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Improving the procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and format of reports to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties - consideration of draft reporting guidelines for reporting entities referred to in decision 8/COP.8

Improving the procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and format of reports to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties: consideration of draft reporting guidelines as referred to in decision 8/COP.8

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present document was prepared in response to decisions 3/COP.8 and 8/COP.8, which requested the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) to prepare reporting guidelines for all entities submitting reports on the implementation of the Convention and of the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (The Strategy) to the Conference of the Parties (COP), or otherwise providing information to the COP in this respect. It introduces all the relevant elements of the proposed reporting guidelines as well as the documents for the eighth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) in which these elements are further elaborated. It is based on documentation provided to the seventh session of the CRIC and on the recommendations of the CRIC to the COP on this matter.

At its eighth session, the CRIC may wish to review the structure and content of the proposed reporting guidelines and to recommend their adoption to the COP. Parties may also wish to refer to document ICCD/CRIC(8)/INF.2, which provides a general overview of how the reporting tools may look.

Finally, and taking into consideration the recommencement of reporting in 2010, the UNCCD secretariat should be entrusted by the COP with the preparation of the reporting tools necessary to assist reporting entities in writing reports.

CONTENTS

	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. INTRODUCTION	1-8	3
II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION	9-12	5
III. ELEMENTS OF THE REPORTING GUIDELINES	13-24	5
A. Measuring implementation of The Strategy using performance indicators.....	16-19	6
B. Measuring implementation of the Convention using impact indicators.....	20	7
C. Financial annex and programme and project sheet.....	21-22	7
D. Best practices	23	8
E. Lessons learned, including on the reporting process	24	8
IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	25	8

I. Introduction

1. Decision 8/COP.8 requested the Executive Secretary, taking into account the views of the Global Mechanism (GM), to develop draft reporting guidelines before the seventh session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 7), seeking external support as appropriate, for the following entities that are requested to report regularly to the Conference of the Parties (COP), or otherwise provide information, on support to the implementation of the Convention:

- (a) affected country Parties, including country profile;
- (b) developed country Parties;
- (c) United Nations agencies and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and the relevant international financial institutions and mechanisms;
- (d) the Global Environment Facility (GEF), in accordance with the memorandum of understanding between the COP and the GEF;
- (e) the secretariat;
- (f) the GM.

2. In the same decision, the COP also requested the Executive Secretary, taking into account the views of the GM, to advise on and/or establish detailed draft reporting guidelines, formats and help guides, as necessary, for:

- (a) reports on the implementation of subregional action programmes;
- (b) reports on the implementation of regional action programmes.

3. The COP further requested that the reporting guidelines should be in line with the 10- year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) (The Strategy, decision 3/COP.8) and should take into consideration the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG).¹

4. Finally, the COP requested the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) to consult with the other secretariats of the Joint Liaison Group and to advise on ways to make reporting more efficient, taking into account the reporting procedures and obligations under each Rio convention.

5. Documents ICCD/CRIC(7)/3 and Add.1 to Add.7 were prepared by the UNCCD secretariat for the CRIC at its seventh session in Istanbul, Turkey, in November 2008 in response to decision 8/COP.8. They contained an overview of 20 reporting principles established on the basis of a systematic review of: relevant deliberations of the COP; reports, conclusions

¹ ICCD/CRIC(5)/9 (preliminary report) and ICCD/CRIC(6)/6 (final report).

and recommendations made by its subsidiary bodies and by the AHWG; and the relevant provisions of The Strategy, and taking into account the views of the GM, the guidance received by the Bureau of the CRIC and the advice provided by the inter-agency task force (IATF) established for this purpose.² The reports were taken up at CRIC 7, and Parties provided substantive feedback and guidance, as reflected in the conclusions of the session and the recommendations made by CRIC 7 to the ninth session of the COP.³

6. The present document and its addenda (ICCD/CRIC(8)/5/Add.1 to Add.7) are submitted to the CRIC at its eighth session (CRIC 8) for consideration. These documents were prepared by the UNCCD secretariat in conformity with the conclusions and recommendations of CRIC 7 and taking into account the views of the GM, the guidance received by the Bureau of the CRIC at its meeting on 27–28 May 2009, the input received at the joint meeting of the CRIC and the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) Bureaux on 26 May 2009 and the advice provided by the members of the IATF. The Parties belonging to regional implementation annexes will also have had the opportunity to discuss these documents before the COP at their preparatory meetings in June–July 2009.

7. Since important substantive questions on reporting elements, such as details on performance indicators, best practices, and so on, are still to be deliberated on by Parties, the UNCCD secretariat opted to produce those substantive elements and provide opportunities for Parties to steer the reporting process from the outset, by defining the modalities by which they need to report to the COP. It is to be noted that this approach was adopted in full recognition of the fact that the transparency and coherence of a new reporting system that differs greatly from that applied in the past need to be maintained and that Parties have an opportunity to make informed decisions on reporting.

8. In the light of decision 8/COP.8 and in order to assist the future users of the reporting guidelines to visualize what future reporting would entail, an informal document (ICCD/CRIC(8)/INF.2) has been prepared. This document is not meant to be exhaustive, or to replace the final product to be delivered after the COP has decided on the substantive matters to be reported on. Its sole purpose is to assist reporting entities in visualizing the reporting process from the angle of a user.

² Following decision 8/COP.8, the IATF was established to assist the UNCCD secretariat in reviewing the reporting principles and guidelines. The expert opinions of the IATF members helped to enhance the quality of UNCCD reporting and to ensure that consistency and linkages with other relevant international environmental reporting/monitoring obligations and initiatives were achieved. The IATF is comprised of representatives of the following organizations: the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) secretariat, the European Environment Agency (EEA), the GEF secretariat, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations University – International Network on Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH) and the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT). A representative of the CST is also a member of the task force. The task force met twice: once in 2008 and once in 2009.

³ Contained in ICCD/CRIC(7)/5.

II. Background Information

9. The obligation of the Parties to communicate to the COP for consideration at its ordinary sessions, through the secretariat, reports on the measures that they have taken for the implementation of the Convention was established in article 26 of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD, the Convention). The COP, in its decision 11/COP.1, determined the timetable for submission and the format of such reports. The same decision also invited relevant organs, funds and programmes of the United Nations as well as other IGOs to provide information, as appropriate, on their activities in support of the preparation and implementation of action programmes under Convention.

10. The first guidelines to assist the Parties in the formulation of their reports on the implementation of the Convention were prepared by the UNCCD secretariat for the third session of the COP. They were subsequently revised by the COP at its fourth, fifth and sixth sessions. At COP 7, the Parties, drawing lessons from the three reporting cycles conducted thus far, decided to start a process aimed at helping to improve the procedures for communication of information and the quality and format of reports, and established the AHWG to this end. In its reports to the CRIC and the COP, the AHWG laid the foundation for the development of new reporting tools by calling for the new guidelines to: be user-friendly, consistent, comprehensible and standardized; allow comparison; make assessment of progress easy; be concise but cover all necessary areas; enable a consolidation for subregional, regional and global review; be in line with COP decisions; allow the measurement of progress in the implementation of action programmes and of The Strategy; and allow for the development of synergies with other reporting obligations. The AHWG also stressed that reports to be produced on the basis of these guidelines should concentrate on impacts achieved, and on the use of quantifiable indicators to measure progress against objectives.

11. The adoption of The Strategy enabled this new approach to reporting to come to its full fruition. The Strategy is based on two sets of objectives: four strategic objectives with seven expected impacts, and five operational objectives with 21 related outcomes. These expected impacts and outcomes are to be measured through two sets of indicators. The reporting guidelines are developed on the basis of this approach and should serve as a tool for all the reporting entities submitting reports on the implementation of the Convention and The Strategy, enabling them to prepare reports which are organized in a way that facilitates analysis at all possible levels.

12. This document introduces all elements of the reporting guidelines relevant to the forthcoming reporting process. They are detailed in addenda to this document (ICCD/CRIC(8)/5/Add.1 to Add.7). Document ICCD/CRIC(8)/INF.2 is a proposed sample format for the reporting guidelines and provides further clarification on their use.

III. Elements of the Reporting Guidelines

13. While it is understood that some reporting entities may not be requested to report against all reporting elements, it is proposed that the reporting guidelines should generally have five main sections:

(a) performance review (review of progress against the operational objectives of The Strategy through performance indicators);

(b) assessment of implementation (review of progress against the strategic objectives of The Strategy through impact indicators);

(c) a financial annex and a programme and project sheet capturing information on investment flows relating to operational objective 5 and partially to strategic objective 4;

(d) best practices;

(e) lessons learned, including on the reporting process itself.

14. These five main sections, and their content, would be adjusted to meet the needs and requirements of each individual reporting entity.

15. During CRIC 7, Parties made clear that enhancing reporting requirements and procedures would need to go hand in hand with international support provided for capacity building on monitoring. The UNCCD secretariat has initiated a process whereby the United Nations Environment Programme/GEF would provide such support starting in 2010 with the performance review, the financial annex and best practices undertaken by all Parties. This capacity-building element, which will enable Parties to adhere to a standardized way of monitoring UNCCD implementation and implementation of The Strategy, is contained in an informal document (ICCD/CRIC(8)/INF.3). Parties may wish to consider the information contained therein and provide comments on the overall direction of capacity building in the context of The Strategy and efforts to cover the observation requirements that overlap with the other Rio processes. Efforts will also be made to include the specific capacity-building needs that emerge from financial reporting in collaboration with the GM.

A. Measuring implementation of The Strategy using performance indicators

16. Performance indicators for the operational objectives of The Strategy were not adopted at the eighth session of the COP. Instead, the COP invited Parties and the regional implementation annexes to develop nationally and regionally relevant indicators for the implementation of The Strategy for consideration at CRIC 7 in the context of the development of reporting guidelines for the Parties. Document ICCD/CRIC(7)/2/Add.7 contains a compilation of the views of Parties on this matter. Parties at CRIC 7 agreed that a limited set of indicators should be established and integrated into a simple and efficient review system for implementation of The Strategy. CRIC 7 considered the options presented by the secretariat and requested the secretariat to harmonize the views of Parties and to prepare a consolidated document for consideration by CRIC 8.

17. Document ICCD/CRIC(8)/5/Add.1 consequently presents a set of 18 consolidated performance indicators according to which the CRIC would review performance based on operational objectives. It also presents the methodological approach adopted for the identification of each indicator. The views of the GM (in particular with regard to operational objectives 1, 2, and 5) and guidance received from the CST Bureau (in particular with regard to operational objective 3) were taken into consideration.

18. CRIC 7, in its report, also asked for harmonization of the various sets of indicators used by The Strategy, with the ultimate goal of having a coherent indicator system across the UNCCD. In particular, it was emphasized that reporting should be coherent with the performance indicators used by the institutions implementing a result-based management (RBM) system, and more specifically by the subsidiary bodies of the COP, the secretariat and the GM. Accordingly, consolidated performance indicators are to reflect the roles of the various stakeholders in the operationalization and implementation of The Strategy. In order to ensure coherence, a draft of document ICCD/CRIC(8)/5/Add.1 was used as a reference for the preparation of the various workplans and work programmes (ICCD/CRIC(8)/2 and Add.1 to Add.4; and ICCD/COP(9)/CST/3/Add.1).

19. The UNCCD secretariat was also requested by CRIC 7 to develop a methodology to guide Parties in the use of performance indicators, and a glossary clarifying the terminology and definitions of indicators in pursuit of a common understanding of the process and of the implementation modalities by all reporting entities. These two requests are dealt with in documents ICCD/CRIC(8)/5/Add.2 and Add.3, respectively.

B. Measuring implementation of the Convention using impact indicators

20. As requested by decision 3/COP.8, the impact indicators for the strategic objectives adopted in The Strategy were refined further by the CST, capitalizing on existing sources of data, to form the baseline data (ICCD/COP(9)/CST/3/Add.2). The same decision also requested the CST to provide advice to the CRIC on how best to measure progress on strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3 (ICCD/CRIC(8)/5/Add.6), providing a minimum set of impact indicators for strategic objectives 1,2, and 3. The Parties at CRIC 7 highlighted the importance of launching intergovernmental exchanges on how to approach the achievement of strategic objective 4, and requested the UNCCD secretariat to initiate action together with the GM on this matter (ICCD/CRIC(8)/5/Add.7).

C. Financial annex and programme and project sheet

21. CRIC 7 recommended that financial reporting should be based on a standard financial reporting format to be agreed by the Parties. In order to achieve coherence in data sets, common financial reporting systems should be used by affected country Parties and their development partners. Emphasis in reports should be put on financial matters and also on an analysis of the impact of the activities undertaken. The format for a common financial annex, which should serve to measure and compare financial flows and resources made available for the implementation of the Convention, is proposed in document ICCD/CRIC(8)/5/Add.4. The reporting principles submitted to CRIC 7 recommended that the tools for analysing the information obtained from financial annexes, that is, the relevant activity codes (RACs), be

updated and that information on the use of Rio Markers is made available to Parties in order to enhance understanding of the reporting process.

22. Similarly, a programme and project sheet, the format of which is also proposed in ICCD/CRIC(8)/5/Add.4, should provide a better overview of all the programmes and projects relevant to the UNCCD, and allow for comparison and systematization with the aim of making investment flows for tackling the effects of desertification/land degradation and drought clearer, and of making it easier to assess their impact at the national, subregional and regional levels.

D. Best practices

23. One of four main functions of the CRIC is to document and disseminate good practices from experience in implementing the Convention, thereby bringing a cross-cutting contribution to all the operational objectives. Document ICCD/CRIC(8)/5/Add.5 provides proposals for the definition and classification of good practices relating to the Convention and its implementation, with particular regard to the strategic and operational objectives of The Strategy and other relevant provisions of the Convention and decisions of the COP (decision 1/COP.5 and 8/COP.4); identification of the providers and end-users of information relating to good practices; identification of the sources of and procedures for receiving information on good practices from country Parties and/or through reports from various reporting entities; identification of procedures for and a methodology to validate good practice; and identification of procedures for and means by which all the above will be disseminated.

E. Lessons learned, including on the reporting process

24. The fifth proposed element of the reporting guidelines is a section on lessons learned. It would allow the reporting entities to address both the success stories on the implementation of the Convention through action programme implementation and those aspects which could be regarded as bottlenecks and constraints, as well as drivers and needs relating to physical, human and financial resources. Special attention should be dedicated to addressing possible problems emanating from the reporting process itself, that is, the provision of information, including collection and storage, and analysis of information pertaining to the review process. The ultimate goals of this analysis are to share experience, draw conclusions and learn lessons, thus improving the knowledge base of the Convention. Details on the proposed format for this section are available in ICCD/CRIC(8)/INF.2.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

25. At its ninth session, the COP may wish to consider taking the following actions:

(a) adopting all elements of the reporting guidelines for all entities mentioned in decision 8/COP.8 and entrusting the UNCCD secretariat with preparing the reporting tools for use by the Parties and by observers, in particular:

- (i) adoption of the format of reporting guidelines with five elements (assessment of implementation through impact indicators relating to strategic objective 4, performance review through performance indicators,

- the financial annex and project and programme sheet, best practices and lessons learned);
- (ii) adoption of harmonized sets of performance indicators, their baselines and targets, and the means to collect them for all the reporting entities;
 - (iii) adoption of a harmonized set of impact indicators as they relate to strategic objective 4, their baselines and the means to collect them;
 - (iv) adoption of a comprehensive system to collect and disseminate best practices;
 - (v) adoption of the financial annex and programme and project sheet as an integral part of measuring investment flows relating to the implementation of the Convention;
 - (vi) adoption of impact indicators as presented to the CRIC by the CST with the aim of revisiting the minimum set of impact indicators at COP 10, and the appropriate methodologies for implementing them at the national, subregional and regional levels.
- (b) providing further guidance to the UNCCD secretariat and other relevant bodies, institutions and organizations on necessary capacity-building measures.

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