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The UNCCD reporting and review process in view of the post-2015 development agenda

Improving the procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties

The iterative process relating to the assessment of implementation, including performance and progress indicators, methodology and reporting procedures

Note by the secretariat


Summary

The present document provides a preliminary analysis of the feedback that reporting entities have provided as part of the 2014 reporting exercise on performance indicators as the basis for the iterative process requested by the Conference of the Parties (COP) in decision 16/COP.11. The document also addresses information provided on various aspects of the reporting process from the last reporting exercise, such as financing, human resources, knowledge, and coordination at various levels.

Given the proposed reshaping of the reporting and review process as set out in document ICCD/CRIC(14)/10, it is to be noted that the recommendations contained in the present document would need to be considered once a decision is taken on the additional procedures and the institutional mechanisms to assist the COP in regularly reviewing the implementation of the Convention. In particular, the recommendations relating to performance indicators may need to be adjusted to the new reporting requirements and procedures to be adopted at the twelfth session of the COP.

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I. Introduction

1. The iterative process was established by decision 13/COP.9 with a view to conducting a periodical review and refinement of the agreed set of performance and impact indicators¹. Since the first reporting exercise under the performance review and assessment of implementation system (PRAIS), the reporting templates have included a specific section whereby Parties and other reporting entities can provide feedback on how to improve methodology and reporting procedures. The present document has been prepared by the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) on the basis of: (a) information contained in the 2014 reports; (b) the recommendations made by Parties at the thirteenth session of the Committee for the Review of Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 13); and (c) the experience acquired by the Convention's institutions during the last three reporting cycles.

2. Taking into consideration the proposed reshaping of the reporting and review process as set out in document ICCD/CRIC(14)/10, it is to be noted that the recommendations contained in the present document would need to be considered once a decision is taken on the additional procedures and the institutional mechanisms to assist the COP in regularly reviewing the implementation of the Convention. In particular, should the Parties decide to discontinue performance reporting, the recommendations relating to performance indicators in this document may need to be adjusted to the new reporting requirements and procedures to be adopted at the twelfth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 12).

3. Recommendations emerging from this document should therefore be considered after an agreement is reached on the recommendations contained in document ICCD/CRIC(14)/10, in order to ensure a coherent approach to reporting in view of the post-2015 development agenda.

II. Refinement of the set of progress indicators relating to the strategic objectives and associated methodologies

4. Progress indicators relating to strategic objectives 1 to 4 of the Strategy have been reported on once and the information submitted by Parties on this matter was reviewed by the eleventh session of the Committee (CRIC 11) in 2013.

5. Progress indicators for strategic objectives 1, 2, and 3 have been continuously refined in accordance with the advice and guidance of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST). At its eleventh session, the COP adopted a monitoring and evaluation approach that consists of: (a) a minimum of six "progress indicators"; (b) a conceptual framework that allows the integration of indicators; and (c) indicators sourcing and management mechanisms at the national/local level.

6. COP 11 also decided that reporting is required only for those indicators for which standardized global datasets that can be disaggregated to the subnational level exist; it also requested the secretariat to provide affected country Parties with national estimates of each

¹ Decision 13/COP.9 on improving the procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and format of reports to be submitted to the COP, whereby the secretariat and the Global Mechanism were requested to use an iterative process to develop proposals for consideration by future sessions of the COP, commencing with the tenth and eleventh sessions, in order to refine the set of performance and impact indicators and associated methodologies.

indicator and urged affected country Parties to subsequently verify or replace these national estimates using data sourced/computed nationally/locally.

7. In response to this request, the secretariat prepared document ICCD/COP(12)/CST/3-ICCD/CRIC(14)/7 for consideration by the CST and CRIC, focussing, *inter alia*, on the availability of global data sets for use and validation by Parties through the UNCCD reporting. The aforementioned document specifies how this could be achieved, including recommendations for consideration by COP 12.

8. Parties at CRIC 13 recommended that the GM investigate the potential for collecting data on strategic objective 4, operational objective 5 and the Unified Financial Annex in the same way it was requested for strategic objectives 1, 2, and 3, i.e. through global data sets that could be made available to Parties for validation purposes. Parties at COP 11 also requested that the GM reduce the number of indicators relating to the monitoring of financial flows. Document ICCD/CRIC(14)/8 discusses in detail the potential to implement this recommendation along with recommendations for future reporting on strategic objective 4.

9. It is to be noted that specific recommendations on progress indicators are contained in documents ICCD/COP(12)/CST/3-ICCD/CRIC(14)/7 and ICCD/CRIC(14)/8, respectively.

10. At its last intersessional meeting (Bonn, Germany, 11–12 June 2015), the Bureau of the CRIC recommended that joint consultations be facilitated on this matter through meetings between the contact groups of the two respective subsidiary bodies at COP 12.

11. Similarly, and in the spirit of facilitating closer cooperation between the two subsidiary bodies as requested by the COP, the Bureau of the CRIC also decided that only one decision should be issued at COP 12 on future reporting under the Convention, based on the recommendations contained in the present document as well as those of document ICCD/COP(12)/CST/3-ICCD/CRIC(14)/7, document ICCD/CRIC(14)/8 and document ICCD/CRIC(14)/10, to be drafted in joint consultations of the CRIC and the CST as relevant and according to their respective mandates.

III. Refinement of the set of performance indicators and associated methodologies

12. Performance indicators have been refined twice during the life span of The Strategy, after the ninth and eleventh sessions of CRIC respectively (CRIC 9 and CRIC 11). The second review resulted in a drastic simplification of the reporting template as well as technological improvements that rendered the reporting portal more user-friendly through an off-line function of the template to facilitate sharing and filling in the form.

13. The results of the simplification of the reporting requirements undertaken after CRIC 11 (2013) included:

(a) A reduced number of performance indicators: in accordance with the feedback provided by Parties on e-smart criteria,² some performance indicators were discarded. For other indicators, the responsibility for compiling data of information provided by Parties was transferred to the secretariat or the GM. As a result of this process, the number of performance indicators was reduced from 14 to 11 for affected country Parties, and from 10 to 8 for developed country Parties;

(b) A reduced quantity of information required per indicator. Reporting templates for country Parties and other reporting entities were revisited according to the completeness of reports submitted in the last two reporting cycles, the analysis of the information and its actual use according to the analytical framework, and its utility in the review process at CRIC 9 and CRIC 11. The number of required fields was thus reduced by 40 per cent in the affected country Parties template, and by 65 per cent in the developed country Parties template.

14. During the 2014 reporting process, another evaluation of the e-SMART criteria was conducted by Parties and included in the national reports. In this evaluation, it transpires that affected country Parties still reported difficulties in providing information to the secretariat (see table 1 below). Affected country Parties experienced the most difficulties in terms of the measurability of performance indicators, with the least problematic aspect being their relevance, and even in this cycle, the economic criteria (see table 1 below).

15. When comparing the two e-SMART evaluations undertaken in 2013 and 2015, it can be concluded that despite all the improvements made on the templates and reporting process and all the training delivered, affected country Parties are still experiencing difficulties in reporting on performance indicators CONS-O-1, CONS-O-4 and CONS-O-18. Fewer problems were reported on CONS-O-5 and CONS-O-10, relating to the alignment, formulation and implementation of action programmes (see table 1 below).

Table 1
Number of affected country Parties that experienced difficulties with reporting on performance indicators

	<i>Economic</i>	<i>Specific</i>	<i>Measurable</i>	<i>Achievable</i>	<i>Relevant</i>	<i>Time-bound</i>	<i>Affected country Parties</i>
CONS-O-1	25	32	87	42	22	29	87
CONS-O-3	16	37	34	23	15	22	69
CONS-O-4	22	39	61	24	18	23	96
CONS-O-5	16	11	10	11	10	18	48
CONS-O-7	12	20	27	28	10	17	61
CONS-O-8	18	27	21	19	13	13	65
CONS-O-10	10	4	14	10	10	10	37

² E-smart is a criteria applied for the selection of UNCCD performance indicators and impact indicators for strategic objective 4. 'e-SMART' stands for economic – Specific – Measurable – Achievable – Relevant – Time bound. Economic: The data and information required for the indicator are available at a reasonable cost. The cost is affordable and worthwhile. Specific: The indicator clearly and directly relates to the outcome. It is described without ambiguities. Parties have a common understanding of the indicator. Measurable: The indicator is preferably quantifiable and objectively verifiable. Parties have a common understanding of the ways of measuring the indicator. Achievable: The required data and information can actually be collected. Relevant: The indicator must provide information which is relevant to the process and its stakeholders. Time-bound: The indicator is time-referenced, and is thus able to reflect changes. It can be reported at the requested time.

	<i>Economic</i>	<i>Specific</i>	<i>Measurable</i>	<i>Achievable</i>	<i>Relevant</i>	<i>Time-bound</i>	<i>Affected country Parties</i>
CONS-O-13	17	23	31	21	10	15	66
CONS-O-14	24	19	19	20	14	16	58
CONS-O-16	24	21	23	12	16	17	60
CONS-O-18	35	43	53	31	17	18	92
<i>Affected country Parties</i>	63	92	114	81	50	67	***

16. Developed country Parties had eight performance indicators to report on and often experienced problems with their measurability. CONS-O-1, CONS-O-3 and CONS-O-7 were the most problematic. CONS-O-8 was the least problematic performance indicator (see table 2 below).

Table 2

Number of Developed country Parties that experienced difficulties with reporting on performance indicators

	<i>Economic</i>	<i>Specific</i>	<i>Measurable</i>	<i>Achievable</i>	<i>Relevant</i>	<i>Time-bound</i>	<i>Developed country Parties</i>
CONS-O-1	3	3	12	3	2	2	16
CONS-O-3	2	2	4	1	1	1	9
CONS-O-4	2	1	4	2	1	2	8
CONS-O-6	1	3	0	1	1	1	8
CONS-O-7	3	1	2	1	3	2	9
CONS-O-8	3	1	2	1	1	1	6
CONS-O-13	2	2	1	2	0	1	6
CONS-O-14	1	2	2	2	2	1	8
<i>Developed country Parties</i>	4	8	12	7	6	6	***

17. Unlike progress indicators, information on performance indicators relating to operational objectives is so specific that no relevant global datasets are available; hence, default data derived from global data sources cannot be made available for review and validation by country Parties in order to relieve them of this reporting burden.

IV. Refinement of the Unified Financial Annex and associated methodologies

18. During CRIC 13, Parties noted the need for further simplification of reporting on financial flows and the Unified Financial Annex to avoid potential duplication in the reporting from developed country Parties, affected country Parties and multilateral agencies. The GM was requested to explore the options of providing the country with default data on financial flows for their verification.

19. The reporting on financial flows underwent significant simplification and enhancements through the iterative process cycles. In accordance with decision 16/COP.11, the reporting format on financial flows for the 2014 reporting process was significantly simplified and enhanced, with the merger of the previously-used Standard Financial Annex and Project and Programme Sheet into a Unified Financial Annex (UFA). The number of the required fields was thus reduced by 70 per cent.

20. The significant substantive and structural changes introduced in the 2014 reporting templates has had inevitable implications on data analysis, including the revision of the analytical frameworks, data export and interfacing between different databases, and discontinuity between new and historical datasets. Further substantive and structural changes in the UFA would not only have additional technical and financial implications, but also further impair the ability to make trend analyses.

21. On the other hand, certain improvements can be made to the electronic template for UFA data entry. For example, to allow efficient disaggregation of the financial commitments between internal and external funding sources, the reporting system could be equipped with pre-compiled drop-down lists, and further data mining functionalities could be introduced to facilitate comparison and visualization of current and historical datasets. These improvements would be in line with the recommendations by the CRIC at its 13th session.

22. By decision 14/COP.11 the GM was also requested to explore the possibility of capturing the financial flows and investments made by innovative funding sources, such as foundations, businesses, the financial industries and civil society organizations, given the difficulties encountered by reporting entities, and present the proposal at the COP at its twelfth session.

23. However, to date, there are no existing global reference databases that would allow the capture of all financial flows, including domestic flows by the affected country Parties and private flows. The most authoritative source of information on relevant bilateral aid data is the Creditor Reporting System (CRS) and its subset database on desertification-related Official Development Assistance (ODA), maintained by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD. However, the following differences should be noted:

(a) Donors: not all (17 out of 45) developed country Parties to the UNCCD are DAC members, and hence are not included in the CRS;

(b) Recipients: not all (29 out of 168) affected country Parties to the UNCCD are on the list of DAC ODA recipients; 6 DAC ODA recipients are not Parties to the UNCCD;

(c) Reporting cycles: the UNCCD and DAC reporting cycles are not synchronized. While UNCCD reports cover a biennium, the CRS contains annualized data. More importantly, the data for last year will be released by the DAC with an approximate one year delay as a result of a rigorous data integrity check and verification with the sources (e.g. final 2014 data will be published in December 2015).

24. Use of the OECD ODA desertification-related statistics would thus not enable a comprehensive assessment of all bilateral flows from developed to affected country Parties due to the above-mentioned differences. Furthermore, as the UNCCD and OECD reporting cycles are not synchronized, the review of financial flows would be based on the first year of the biennium only. However, in order to harness all possible synergies between the two systems, it would be advisable to consider using relevant data extracted from the CRS for the purpose of facilitating reporting to the UNCCD on bilateral aid flows by developed country Parties that are also DAC members. This would be in line with the provisions of decision 14/COP.11.

V. Adjustment of reporting procedures, including financial support provided to reporting

25. As part of the last reporting exercise, affected and developed country Parties were requested to provide feedback on several process-related issues including, *inter alia*,

financial resources used to prepare reports, the number of human resources engaged, whether or not sufficient knowledge was available to compile the data, coordination and validation of information with and by stakeholders in the country, and participation and consultation. Such information was submitted by 157 affected and 31 developed country Parties, however not all questions were responded to by all Parties.

A. Financing

26. Approximately USD 7.6 million was invested in the 2014 reporting exercise by Parties.³ On average, each Party invested USD 45,709 for the national report which, by and large, matches the amount reported on during the previous reporting exercise.⁴ According to this trend, it can be concluded that financial requirements for reporting on performance indicators and financial flows amount to USD 50,000 per report on average. Interestingly, this corresponds to the amount made available by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for enabling activities – including reporting and action programme alignment – under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) umbrella projects.

27. Despite the support provided by the GEF for reporting, a large number of affected country Parties still claim to have insufficient funding for proper monitoring and reporting. Sixty three per cent of affected eligible country Parties reported that they could not count on sufficient financial resources, compared with 33 per cent that indicated no lack of funding for this activity (4 per cent did not respond). At subregional level, two out of three subregional institutions that reported in 2014 informed the secretariat that they had had sufficient financial resources to meet their reporting obligations.

28. Specific feedback received from Parties highlighted inadequate financial resources and budgetary support as one of the reasons explaining the lack of a proper national monitoring system. Others emphasized the need for technology transfer, especially for the technological support needed for the establishment of such monitoring systems.

29. Beyond the financial support to Parties, the high reporting rate (95 per cent of reports received from affected country Parties) can certainly be attributed to the technical assistance rendered by the UNEP through the Global Support Programme (GSP) funded by the GEF. The Convention's institutions also contributed to this programme⁵. Deliberations at CRIC 13 highlighted the need for a successor programme to enable Parties to shoulder the additional responsibility to report on progress indicators.

B. Human resources

30. According the information provided in the last reporting round, an average of 25 persons per country were involved in the preparation of national reports of affected country Parties, and 9 persons in those of developed country Parties.

31. Some Parties reported that despite the training conducted and technical assistance made available, there was still lack of human capacity and trained staff, and insufficient

³ The data reported by two countries was considered biased and therefore excluded from the calculations. The Euro rate against USD used in this calculation is 1.13. The number of reporting countries in these reporting process-related issues was 157.

⁴ In the previous reporting, the total amount invested was USD 3.5 million over 71 reports submitted by affected country Parties.

⁵ The Secretariat and the GM provided in-kind contributions of USD 609,640 and USD 372,388, respectively to the Global Support Programme.

technical resources. Considering that the next reporting process will require the compilation of information on progress indicators, further training and capacity building will be crucial in order to maintain the current reporting rate and ensure the reliability of information provided.

C. Knowledge

32. In the last reporting exercise, the vast majority of countries (76 per cent) reported sufficient scientific and technical knowledge for reporting. Some Parties consider it important to make data and information and data sets available, e.g. baseline data on desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD), to ensure more accurate reporting. In addition, many Parties reported specifically on the absence of a well-structured DLDD monitoring system to assist in the continuous monitoring of information. The lack of such systems was explained by insufficient technical equipment and financial resources.

D. Coordination

33. In total, 75 per cent of all Parties⁶ that submitted reports were satisfied with the national level coordination with the relevant ministries to enable comprehensive and coherent reporting during this reporting exercise. This level of coordination remained stable compared to the previous reporting exercise, indicating that coordination at national level and among several institutions is considered important and useful.

34. Some Parties referred to a lack of coordination among the relevant stakeholders and financing institutions, while others found it important to establish a functional institutional structure for coordinating actions relating to DLDD.

E. Participation, consultation and validation meetings

35. The vast majority of affected country Parties (87 per cent) reported having undergone a participatory or consultative approach in the reporting process in order to involve all relevant stakeholders. Most of them convened validation meetings in 2014 as a means to ensure integration of stakeholder views in the reporting process, with a remarkable increase compared to previous reporting exercises. This reveals increasing attention to consultation processes at the national level, as well as a sense of accountability and transparency in the reporting process.

36. It is also worth mentioning that all reports of the subregional organizations were validated by the involved affected country Parties.

F. Capacity development

37. As part of the Global Support Programme, training and technical assistance was provided to Parties on the revised reporting requirements, methodologies and tools, in preparation for the 2014 reporting. The training was initiated by a series of “training of trainers” workshops, followed by seven subregional workshops for the National Focal Points and Reporting Officers from affected country Parties. An additional training

⁶ Two affected country Parties/developed country Parties reported differently in their respective reports and were thus counted twice.

workshop was offered to developed country Parties. Altogether, 262 officials from 142 country Parties took part in the training sessions.

38. In addition to training, technical assistance was delivered to country Parties through a helpdesk service and a number of regional consultants who have been constantly advising countries in the compilation, review and final submission of national reports.

39. Despite the positive impact of the GSP on the quantity and quality of reports submitted in 2014, timelines and, in particular, the deadline for reporting required adjustment on two occasions to allow country Parties to successfully complete the reporting. As this was also the case during the previous reporting cycles, it can be concluded that the time needed by countries (including receiving training, compiling the required information, checking the quality of the information, and validating and submitting the national report) has been underestimated. Parties may wish to consider addressing this matter as part of the streamlining of the reporting and review process proposed in document ICCD/CRIC(14)/10.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

40. **The analysis of the feedback provided by Parties in 2014 suggests that despite the drastic reduction of required fields and performance indicators, reporting on operational objectives still poses challenges to Parties.**

41. **As requested by the COP, reporting requirements on financial flows also underwent significant simplification. In this case, further simplification would have additional technical and financial implications and further impair the ability to make trend analyses, and is therefore not recommended. On the other hand, some improvements could be introduced to the electronic template for financial data entry to allow better data mining, for instance.**

42. **In the absence of global reference datasets to allow capture of all financial flows, including domestic and private sector flows, it only partial statistics on desertification-related bilateral aid flows using the OECD CRS could be compiled. However this would not allow a comprehensive and timely assessment of all bilateral flows from the UNCCD developed country Parties to affected country Parties due to differences in the number of donor and recipient countries and unsynchronized reporting cycles. To date, the Unified Financial Annex remains the most comprehensive source of data on financial flows in support of the implementation of the Convention.**

43. **Capacity development has benefitted the reporting process to a great extent by delivering services through a GSP, funded by the GEF and implemented by UNEP. Close cooperation between the implementing agency and the Conventions institutions has resulted in an unprecedented submission rate of both affected and developed country Party reports. Given the forthcoming reporting focused on progress indicators, future capacity-building efforts will become a key concern in terms of a successful reporting and review process in the next biennium.**

44. **Timelines for deliverables under reporting remain a limiting factor. Parties may wish to consider adjusting the reporting schedule so as to provide sufficient time for the development of sound reporting tools and the compilation of the required information.**

45. **Information received from Parties on human resources involved in reporting, and on available knowledge to handle the reporting obligations, suggests that, in many**

countries, UNCCD reporting is not yet a fully institutionalized process and may remain primarily dependent on ad hoc and/or outside assistance.

46. Taking the above conclusions into account, as well as the conclusions and recommendations contained in documents ICCD/COP(12)/CST/3-ICCD/CRIC(14)/7; ICCD/CRIC(14)/8; and ICCD/CRIC(14)/10, Parties at COP 12 may consider the following recommendations:

(a) Requesting the secretariat, in consultation with the GM where appropriate:

(i) To introduce improvements to the electronic template for the compilation of financial data to allow efficient disaggregation of financial commitments between internal and external funding sources, as well as other data mining functionalities, as appropriate, and to facilitate comparison and visualization of current and historical datasets;

(ii) To use the CRS as a reference database to facilitate reporting on bilateral aid flows by developed country Parties that are members to the OECD DAC, with regard to the first year of the UNCCD reporting cycle;

(iii) To post on the UNCCD website and the PRAIS portal the proposed adjustments to the financial flows reporting, as well as their tools and guidelines, in order to facilitate feedback from Parties;

(b) Inviting Parties to take advantage of official meetings of the Convention in the coming biennium, including sessions of the subsidiary bodies and meetings of the Regional Implementation Annexes when convened, to discuss methodological questions, templates, tools and manuals relating to reporting and to provide feedback to the secretariat and the GM in this regard;

(c) Deferring the next reporting exercise until the methodological approach to reporting has been concluded, and revised reporting tools have been made available to Parties;

(d) Calling upon the GEF to continue providing support to help affected country Parties meet their reporting obligations under the Convention;

(e) Inviting Parties to speed up the process for establishing procedures and methodologies aimed at assisting focal points in continuously monitoring implementation of the Convention.

47. The annex to this document contains an estimate of the financial requirements for the implementation of some of the activities referred to in paragraph 47(a) above, by the secretariat and the Global Mechanism, to be funded through extra budgetary resources.

Annex

Financial implications

The table below indicates the budget requirements for the implementation of the activities according to the recommendations contained in paragraph 47(a) of this document, from extra budgetary resources, as well as a possible source of funding if known. The activities mentioned below will be implemented only if the required funding is secured in time.

Table
Activities, cost estimates and possible source of funding

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Cost (euro)</i>	<i>Possible source of funding</i>
The secretariat and the GM introduce improvements to the electronic template for the compilation of financial data to allow efficient disaggregation of financial commitments between internal and external funding sources, as well as other data mining functionalities, as appropriate, and to facilitate comparison and visualization of current and historical datasets	56 000	EUR 56,000 from the budget of the current GSP project. Further improvements will be implemented only if a successor GSP is funded by the GEF, or other voluntary contributions are made available
The GM uses the OECD/DAC Creditor Reporting System as a reference database to facilitate reporting on bilateral aid flows by developed country Parties that are members to the OECD/DAC, with regard to the first year of the UNCCD reporting cycle	160 000	This activity will be implemented only if a successor GSP is funded by the GEF, or other voluntary contributions are made available
Total extra budgetary resources	216	