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Reshaping the operation of the Committee on Science and Technology in line with the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Intersessional Working Group 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the convention (2008–2018): Progress on the preparation of the ninth session of the Committee on Science and Technology in a scientific and technical conference-style format

**Report on progress with the preparation of the ninth session of the
Committee on Science and Technology in a scientific and
technical conference-style format**

Note by the secretariat

Summary

By its decision 13/COP.8, the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) decided that the future sessions of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) should be organized in a predominantly scientific and technical conference-style format. This would enable the international scientific community to bring wider scientific and technological expertise to the CST and the Convention. The COP requested the Bureau of the CST to select a lead institution or a consortium of institutions to assist the Bureau with the organization of the session. Based on the requirements of the call for expressions of interest, and in accordance with decision 13/COP.8, the Bureau selected by consensus Dryland Science for Development (DSD) to be the consortium to assist with the organization of the next ordinary session of the CST.

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I. Introduction

1. During the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 8) in Madrid in 2007, the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), by its decision 13/COP.8, decided that the future ordinary sessions of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) should be organized in a predominantly scientific and technical conference-style format. Such sessions should be organized by the Bureau of the CST in consultation with a lead institution or consortium of institutions that has expertise in the relevant thematic topic selected by the COP.
2. The COP requested the Bureau of the CST to select a lead institution or a consortium of institutions to assist the Bureau with the organization of the conference.
3. The priority issue selected by the COP for the 2008–2009 biennium is "Biophysical and socio-economic monitoring and assessment of desertification and land degradation to support decision-making in land and water management". This theme is to be addressed by the CST scientific and technical conference.

II. Selection process

4. As per the decision of the COP, the CST Bureau, at its meeting in Bonn, Germany, on 19 February 2008, decided to select a consortium of institutions following the annexed terms of reference, initiated the selection process and agreed to the content of the call for expressions of interest which can be accessed under:
< http://www.unccd.int/science/docs/call_expression_of%20interest.pdf>.
5. Key stakeholders with knowledge of and a keen interest in the above thematic topic that were prepared to play a key role in assisting the CST to realize its goal were called on to express an interest in collaborating with the Bureau of the CST in organizing the conference. The CST Bureau set a deadline for submissions to be received by 30 April 2008.
6. Six submissions were received by the UNCCD secretariat. These were sent to the CST Bureau members with a summary table, an analytical matrix and a scoring matrix template. The Bureau of the CST met on 25 June 2008 to select a consortium.
7. Of the six proposals received, only two were considered by the members of the CST Bureau to be consortiums: Dryland Science for Development (DSD) and a consortium represented by Centro de Estudios de Zonas Aridas (CEZA). The other submissions were from individual organizations. The CST Bureau deliberated on the proposals submitted by the two consortiums, which were recognized as good quality submissions. Based on the requirements of the call for expressions of interest, the Bureau selected DSD by consensus to be the consortium to assist, in accordance with decision 13/COP.8, with the organization of the next ordinary session of the CST. The secretariat pointed out that this process must be in conformity with the rules and regulations of the United Nations, in particular those on procurement matters. A full report of the meeting of the CST Bureau is contained in document ICCD/CST(S-1)/2.

8. At the request of the CST Bureau, the secretariat informed all the candidates of the result of the selection process and posted this information on the UNCCD website.

9. The CST Bureau agreed that the next ordinary session of the CST should have some time devoted to other CST business. It proposes that two-thirds of the time be allocated to the scientific and technical conference, and the remaining one-third to a regular session of the CST, in order to consider the other part of the Bureau's work programme set out in the decisions made at COP 8.

III. Conclusions

10. The Bureau has decided that the next steps in the process of the organization of the scientific and technical conference will start without delay. The Bureau will hold consultations with the selected consortium to agree how to proceed. The Chair of the CST will provide an update on the activities undertaken or planned to date in the form of a verbal communication.

Annex

Terms of reference for a lead institution or consortium to support the organization of the scientific conference of the Committee on Science and Technology

Context

1. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification established a Committee on Science and Technology (CST), under Article 24 as a subsidiary body of the Conference of the Parties (COP). The major role of the CST is to provide the COP with information and advice on scientific and technological matters relating to combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought. The CST is composed of government representatives competent in the relevant fields of expertise.
2. The Committee identifies priorities for research, and promotes cooperation in the field of combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought through appropriate subregional, regional and national institutions. The Committee is multi-disciplinary and open to the participation of all Parties, and among other tasks also collects, analyses and reviews relevant data.
3. The 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (The Strategy), which was adopted by the COP during its eighth session in September 2007 in Madrid, spells out the vision of the UNCCD. The mission is to provide a global framework to support the development and implementation of national and regional policies, programmes and measures to prevent, control and reverse desertification/land degradation and mitigate the effects of drought through scientific and technological excellence, raising public awareness, standard setting, advocacy and resource mobilization, thereby contributing to poverty reduction.
4. The vision of the UNCCD is to forge a global partnership to reverse and prevent desertification/land degradation and to mitigate the effects of drought in affected areas in order to support poverty reduction and environmental sustainability.
5. Through the operational objective on science, technology and knowledge, which is a central component, The Strategy sets out how the UNCCD can become a global authority on scientific and technical knowledge pertaining to desertification/land degradation and mitigation of the effects of drought and to facilitate access to technology by affected country Parties, notably within the framework of South-South and North-South cooperation.
6. Recognizing the need to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the CST, The Strategy calls for a reshaping of the CST, strengthening its capacity to process scientific, technical and socio-economic information, and setting up a framework for activities with redefined roles, responsibilities and working modalities.
7. More specifically, the COP adopted a decision setting-up a new framework for the CST meetings, which will now be held in a scientific and technical conference-style format and focus

on one priority theme. The conference will be organized by the Bureau of the CST, in consultation with a lead institution/consortium, which is qualified in and has expertise in the relevant thematic topic selected by the COP. The priority theme to be addressed by the next session of the CST in line with the COP decision shall be: "Bio-physical and socio-economic monitoring and assessment of desertification and land degradation, to support decision-making in land and water management".

8. In order to facilitate efficient implementation of the new scientific and technical conference-style CST meeting and address the selected priority theme, the COP further requested the Bureau of the CST in collaboration with the lead institution or consortium to link with networks, agencies and bodies that perform similar work as the CST, and to include NGOs and other civil society stakeholders, to address the priority theme. To this end, wide-ranging expertise from key stakeholders needs to be brought on board, and knowledge at various levels mobilized and analysed in order for the CST meeting to succeed.

9. The CST conference is expected to produce sound scientific outputs and policy-oriented recommendations based on the analysis and compilation of peer reviewed and published literature that informs policy formulation and dialogue at the Conference of the Parties. This would also provide a clear picture of available options and possible solutions to the questions of decision makers on monitoring and assessment of desertification/land degradation. A cost-effective and efficient mechanism is therefore essential to facilitate the analysis and transfer of information from the national, subregional and regional levels to the global level.

Objective of the assignment

10. The main aim of this undertaking is to ensure that the CST session, which is expected to take place in the last quarter of 2009 during COP 9, is successfully held in an international scientific and technical conference-style format, bringing on board the key scientific institutions and scientists, and ensuring that the scientific community participates effectively in the conference.

11. State-of-the-art research findings and best practices in the relevant fields need to be brought to the CST session, with a view to engaging the best possible scientific and technological expertise in the search for solutions to assist in decision-making.

12. The lead institution or consortium is expected to collaborate with the CST Bureau in ensuring the success of the scientific conference. The lead institution or consortium shall provide an interface with the larger global science community to foster communication and the flow of new ideas through enhanced knowledge-sharing processes.

Specific tasks

13. The lead consortium shall be expected:

(a) To assist the CST Bureau in selecting the key issues and possible task forces on the subject matter of the conference, including delineating the various possible topics to be covered by the conference;

(b) To assist the CST Bureau in clearly defining the expected outcomes from the various actors to be engaged in the organization of the conference, including mobilizing the scientists, institutions and networks;

(c) To assist the CST Bureau in developing the terms of operation of the conference, including:

- (i) Conference agenda and programme;
- (ii) Selection of a scientific committee;
- (iii) Identification of subject topics or sub-themes;
- (iv) Preparation/selection of teams for peer review;
- (v) Selection of suitable abstracts from contributors;
- (vi) Developing flyers for the conference;
- (vii) Identifying the expected outcomes of the conference;
- (viii) Establishment of a website for communication of information, among other things;

(d) To assist the CST Bureau in mobilizing the necessary resources to support the organization and hosting of the conference.

Qualities required of the Institution

14. The lead institution is to display qualities like:

(a) Leading science-for-development capacity reflected in the constituent organizations and scientists;

(b) Breadth and quality of capacities across disciplines (biophysical, socio-economic, agricultural, environmental, etc.);

(c) Breadth and quality of capacities across institution types (advanced research institutions, national research systems, civil society and NGOs, etc.);

(d) Breadth and quality of capacities across geographies, consonant with the global mandate of the UNCCD (engaging leading science institutions from many desertification/land degradation-affected continents and regions);

(e) Participation in and experience with the UNCCD and its processes;

(f) Capacity to mobilize funds;

(g) Organizational capacity for executing major initiatives.

Information requested from the institution

15. Institutions interested in co-organizing the CST scientific conference shall be requested to provide inter alia, the following information:

(a) Profile of the participating institution - This should include a description of the qualities of the institution that are relevant to the work of the UNCCD Committee on Science and Technology, to cover:

- (i) Institution's history, including involvement in the UNCCD;
- (ii) Actual fields of work;
- (iii) Any special competence and focus of the institution, particularly in sustainable land management in dryland areas;
- (iv) Past experience in facilitating international scientific conferences;

(b) Personal profiles of key personnel to include:

- (i) Name, title, position and full address;
- (ii) Milestones of career;
- (iii) Key expertise;
- (iv) Actual and previous participation in work related to the realm of the CST;
- (v) Any other relevant information as deemed appropriate;

(c) Strategy for mobilization of requisite resources.
