government departments themselves.

UNEP, "Haiti Regeneration Initiative: Study of Lessons Learned in Managing Environmental Projects in Haiti", UNEP working paper (March 2009).

13. The United Nations General Assembly declared the period from January 2010 to December 2020 the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification to promote action that will protect drylands. The Decade is an opportunity to make critical changes to secure and develop the long-term ability of drylands to provide value for humanity's well-being.

14. The existing inter-agency coordination frameworks at both the global and the country level, including specific initiatives, provide a platform for collaboration that harnesses energy and resources from the United Nations system for the assessment of drylands issues and for the design and implementation of their sustainable development, protection and rehabilitation, within a broader governance and multi-issue context.

15. The United Nations framework of the Global Drylands Report provides an integrating platform for varied agendas and cross-cutting issues that impinge on drylands, namely, climate change, loss of biodiversity, food security, energy and water. However, there is still a flow gap between international action and local responses, as indicated in paragraph 12 above. Actions need to be reconciled and synchronized with national governments, regional organizations, bilateral aid agencies, local communities, non-governmental and civil society organizations, and the private sector at various levels, in order to enhance coordination efforts that yield the concrete outcomes needed to attain a land degradation neutral world. The most successful SLM and rehabilitation efforts in drylands (e.g. Gaviotas, Niger, Loess Plateau), have depended on clear governance and cooperation approaches: that is, strong leadership and participation by the community, either to galvanize broader external support when the initiative is endogenous (Gaviotas) or to make the project possible when the drivers are external (Loess Plateau).

16. It is within this international framework that this concept note proposes that a concrete action plan to implement the recommendations of the Global Drylands Report should include the establishment of a platform focusing on STADs, around which concrete measurable actions can be set up for SLM and land rehabilitation initiatives.

17. The platform which is proposed to be established should correlate all relevant actors at the local, national, regional and international levels and describe the interlinkages among the different levels and groups of stakeholders (intergovernmental, governmental, civil society and private sector) with respect to selected STADs.

18. This platform would consolidate the following: (1) overall global inter-agency collaborative mechanisms such as the EMG; (2) the operationalization of this inter-agency collaboration on land issues at the country level, implemented through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework; (3) the UNCCD legal mandate to address dryland areas; and (4) specific initiatives such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-UNEP Poverty-Environment Initiative and the UNDP Integrated Drylands Development Programme. The consolidation would be carried out by focusing on specific SLM and rehabilitation work within STADs that would be selected within the UNCCD process by an ad hoc steering group of field experts, in support of the IMG on Land and concerned governments. The selection of these STADs would aim at scaling up and mainstreaming successful tangible and measurable initiatives for drylands SLM and rehabilitation, in favourable and geographically and ecologically representative areas.

III. A platform for coordinated action towards sustainable development and rehabilitation of drylands

19. This concept note proposes the development of a platform that focuses on STADs and that would enable meshing the different international, national and local machineries required to attain measurable and comparable concrete results – a platform that brings

together scientific and traditional knowledge, civil society organizations, the private sector and local people around a precise action focus. The public and private sectors could be attracted to invest in a programme of this nature, which is measurable and is focused on specific timetables and outcomes.

20. The platform would serve as a dynamic instrument to identify strategic points of entry and to incorporate the different elements that lead to a successful implementation and the most effective harnessing of institutional resources. It would also help to create the basis for the development of the initiation plan and the strategic scheduling of scalable public and private investments and the political will necessary to set the initiatives for the STADs in motion.

21. The focusing enabled by the platform would allow for the identification of representative areas to develop or strengthen measurable SLM or ecosystem rehabilitation practices within a fixed period of time, creating a momentum of progress that focuses on the success of SLM and its social and economic benefits, changing the narrative and attracting investments looking for concrete results.

22. The platform would bring together comprehensive linkages and flows between different intertwined and parallel drylands initiatives at the international, regional, national and local levels spearheaded and/or supported by: the United Nations system, the GEF, the Bonn Challenge, EU programmatic actions of the Environment Directorate-General and the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (among other initiatives the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST)), TerrAfrica, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies, the World Bank and regional banks, government ministries, local communities, civil society organizations and the private sector. Scientific support of the official programmes and initiatives could include, for example, the 8th EU Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development and similar actions from the United States of America, China, Brazil, Qatar and others. It is also envisaged that EMG members such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization could be engaged in the scientific inputs for policy development of monitoring and assessment.⁷ The coordinated action platform would define appropriate switching instruments, entry points and measurable progress indicators drawn from ongoing processes (see figure 3).

⁷ In 2012 several international events were organized, focusing on the dryland areas, such as the Sede Boqer (Israel) and the Global Soil Week (Germany). At these events the issue of how to make operational options for land degradation was addressed. See the respective websites: <http://uncsd.iisd.org/events/fourth-international-conference-on-drylands-deserts-and-desertification-implementing-rio20-for-drylands-and-desertification/> and <http://www.globalsoilweek.org/registration/venue/>.

Figure 3
Proposed coordinated action platform on drylands



IV. A process to select successful sustainable land management and rehabilitation initiatives

23. The Rio+20 summit called for the development and adoption of scientifically based indicators to assess the extent of land degradation and drought and the success of the implementation of SLM and rehabilitation programmes. Although there have been efforts to bring together best practices, as a resource to export success stories, this process needs to be strengthened with a focused effort combining local leadership in the setting up of targets, accompanied by international facilitators and benefiting from the experience of the achievers of earlier success. What is to be proposed, based on the Global Drylands Report, is a focused platform that engages all of these elements and sets in motion an effective (attainable) and measurable action programme.

24. An important element in setting up this platform could be the recently approved (29 February 2012) European Concerted Research Action designated as COST Action ES1104, which sets up a Drylands and Desert Restoration Hub which focuses on a hands-on practical approach to arid land rehabilitation with a special emphasis on engaging and involving local experts (practitioners) who possess local and traditional experience and knowledge and providing users with access to existing knowledge.⁸

25. There are numerous examples of successful in-situ and ecosystem-based drylands management and rehabilitation in various regions of the world, including the Loess Plateau in China, Gaviotas in Colombia and the Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration of Niger and Burkina Faso.

26. These best practice initiatives show synergy between multiple actors and sectors in the implementation of SLM and rehabilitation programmes, and provide an example of a focused platform based on governance and local empowerment, for the successful development of drylands sustainable development projects. They are rooted firmly in:

⁸ See <<http://desertrestorationhub.com/about/memorandum-of-understanding-mou/>>.

- (a) The full participation of and assumption of the leadership role by the local community;
- (b) A combination of traditional approaches with innovative scientific knowledge;
- (c) Economic and social returns in terms of improved livelihoods and income.

27. The conceptual strategy being proposed for the concrete action plan to implement the Global Drylands Report recommendations would identify SLM and rehabilitation dryland areas initiatives that could be replicated. This identification would be based on:

- (a) A selection of the most successful SLM and rehabilitation initiatives within representative geographical regions and biotopes;
- (b) The determination of the underlying factors that enabled their accomplishment;
- (c) The determination of their social, environmental and economic impact;
- (d) Their cost and sources of financing;
- (e) A mapping of the actors and social agents participating in their implementation at all levels;
- (f) An assessment of the exportability of their approaches to similar areas.

V. Identification of specific target areas in drylands

28. The platform would facilitate the identification of STADs to implement measurable and concrete SLM and land rehabilitation projects in drylands by 2018, in localities with similar characteristics to those identified in existing successful initiatives. The following elements within the STADs to be identified would be analysed: (a) linkages between key stakeholders; (b) strategic tipping points and feedback mechanisms; (c) integration of already agreed indicators of progress and milestones; and (d) coordination among the three Rio Conventions on the common issues pertaining to dryland areas. For the development of the platform, the action plan would draw guidance from the ongoing work of the ad hoc Advisory Group of Technical Experts (AGTE) created by decision 19/COP.10.⁹

29. The selection of a fixed number of STADs would allow quantifiable progress towards achieving the land degradation neutrality goals to be assessed, help to focus on areas which are most critical and which could more feasibly be managed or restored, allow for timely harnessing of resources and facilitate investments and participation from all stakeholders, particularly the private sector (see figure 4).

⁹ According to decision 19/COP.10, the tasks of AGTE are, among others: "...Develop a mechanism or framework that encourages country Parties to identify nationally and locally relevant impact indicators and integrate these in their contribution to the global impact assessment effort."

Figure 4
Interaction between stakeholders and specific target areas in drylands within the proposed platform

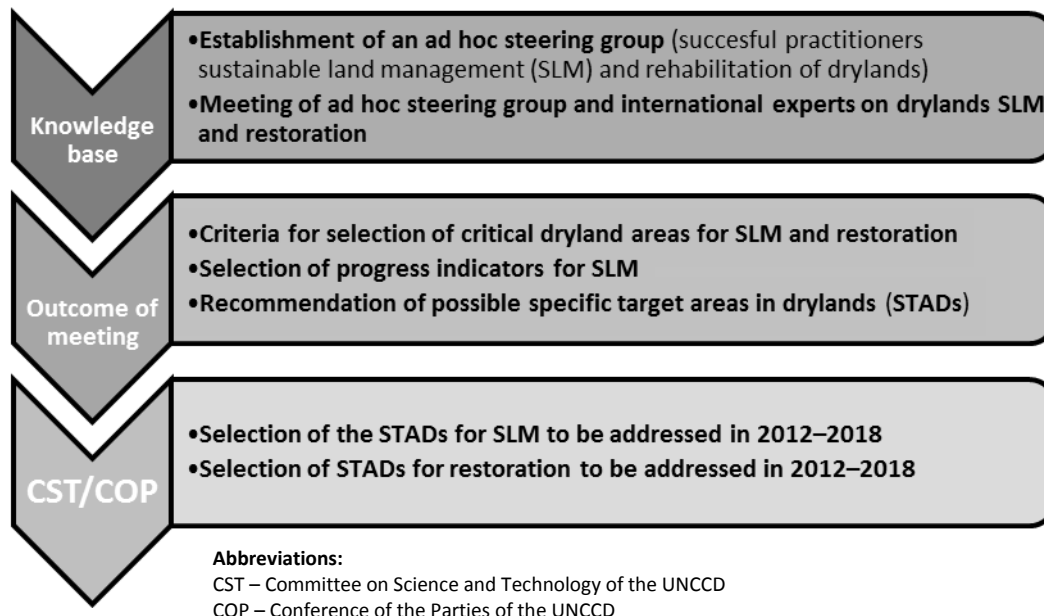


30. A STAD strategic approach, in setting achievable and verifiable targets, would establish criteria for the selection of the STADs, enabling the securing of necessary investments for their implementation.

VI. A road map for the implementation of the action plan

31. The adoption of the central strategy presented in this concept note would be the first step in developing an action plan for coordinated action in the drylands in 2012–2018 that concretizes the implementation and effective coordination of work by means of a focused programme of selected STADs. The action plan for 2012–2018 would include a multi-stakeholder platform concept and a STAD strategic approach to arrive at neutral land degradation and increased sustainable development of dryland areas in localities with similar characteristics to present successful initiatives. This action plan would be developed by the IMG on Land and presented to the different consultative bodies of the UNCCD and to the COP at its eleventh session for its adoption (see figure 5).

Figure 5
The road map for the Global Drylands Report action plan



32. Establishment, with the facilitation of the UNCCD secretariat, of an ad hoc steering group of successful SLM and rehabilitation of drylands practitioners, as a provisional resource for international coordination. The ad hoc steering group should identify strategic and operational approaches to SLM and rehabilitation in drylands which are transferable to the selected STADs.

33. A first meeting of this ad hoc steering group, together with key international actors in the drylands agenda, could be arranged in order to:

- (a) Propose indicator subsets, selected from existing and agreed indicators by the Committee on Science and Technology or the GEF Scientific and Advisory Panel for progress in SLM, and using the NAP alignment process as a policy tool at the national level;
- (b) Recommend criteria for the selection of critical areas to develop monitored SLM programmes;
- (c) Propose a list of STADs for SLM;
- (d) Recommend criteria for the selection of critical areas for land rehabilitation based on short-term feasibility, measurement of progress and similitude of circumstances with successful ecosystem/land rehabilitation projects;
- (e) Propose a list of STADs for rehabilitation.

VII. Outline of the action plan

34. The proposed action plan intends to provide, through the United Nations system, a functional concrete framework to implement multi-stakeholder cooperation in the development of SLM and rehabilitation initiatives in drylands. The action plan would

propose achievable and measurable STADs and galvanize and effectively harness science, policy, national development plans, community objectives, traditional know-how and leadership, and public–private investments in drylands sustainable development.

35. Focused and measurable STADs would help to interlink effectively international, national and local actors around national development plans and interconnected issues of dryland degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss, food security and poverty.

36. The table below outlines the proposed action plan.

Outline of the proposed action plan

| <i>Actions</i> | <i>Title</i> | <i>Implementer</i> |
|-----------------|--|--|
| Step I | Assessing coordination challenges and opportunities | Issue Management Group (IMG) on Land/UNCCD |
| Activity | Charting of existing/potential initiatives by the United Nations system and other international/national stakeholders and their relationship to most successful sustainable land management (SLM) and rehabilitation initiatives | |
| Step II | Identification of most effective elements for coordinated action within these successful initiatives | IMG on Land/ UNCCD |
| Activity | Assessment of cooperation frameworks for development of most successful initiatives and identification of most effective platforms | |
| Step III | Development/strengthening of the platform for drylands action linking international/national/local levels in both public- and private-sector contexts | IMG on Land/ UNCCD ad hoc steering group |
| Activity | Based on existing best models design a template(s) for utilization in the coordination of the specific target areas in drylands (STADs) | |
| Step IV | Establishment of an ad hoc steering group composed of successful practitioners of SLM and rehabilitation | IMG on Land/ UNCCD ad hoc steering group |
| Activity | Development of criteria to identify potential critical dryland areas where existing approaches can be exported and recommendation of STADs for measurable SLM and rehabilitation initiatives to focus on the next decade | |
| Step V | Assessment of investment envelopes required for the development of these initiatives and potential sources of financing and support | IMG on Land/ UNCCD |
| Activity | Identification of existing guidelines and mechanisms to estimate investment envelopes and identify potential sources and investors | |
| Step VI | Selection of STADs | The Conference of the Parties/UNCCD |
| Activity | Selection of STADs for the next cycle and evaluation of prior cycles | |