



Convention to Combat Desertification

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Science and technology correspondents

Progress report on the development of recommendations on the role and responsibilities of the science and technology correspondents

Note by the secretariat

Summary

By its decision 15/COP.7, the Conference of the Parties (COP) encouraged country Parties to select a science and technology correspondent (STC) for the Committee on Science and Technology (CST), to be coordinated by the national focal point (NFP).

By its decision 22/COP.9, the COP requested the CST Bureau to consult with Parties and the regional groups to develop recommendations on the role and responsibilities of the STCs for consideration at the second special session and at the tenth session of the CST. This request arose from the first special session of the CST (CST S-1) held in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2008, during which the Bureau, after consultation with the STCs, agreed to set out general guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of STCs.

Consequently, the CST Bureau, with support from the secretariat, launched a consultation with all NFPs. This document contains the findings and conclusions of the consultation. The results indicate a request from the majority of country Parties for the specific roles that their own STCs should play under the supervision of their own NFP to be more clearly defined and formalized through institutional acknowledgement. All country Parties agreed that the roles and responsibilities proposed by the CST Bureau after CST S-1 should remain as set out in the Istanbul guidelines. These findings were presented to the CST Bureau.

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I. Background

1. At its seventh session, the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), by decision 15/COP.7, on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST), encouraged country Parties to “select a science and technology correspondent for the CST, coordinated by the National Focal Point” (Paragraph 6).

2. On 13 November 2008, in the aftermath of the first special session of the CST (CST S-1) in Istanbul, Turkey, the CST Bureau consulted with the science and technology correspondents (STCs) over their roles and responsibilities. Their main role as representatives of the CST was intended to be scientifically advisory in nature and to consist primarily of providing scientific support for the implementation of the Convention, particularly through the planning, implementation and monitoring of the National Action Programmes (NAPs) in affected countries. More specifically, their roles are:

(a) To enhance relationships and networks with the scientific community at the local, national, regional and global levels with the support of the national focal points (NFPs);

(b) To assist the NFP in establishing a dialogue with scientists and technologists at the national level; and

(c) To assist the NFP in measuring progress in the achievement of the Strategic Objectives of the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) (The Strategy) and the reporting process, among other things.

3. Following CST S-1 in Istanbul, by its decision 22/COP 9, the ninth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 9) requested the Bureau of the CST “to consult with Parties and the regional groups to develop recommendations on the role and responsibilities of the STCs for consideration at the second special session and the tenth session of the CST” (Decision 22/COP 9, para. 1).

4. The CST Bureau discussed whether the consultation process should be launched at regional or national level and decided that it should be carried out through the NFPs.

II. Methodology

5. With a view to inviting country Parties to take part in this consultation process and to capture their specifically expressed views on this matter, the UNCCD secretariat prepared on 16 April 2010 a questionnaire on the role and responsibilities of STCs, which was issued to all NFPs (see Annex II). This was followed by reminders until the agreed deadline for responses of 21 May 2010.

6. The questionnaire was based on the discussion held in the aftermath of CST S-1. The questionnaire contained specific questions posed to each country Party on the roles that countries’ STCs currently play and the roles they believe their STCs should play, including responsibilities and how country Parties believe the scientific community could be best involved in the implementation of the Convention.

7. The questionnaire also allowed country Parties to express their views on the most important achievements of their STCs and on any problems encountered. Finally, a ‘yes-no’

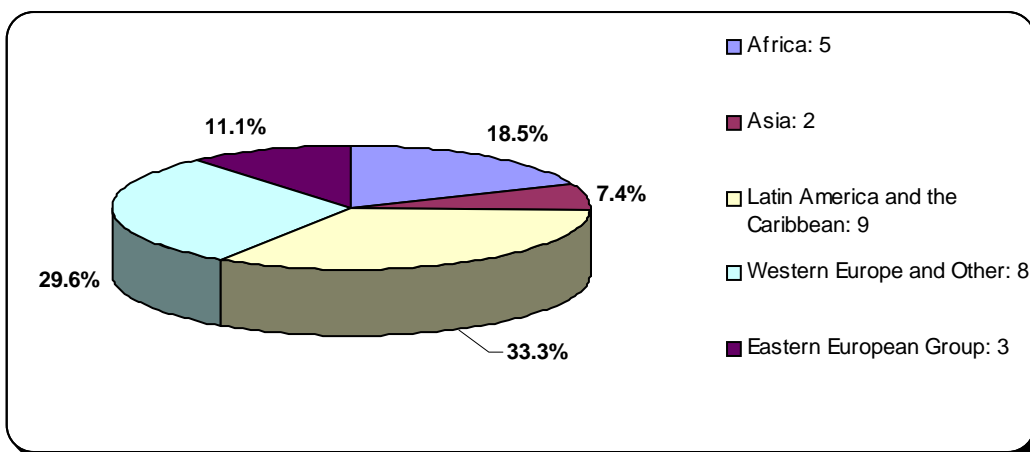
question was asked about whether country Parties believe that STCs should play the roles proposed in the categories presented in para. 2 (hereinafter referred to as “Istanbul guidelines”).

8. In the response collation process, all answers were considered, recorded and sorted into various groups according to the most frequently cited themes raised by country Parties. These themes were subsequently classified as closely as possible under each Istanbul guideline.

III. Analysis and interpretation of results

9. By 21 May 2010, the UNCCD secretariat had received 27 questionnaire responses from the currently existing 128 STCs. The regional spread of countries that responded is shown in the figure below.

Figure
Number and percentage of replies, by region (as of 16 June 2010)



10. For cross-referencing purposes, Annex I gives a summary overview of the participants’ responses in tabular form.

11. Annex I indicates the particular roles that country Parties’ STCs currently play and the roles and responsibilities their STCs should play, including how countries believe that the scientific community could best be involved in the implementation of the Convention. A corresponding number is given for each cross-referenced cell in the table at Annex I. This number reflects the number of countries that were observed to comply with any one of the three Istanbul guidelines.

12. Most countries state that their STC provides scientific advice to further coordination between NFPs and the scientific community, thus fulfilling point 2a above.

13. Approximately one-third of all participant countries fulfilled point 2b, providing advice to the public and private sectors including civil society organizations and preparing for CST special sessions, the COP, and so on. Only two countries complied with point 2c, giving examples such as making a thorough indicator study for NAPs or monitoring of assessment. Additional relevant roles played by four STCs outside the Istanbul guidelines, and therefore shown as an additional column in Annex I, were: strengthening relations between political and scientific sectors; prioritization of research strands on sustainable land management (SLM) practices, including support to commercial reforestation

programmes; and focusing on the dissemination of knowledge and expertise on issues addressing desertification.

14. The three achievements/contributions most frequently cited by countries were: collecting existing data from researchers, non-governmental organizations, universities and technology inventories on desertification, land degradation and drought; enhancing relationships and networking (participation in meetings) with the scientific community at the national level in cooperation with the private sector; and assisting in the review and development of impact indicators for the implementation of the Convention in the country.

15. Regarding the question on the role that countries believed STCs *should* play, the majority of the countries were aware of the need to improve the status of their STC's roles and responsibilities. In fact, all countries agreed on the need for STCs to play an active role in the enhancement of scientific networking. They commonly highlighted the identification of research funding for country-specific position papers, networking with regional and subregional STCs in order to learn from best practices and enhancing their scientific networking at the national level – all of which comply with point 2a. The remaining countries emphasized the need to have clearly defined roles and responsibilities for STCs, including the need to identify modalities for integrating science and technology into NAP implementation and reporting processes (points 2b and 2c). Additional roles that STCs could play include: supporting related new scientific initiatives; providing existing knowledge worldwide on implementing the Convention; and strengthening efforts to keep the scientific community united at the country level.

16. When asked how they believed the scientific community could best be involved in the implementation of the Convention, country Parties made a good set of proposals that tallied well with the Istanbul guidelines. Most countries emphasized prioritizing, coordinating and having a funded research programme in place to assess the implementation of the Convention. Other examples included field visits by the scientific community to find innovative solutions to NAP implementation. There was also general agreement on ensuring dialogue and harmonization between the science and policy communities through possible seminars and round tables on the subject. Last but not least, three countries proposed, in addition to the Istanbul guidelines, the need for knowledge to be organized, using user-friendly tools and platforms, to assess the current state of desertification at the national level and globally to support new strands of scientific research.

17. Countries were also asked about possible problems encountered in the assigned roles and responsibilities of STCs. Nine countries reported having experienced no problems at all. The most commonly experienced problems of the remaining half of the country Parties highlighted the lack of formalization of STCs and the need for specific, clearly assigned roles and responsibilities, given that at present the role of an STC is as a sort of ad hoc, independent worker, which might lead to a risk of poor communication between the NFP and the STC. Other Parties experienced limited budget availability to cover costs of STC operations, had limited access to UNCCD information or had an STC too overloaded with other work to take on these additional tasks.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

18. The majority of the NFPs called for the roles and responsibilities of STCs to be more clearly defined, and formalized through institutional acknowledgement of the specific roles and responsibilities that STCs should play under the supervision of the NFP.

19. All country Parties agreed that the roles and responsibilities proposed by the CST Bureau after CST S-1, in the Istanbul guidelines, should remain.

V. Deliberations of the Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology

20. These recommendations were brought to the attention of the CST Bureau meeting held on 21 and 22 June 2010 in Bonn, Germany. They were thoroughly discussed. The CST Bureau welcomed the recommendations, highlighting the following points:

(a) It was decided that any further specification of roles and responsibilities for STCs should be proposed and provided by the NFP to their respective STCs.

(b) The NFPs should also clearly communicate upfront to their STC, in writing, the kind of support (operational and/or financial) that could be made available to the STCs. Similarly, the support that STCs might expect should also be indicated through the NFP.

21. The second special session of the CST might wish to consider and endorse the above-mentioned roles and responsibilities of STCs, and to make recommendations to the Conference of the Parties.

Annex I

Table illustrating the summarized replies of country Parties against the Istanbul guidelines

	<i>2a. Enhance relationships and networks with the scientific community at the local, national, regional and global levels with the support of national focal points (NFPs)</i>	<i>2b - Assist the NFP in establishing a dialogue with scientists and technologists at the national level</i>	<i>2c. Assist the NFP in measuring progress in the achievement of the Strategic Objectives of The Strategy and the reporting process, among other things</i>	<i>Relevant additional responses outside the Istanbul guidelines made by STCs</i>
What role does the STC presently play?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist in awareness-raising and advocacy to support implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Provide scientific advice towards coordination between NFP and other Commission Groups, the latter which provide information to science and technology correspondents (STCs). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advice to public, private sectors and civil society organizations (CSOs) including working groups and Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) Assist the NFP (preparing for sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) and Committee on Science and Technology (CST) special sessions; reviewing documentation of CST) Maintenance of Roster of Experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for National Reporting Process of the implementation of Convention Providing technical input to country position papers/ Making and applying national action programmes (NAPs) (e.g. through indicator study or monitoring and assessment of desertification) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen relations between the political and scientific sectors To focus on globally disseminating and sharing knowledge, expertise on issues addressing desertification Prioritize research strands in sustainable land management (SLM) practices including support to commercial reforestation programmes
	Total: 13 countries	Total: 7 countries	Total: 2 countries	Total: 4 countries

	<i>2a. Enhance relationships and networks with the scientific community at the local, national, regional and global levels with the support of national focal points (NFPs)</i>	<i>2b - Assist the NFP in establishing a dialogue with scientists and technologists at the national level</i>	<i>2c. Assist the NFP in measuring progress in the achievement of the Strategic Objectives of The Strategy and the reporting process, among other things</i>	<i>Relevant additional responses outside the Istanbul guidelines made by STCs</i>
What role and responsibilities should the STCs bear?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of research funding to UNCCD process (e.g. land degradation monitoring), providing and coordinating scientific input to country-/situation-specific position papers • Enhance scientific networking at the national level • Learning from best practices by networking with regional and subregional STCs <p>Total: 12 countries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for clearly defined roles and institutionally authorized responsibilities between NFPs and STCs • Emphasize the interface between science and policy management at all levels • Represent the country in CST matters, CRICs, COPs <p>Total: 9 countries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist the NFP in identifying modalities to integrate science and technology into the implementation of NAPs and reporting processes <p>Total: 7 countries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To strengthen efforts in order to keep the national scientific community united on soil themes • Support related new scientific initiatives • Providing existing knowledge worldwide on implementing the Convention <p>Total: 3 countries</p>
How do you think science and the scientific community could be best involved in the implementation of the Convention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritization, coordination and funding of a research programme to assess implementation of the Convention • Regular updating of Roster of Experts <p>Total: 12 countries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing seminars, round tables on the subject • Enabling communication between NFP and STCs by clarifying the specific responsibilities of each <p>Total: 12 countries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visits done by scientific community to find innovative solutions for NAP implementation • Ensuring dialogue and harmonization between the science and policy communities <p>Total: 11 countries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New national research strands ought to be supported by global scientific projects • Knowledge should be organized using user-friendly tools/platforms • Assess the current state of desertification at the national level <p>Total: 3 countries</p>

Annex II

Table illustrating the consultation questionnaire

Past and present situation:

1. What role does the science and technology correspondent (STC) presently play and what responsibilities does he/she have in your country in assisting the national focal point (NFP)?
2. What have been the most important achievements/outcomes of the contribution of the STC at national, subnational and/or regional level?
3. What do you consider as problems in the cooperation with the STC?

Revision of the role and responsibilities of STCs

4. What role and responsibilities should the STCs bear in your opinion?
5. How do you think science and the scientific community could best be involved in the implementation of the Convention?
6. Should the STCs play a role – as proposed in Annex I – in the enhancement of scientific networking?

Please let us have any other comments and recommendations from your side
