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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

Policy options paper on the support required in meeting the obligations of affected country Parties under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Note by the secretariat

Summary

Since the entry into force of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, three important milestones have marked the way for its effective implementation: (a) the adoption of the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (The Strategy) by the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties; (b) the decision of the Fourth Assembly of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), that the GEF would become the financial mechanism of the Convention, and the subsequent amendment of the GEF Instrument to accommodate this new development; and (c) the adoption of the terms of reference of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention and the subsequent establishment of a performance review and assessment of implementation system (PRAIS).

The present document analyses the options available to make the best possible use of the resources made available by the international community, particularly the GEF resources set aside for enabling activities under the land degradation focal area, ensuring a coordinated and coherent approach to action programme implementation and reporting under the Convention.

Parties at the ninth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention may wish to consider these options and provide guidance to the institutions of the Convention and the other partners on how to design further support programmes while capitalizing on ongoing initiatives and the results achieved so far.

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I. Introduction

1. Since the entry into force of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), three important milestones have marked the way for its effective implementation: (a) the adoption of the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (The Strategy) at the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 8); (b) the decision of the Fourth Assembly of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), to be followed by the agreement of the Conference of the Parties, that the GEF would become the financial mechanism of UNCCD and the subsequent amendment of the GEF Instrument to accommodate this new development; and (c) the adoption of the terms of reference of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) and the establishment of a performance review and assessment of implementation system (PRAIS).

2. The adoption of The Strategy had a direct impact on the implementation of the Convention by affected country Parties, which were invited to align their national action programmes (NAPs) to combat desertification with the five operational objectives of The Strategy, as well as on the communication of information and the review of the implementation of the Convention.

3. The ninth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 9), building on the strategic framework agreed by COP 8, established the performance review and assessment of implementation system (PRAIS) and a new methodology to measure progress made in the implementation of the Convention against quantitative performance indicators.

4. At the same time, the fifth replenishment of the GEF and the allocations for the land degradation focal area under the System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) have provided a specific resource investment framework to support the process, and the methodological and organizational challenges that it entails for affected country Parties.

5. Both the UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) have been requested by the COP, in a number of decisions, to assist affected country Parties, and particularly the least developed among them, in their efforts to meet the obligations of the Convention with regard to reporting and the review process, as well as the alignment of action programmes. International institutions, such as UNEP and the GEF, have been invited to provide technical and financial assistance to this process.

6. Subsequently, the secretariat and the GM have established partnerships and ongoing cooperation with the GEF implementing agencies and relevant stakeholders in this regard, and facilitated these processes through voluntary contributions and without a specific funding framework.¹

7. Through the fifth replenishment of the GEF under the land degradation focal area, and the funds set aside for enabling activities decided on by the GEF Council at its 36th meeting, in November 2009, eligible country Parties were given dedicated financial support for the first time to meet their obligations under the Convention.² This presents a significant

¹ Funding was made available by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the European Commission and a number of bilateral development partners.

² An amount of up to US\$ 150,000 will be made available by the GEF secretariat to all eligible Parties on request, for activities related to national action plan (NAP) alignment and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) reporting.

and unprecedented opportunity for catalytic investments for effective implementation of the Convention.

8. The present document analyses the options available for making the best possible use of the resources made available by the international community, and for ensuring a coordinated and coherent approach to action programme implementation and reporting under the Convention. Parties at the ninth session of the CRIC (CRIC 9) may wish to consider these options and provide guidance to the Convention institutions and the other partners on how to design further support programmes, while capitalizing on ongoing initiatives, including online reporting and the results achieved so far.

II. Reporting and review process

9. As is noted above, The Strategy, through the introduction of PRAIS, made considerable changes to the way in which country Parties monitor and report on Convention implementation to the Conference of the Parties. Since 2010, country Parties have used standard reporting templates and an online information system whereby the information provided is guided by a methodology that hinges on reporting quantitative information according to provisionally adopted indicators and targets. A baseline assessment of performance indicators and financial flows was undertaken in the 2010 reporting, based on which trend analyses will be conducted every two years starting in 2012. A baseline assessment of impact indicators will be conducted in 2012 with a view to capitalizing on current investment and conducting a trend analysis every four years.

10. This shift from qualitative to quantitative online-based reporting under UNCCD was initiated with the assistance of a global programme (PRAIS project) supported by the GEF, implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and executed by the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC). The programme ensured harmonized reporting and provided country Parties with training, capacity-building and backstopping at the subregional and regional levels,³ as well as an online reporting platform and global assistance from the UNCCD secretariat and the GM. It is worth noting that the European Commission, as well as the UNCCD secretariat and the GM, have contributed a considerable amount of co-financing to this project, without which the project would not have been fully implemented. Because no specific GEF funding for enabling activities was available within GEF-4 for the 2010–2011 reporting process, the UNCCD secretariat mobilized extra catalytic funding for national level assistance, ranging from US\$ 2,000 to 4,000, for limited national level activities.

11. The PRAIS project provided the following products and services to UNCCD Parties:

- (a) Development of templates and reporting guidelines/tools following an agreed methodology;
- (b) Development of a reporting portal (PRAIS portal) which gathers information in a centralized database through online reporting for the purpose of analysing information for the CRIC but also with the long-term objective of creating a repository for information related to Convention implementation that can be accessed by Parties and a wider audience;
- (c) Catalytic funding for affected developing country Parties;
- (d) The technical services of 14 subregional and regional reference centres;

³ The PRAIS project made available the services of 14 reference centres at the subregional level, which provided training and technical backstopping to the 2010 reporting process.

(e) Training activities for two persons per country, who were officially designated to undertake the reporting process at the national level and a further 40 persons from the 14 regional centres, giving a total of 340 persons trained;

(f) The establishment of a knowledge base and helpdesk function and services by the UNCCD secretariat and the GM;

(g) The creation of an online analytical framework to assist the two Convention institutions to perform analyses of the information provided by Parties and other reporting entities.

12. With support from the PRAIS project, UNCCD has established, for the first time in its history, an objective baseline of the implementation of the Convention at national, regional, and global level. By offering instant, worldwide access to information on the status of the implementation of the Convention, the PRAIS portal represents a fundamental step towards enhanced long-term monitoring of the implementation of The Strategy and can also be used to increase awareness of desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD), improve the science/policy interface and mobilize new resources to fight the devastating consequences of land degradation.

13. The decision by the GEF Council to make funds available for enabling activities, such as reporting and NAP alignment, has changed the set-up by which future assistance for reporting at the global and/or subregional levels can be provided. While the need for regional and global assistance for the 2012–2013 reporting process remains unchanged,⁴ the GEF may consider global level support to be no longer necessary in the light of resources made available for enabling activities under the land degradation focal area.

14. As a result, Parties are invited to provide guidance on the various options set out in chapter IV below. The way in which Parties provide feedback on how enabling activities will be used to support both NAP alignment and reporting will be instrumental in deciding how the Convention institutions and interested partners envisage future support for the important task of providing information on the implementation of the Convention and The Strategy.

III. Alignment of action programmes with The Strategy

15. In accordance with decision 3/COP.8, adopting The Strategy, Parties are to align their national action programmes (NAPs). Decision 2/COP.9 urges the secretariat and the GM to provide guidance and technical assistance to affected country Parties in order to facilitate the alignment process. It further requests the secretariat, in close partnership with relevant subregional, regional and international organizations, to facilitate the provision of relevant technical assistance to affected country Parties for the review, alignment and/or revision of action programmes at all levels.

16. In decision 3/COP.9, the secretariat is requested to facilitate cooperation among affected country Parties in the regions, and to enhance synergies among the relevant institutions, programmes and mechanisms of the United Nations system, multilateral development banks, bilateral donors and other regional and subregional actors and mechanisms, in order to facilitate and, where appropriate, provide technical assistance to

⁴ The needs identified for the 2012 reporting are: development of reporting templates and methodologies for performance impact indicator reporting; the expansion of the PRAIS portal to meet the additional reporting requirements relating to the iterative process and impact indicator reporting; and the assumed need for capacity-building, training and technical backstopping at the national level.

the national action programmes. These stipulations reflect the challenges faced by affected developing country Parties and the demand for the design, development and implementation of a programme, or programmes, to address these challenges. There remains, however, the fundamental issue of securing the required resources.

17. In addition, decisions 13/COP.9 and 17/COP.9 stipulate that alignment of the NAPs is a necessary step for the effective implementation of The Strategy. Decision 13/COP.9 envisages that at least 80 per cent of NAPs should be aligned by 2014.

18. To ensure that efforts are undertaken in the process of providing assistance to country Parties in the area of NAP alignment, and to answer the concrete needs of the Parties, a survey on NAP alignment was conducted among all the Parties, while using inter alia information from the 2010–2011 reporting. The information provided has been thoroughly analysed and some conclusions drawn about the areas in which country Parties have indicated a need for assistance. A study has also been carried out of the results of the national capacity self-assessment (NCSA), where these have been completed, along with a preliminary review of the information contained in the national reports provided through the fourth reporting process. These have all helped to provide a picture of the needs of affected country Parties as regards the NAP alignment process.

19. The picture that emerges from these studies shows that the overwhelming majority of affected developing country Parties would need support, including, but not exclusively, with technical, financial, institutional and capacity-building issues.

20. The results contained in the analysis of the information gathered from the survey on NAP alignment, the information from the NCSA and the findings from the fourth reporting and review process show a clear need for a programme or programmes to assist developing affected country Parties, among other things, with:

(a) Broadening and raising awareness through national and local processes and actors to address desertification, land degradation and drought-related issues, including activities for early warning systems on drought monitoring;

(b) Ensuring that aligned NAPs have an improved policy framework for implementation, paying special attention to the issues of the legal framework, synergies with the other Rio conventions and mainstreaming in national priorities and strategies;

(c) Facilitating the implementation of pertinent measures for capacity-building;

(d) Facilitating the development and implementation of a programme for the establishment of socio-economic and biophysical baselines in the NAPs;

(e) Making performance and impact indicators a fundamental element of the aligned NAPs for improving implementation and monitoring;

(f) Orienting NAP design and development, taking account of the requirements of the new reporting process;

(g) The development and implementation of integrated investment frameworks (IIFs) and integrated financial strategies (IFSs);

(h) Addressing country-identified specific requests for support with the alignment process.

21. Creating and implementing such a programme or programmes requires resources, since some of the issues listed above may best be dealt with taking a subregional or regional approach, with adequate technical backstopping, training and capacity-building that can be extended outside the national context.

22. The NAP, as the fundamental tool for the implementation of the Convention, is part of the enabling process for which GEF resources are allocated since – once aligned with The Strategy – it should make the implementation of the Convention at the national level more focused and results-oriented. Reporting against The Strategy cannot and will not be truly meaningful if the NAP is not aligned.

23. In addition, and in relation to NAP implementation, Parties may wish to consider developing new approaches to funding architectures for NAP implementation under the Convention, focusing on the activities already included in the different decisions of the COP on this matter, including tapping into other GEF-managed funds such as the Adaptation Fund, the Special Climate Change Fund and the Least Developed Countries Fund. In this new architecture for NAP funding, parties may also wish to consider the role of the regional and subregional entities, such as multilateral institutions and regional banks and commissions, that undertake action on land-based ecosystems, including their potential role as GEF multilateral implementing entities (MIEs), and to provide input into how these land-aware MIEs could be selected by Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in accordance with the decisions on the financial architecture for adaptation to climate change approved at the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) to UNFCCC in Cancun, Mexico.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

24. The decision by the GEF Council to grant UNCCD country Parties access to enabling resources should be considered a landmark. It provides country Parties eligible under the Convention with direct access to resources to improve their NAPs and subsequently to report on NAP implementation using a quantitative approach based on provisionally adopted performance and impact indicators and targets.

25. These allocations will greatly facilitate national activities, but concerns arise over the question of how to support global activities, which would have to be implemented in conjunction with national-level activities in order to ensure the coherence and consistency of the overall process.

26. To this effect, country Parties may wish to consider the following three options:

Option 1: Independent access to resources for land degradation enabling activities, with no regional/global support. Describes a situation in which no additional resources for subregional, regional or global support in terms of training, capacity-building, and technical backstopping will be made available to country Parties for NAP alignment and reporting. Country Parties, and in particular affected country Parties eligible for GEF enabling activities under the land degradation focal area, will access these resources to independently align their NAPs, and report to the Conference of the Parties using methodologies and tools set out by the secretariat and the GM. No further technical assistance will be provided unless a country Party decides directly to engage bilaterally with an interested institution at the national, subregional, or regional level in order to obtain assistance.

It should be noted that under this option the Convention budget 2012–2013 should include allocations for costs related to refining methodologies for impact and performance indicators, as well as for other relevant reporting tools and services in the next two-year period, as part of the core budget allocation, in order to ensure minimum service delivery with regard to reporting. Similar financial considerations would be needed for the process of NAP alignment. Core functions related to the Convention institutions – but also related to the

obligations of the Parties – will become fully dependent on the outcome of the programme and budget discussions at the tenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 10).

Option 2: Independent access to resources for land degradation enabling activities, with regional/global support funded against set-aside resources.⁵ The second option assumes that country Parties eligible to access GEF enabling resources consider the services rendered at the subregional, regional and global levels instrumental to meeting their obligations under the Convention and The Strategy. Under this option, the Parties will agree on a certain amount of funds set aside for enabling activities for global components of the capacity-building programmes. The actual amount still needs to be assessed and could be discussed on the sidelines of the CRIC for inclusion in the recommendations of the final report, in order for the GEF to initiate the necessary follow-up through its Council.

As a result, resource requirements for the forthcoming core budget would be reduced to basic services (technical backstopping and recurrent expenses) and those related to the need to increase co-financing opportunities, which would entail staff time from both the UNCCD secretariat and the GM.

Option 3: Independent access to resources for land degradation enabling activities, with regional/global support funded against global set-aside resources.⁶ This follows the example of option 2, whereby resources from the funds set aside for enabling activities would only be used to pay for direct services to countries (particularly training and capacity development) delivered at subregional and regional levels.

The difference between option 2 and option 3 is that resources required for activities needed to ensure coherence of action across regions (in particular, global knowledge management and coordination) would not be drawn from the allocations for enabling activities but from resources to be allocated from the regional set-aside funds, which the GEF Council would need to approve.

27. Parties may wish to choose two different options: one for each process (NAP alignment and reporting), as they see fit.

28. All options are based on the assumption that affected developing and developed country Parties take full responsibility for the preferred option(s) based on decisions 1/COP.9 and 13/COP.9 and back the supportive measures to secure the core budget allocation, voluntary contributions and GEF funding which are all needed to implement this innovative approach.

29. Irrespective of which option is chosen by Parties, it is crucial for the implementation of the Convention that the maximum number of eligible country Parties request resources from the GEF secretariat for enabling activities, in order to enhance opportunities to improve NAP alignment and the reporting process at country level in the future. Country Parties may wish to deliberate on the services that they might need from the secretariat and the GM in this respect, and to ensure that these are reflected in the final report of the CRIC.

⁵ Total funding of US\$ 25 million for enabling activities has been made available for all eligible countries to access up to US\$ 150,000 per country. Resources set aside for enabling activities are those which fall outside the funding earmarked for each eligible country.

⁶ Resources outside the total funding for enabling activities.