



## Convention to Combat Desertification

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### Committee on Science and Technology

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**Issues associated with the development and implementation of impact indicators related to the measurement of strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3 of The Strategy**

**Progress made on the refinement of the set of impact indicators for strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3**

**How to further streamline the cooperation with the Global Environment Facility in a longer-term framework to support progress in measuring the implementation of strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3 of The Strategy**

## Progress report on the refinement of the set of impact indicators on strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3

### Note by the secretariat

#### *Summary*

By its decision 17/COP.9, the Conference of the Parties (COP) decided to provisionally accept the set of impact indicators attached to that decision to assist measurement, at the national and global levels, of progress made under national action programmes in implementing strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3 of the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) (The Strategy). The COP requested the secretariat, under the guidance of the Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) and using an iterative process, to develop proposals to refine the set of impact indicators and associated methodologies. The CST was requested to review the status of this iterative process during its sessions and to recommend a minimum set of impact indicators for consideration at the eleventh session of the COP.

This document reports on progress made in the refinement of the set of impact indicators. A scientific peer review of the relevance, accuracy and cost-effectiveness of the set of impact indicators was undertaken (see document ICCD/CST(S-2)/INF.1). A pilot impact-tracking exercise is also being launched to test the applicability of the indicators and to evaluate the validity and availability of data needed to effectively use them. This document also explores how to further streamline cooperation with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in a longer-term framework to support progress in measuring the implementation of strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3 of The Strategy.

The CST may wish to review the status of the iterative process and make recommendations to the COP on further work with this process. The CST may also wish to recommend to the COP actions aimed at streamlining cooperation with the GEF.

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## I. Introduction

1. By its decision 3/COP.8, the Conference of the Parties (COP) requested the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) to advise the COP at its ninth session (COP 9), through the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), on how best to measure progress on the achievement of strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3 of the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) (The Strategy), based, inter alia, on the deliberations and outcomes of the ninth session of the CST.

2. During the biennium 2008–2009 the CST worked to carry out this assignment. As a first step, a framework document<sup>1</sup> was presented and discussed at the first special session of the CST (CST S-1). On that occasion the CST recommended concrete steps to be taken and activities to be carried out for selection of the indicators<sup>2</sup>.

3. In response, the CST developed and implemented a consultative process to select the impact indicators. The process comprised: an in-depth review of the literature and a global consultation of affected Parties on currently utilized impact indicators; consultation with all the actors in the five regional annexes on methodologies, baselines and capacity-building needs; and a study on the availability of data at United Nations agencies and intergovernmental organizations. The findings of this process were synthesized in a comprehensive document<sup>3</sup> which was presented at COP 9; this document contained a recommended set of 11 impact indicators, short discussions on their relevance to the UNCCD and recommendations for their use.

4. By its decision 17/COP.9, the COP decided to provisionally accept the recommended set of 11 impact indicators to assist measurement, at the national and global levels, of progress made under national action programmes in implementing strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3 of The Strategy.

5. The following sub-set of impact indicators was selected as the minimum requirement for reporting by affected countries, beginning in 2012:

- (a) Proportion of the population in affected areas living above the poverty line;
- (b) Land cover status.

6. The remaining impact indicators, while recommended, were considered optional for inclusion in reports by affected countries.

7. By the same decision, the COP requested the CST, with the support of the secretariat, to continue working on methodologies for collecting data and baselines and for an effective use of the agreed set of impact indicators, and to prepare a glossary in order to clarify the terminology and definitions used in the formulation of the set of impact indicators, for consideration at COP 10.

8. The COP also requested the CST, with the support of the secretariat, to further assist the countries by providing an implementation plan for completion of the work and to provide assistance for pilot impact-indicator tracking exercises at the national level, in

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<sup>1</sup> Document ICCD/CST(S-1)/4/Add.3.

<sup>2</sup> Document ICCD/CST(S-1)/5/Add.1 paragraph 4.

<sup>3</sup> Document ICCD/COP(9)/CST/4.

particular to those countries that choose to report on the entire set of impact indicators in 2012.

9. The COP further requested the secretariat, under the guidance of the CST Bureau and using an iterative process, to develop proposals for consideration at future sessions of the COP commencing with its eleventh session, to refine the set of impact indicators and associated methodologies, taking account of:

- (a) Application and review of the impact indicators by affected countries;
- (b) Scientific peer review of the relevance, accuracy and cost-effectiveness of the impact indicators;
- (c) Possible synergy with relevant programmes, projects and institutions, including those associated with the other Rio conventions;
- (d) Relevant contributions from UNCCD scientific conferences.

10. The COP also requested the CST to review the status of this iterative process during its sessions and to recommend a minimum set of impact indicators for consideration at COP 11.

11. The COP further requested the CST to provide information on available sources of data and information required to implement the set of impact indicators and to facilitate access to and use of these indicators by Parties.

12. The COP also requested the secretariat and the Global Mechanism, as part of their joint work programme and in cooperation with relevant international and/or multilateral organizations, to include the impact indicators in their comprehensive capacity-building initiative for assisting affected country Parties, and to communicate information pursuant to decision 17/COP.9, and to seek assistance from bilateral donors, relevant international organizations and financial institutions, with particular regard to the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

13. Finally, the COP requested the CST to include on the agenda of CST S-2 an item on how to further streamline cooperation with the GEF in a longer-term framework to support progress in measuring the implementation of strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3 of The Strategy.

14. This document reports on progress in the refinement of the set of impact indicators and it explores possible areas of cooperation and synergy with the GEF.

15. A progress report on the work done on the sub-set of impact indicators is contained in document ICCD/CST(S-2)/7.

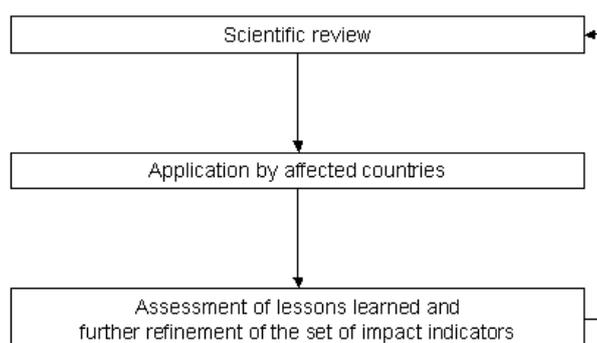
## **II. The iterative process for the refinement of the set of impact indicators**

16. The secretariat, under the guidance of the CST Bureau, devised a roadmap for the development of the iterative process to refine the set of impact indicators. This roadmap was developed in accordance with the guidance provided by the COP in decision 17/COP.9, paragraph 4, and taking as a reference the process adopted by the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development (UNCSD) for the refinement of the

sustainable development indicators (SDIs).<sup>4</sup> As in the UNCSD SDI process, the UNCCD iterative process for the refinement of the set of impact indicators (hereinafter referred to as the iterative process) should involve various actors (Parties, scientists, specialized agencies, etc.) and include a learning loop that may result in a progressive review and adjustment of the indicators. Because of the similarities between the two processes, the UNCSD SDI process was considered an optimal reference for devising the iterative process.

17. A simple scheme that describes the iterative nature of the process is presented in figure 1. The scientific review of the relevance, accuracy and cost-effectiveness of the set of impact indicators aims at refining the conceptual framework, the criteria for selection of the indicators and related methodologies. Following the scientific review, affected countries should apply the indicators to test their applicability and to evaluate the validity and availability of data needed to effectively use them. Then the set of impact indicators can be subject to a further rigorous revision, based on the assessment of lessons learned through their application. Therefore, at any iteration of the process, the set of impact indicators will be further refined in response to evolving science, user needs, and specific objective arising from the implementation of the Convention.

Figure 1  
**Schematic view of the iterative process**



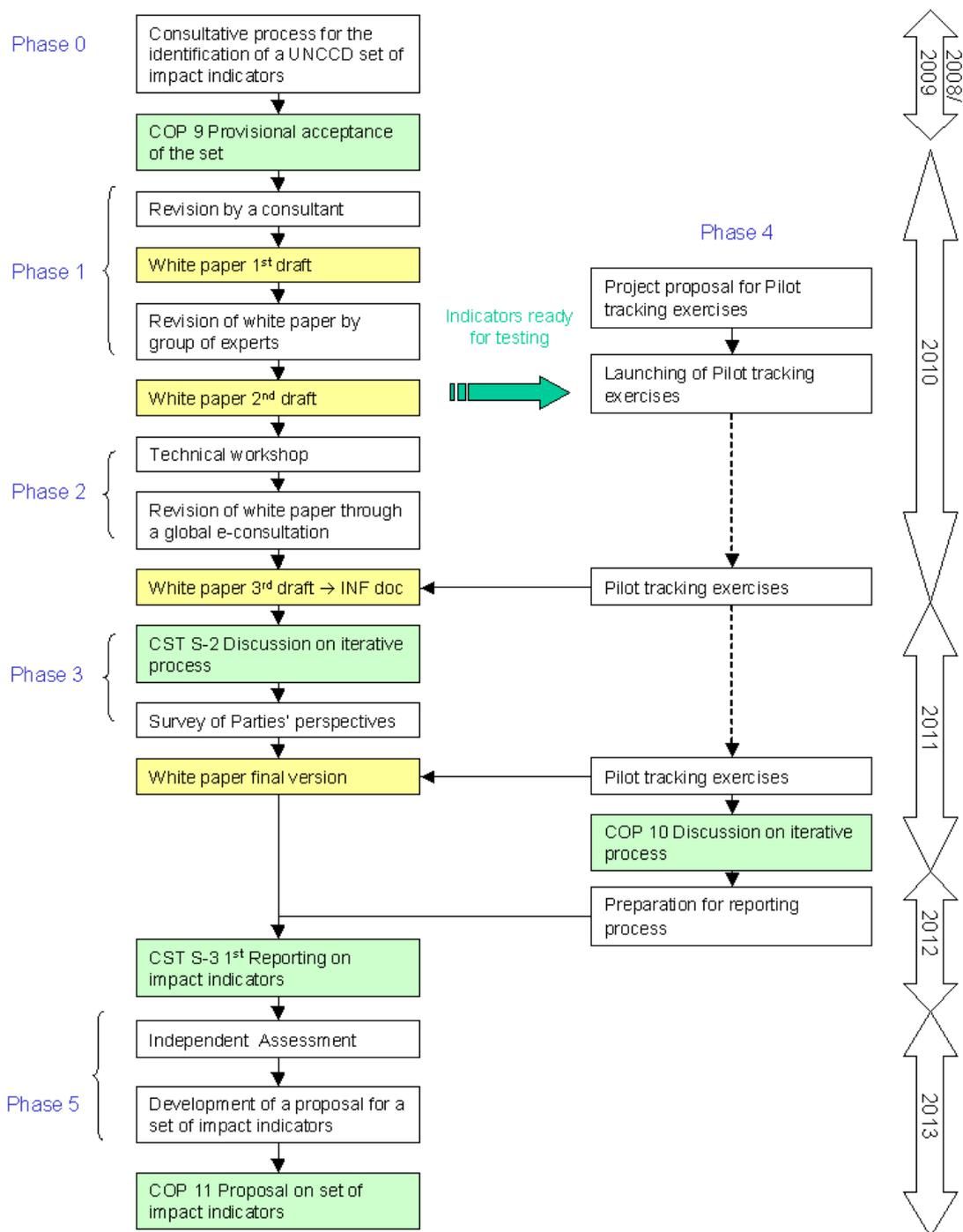
18. For its first iteration, during the period 2010–2013, the iterative process could be developed in five phases as shown in figure 2.

19. Phase zero was carried out in the biennium 2008–2009. This phase included a consultative process that led to the identification of the set of 11 impact indicators. The findings of this process were synthesized in a comprehensive document<sup>5</sup> that was presented at COP 9.

<sup>4</sup> László Pintér, Peter Hardi, Peter Bartelmus: *Sustainable Development Indicators: Proposals for a Way Forward*. Discussion Paper. IISD, International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2005. <http://www.iisd.org/publications/pub.aspx?pno=769>

<sup>5</sup> Document ICCD/COP(9)/CST/4.

Figure 2  
Schematic view of the iterative process – first iteration (2010–2013)



20. The scientific peer review, which constitutes the first and second phases of the iterative process, was organized on the model adopted for the UNCCD 1st Scientific Conference. A consultant reviewed the set of impact indicators, developed proposals for

their refinement and prepared a white paper to summarize the main findings of the study. To ensure that the white paper would be shaped by scientific considerations, a selected group of experts undertook a preliminary review of the first draft. In phase 2 a technical workshop was organized with scientists, experts, managers and practitioners who have experience in the development and implementation of impact indicators. Additionally, the white paper was reviewed through a global e-consultation in order to ensure the effective participation of the scientific community.

21. The main aspects considered in the revision were, in accordance with decision 17/COP.9, the relevance, accuracy and cost-effectiveness of the impact indicators. The review also focused on the coherence of the selected indicators with strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3 of The Strategy; on the appropriateness of the framework and criteria leading to the selection of the indicators; and on the applicability of the indicators at different scales. The main findings of the scientific review process are contained in document ICCD/CST(S-2)/INF.1.

22. After CST S-2, in phase 3, Parties will be given the opportunity to express their opinion on the feasibility of the proposed impact indicators by using appropriate consultative mechanisms. The white paper will be further reviewed taking into consideration Parties' perspectives.

23. Phase 4 comprises pilot impact-indicator tracking exercises at national level. This phase was launched in parallel with phases 1, 2 and 3 in order to facilitate an exchange between the scientific review and the pilot exercises: the lessons learned from the testing process could feed the scientific debate in a learning loop that might result in further refinement of the indicator set. The objectives of the pilot exercise are, inter alia: testing the availability of data; identifying what methodologies are being used for collection and analysis of data; considering how different methodologies can be reconciled and aggregated to move from the national to the global level; ascertaining the capacity gaps that need to be addressed; and identifying what institutional arrangements already exist and/or would be necessary at national level for successful compilation, validation and reporting of indicators.

24. The status of the iterative process and of the pilot impact-indicator tracking exercises will be further discussed at CST 10 in 2011.

25. In 2012, in accordance with decision 17/COP.9, affected country Parties will have to report for the first time on the following sub-set of two impact indicators: proportion of the population in affected areas living above the poverty line; and land cover status. On a voluntary basis, affected country Parties may also report on other impact indicators in the set, as well as on additional impact indicators as long as these fit into the underlying logic of measuring the impact of activities carried out within the ambit of strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3 of The Strategy.

26. An independent assessment of the experiences of the reporting will be organized in 2013 (phase 5). The assessment will provide an opportunity for countries and experts to share lessons learned from the application of the indicators. Based on the findings of the independent review, the set of impact indicators will be further revised and recommended for consideration at COP 11.

### III. Cooperation with the Global Environment Facility to support progress in measuring the implementation of strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3 of The Strategy

27. The establishment of the land degradation focal area (LD FA), approved by the GEF Assembly in October 2002 and made operational by the GEF Council in May 2003, coupled with formal designation of the GEF as a financial mechanism for the UNCCD and followed by a memorandum of understanding between the COP and GEF (decision 6/COP.7), offered a major boost to the investment by the GEF in sustainable land management (SLM) projects.

28. The goal of the LD FA is “to contribute to arresting and reversing current global trends in land degradation, specifically desertification and deforestation. This will be accomplished by promoting and supporting effective policies, legal and regulatory frameworks, capable institutions, knowledge sharing and monitoring mechanisms, together with good practices conducive to sustainable land management (SLM)<sup>6</sup> and that are able to generate global environmental benefits while supporting local and national, social and economic development.”<sup>7</sup>

29. The LD FA directly supports the implementation of the UNCCD. Both the land degradation strategy for the fifth replenishment of the GEF (GEF-5) and The Strategy identify the long-term goal of arresting and reversing land degradation, with emphasis on desertification. In fact, The Strategy is framed around the following long-term vision: “the aim for the future is to forge a global partnership to reverse and prevent desertification/land degradation and mitigate the effects of drought in affected areas in order to support poverty reduction and environmental sustainability.”<sup>8</sup>

30. The shared aspirations are further reinforced by the nature of the alignment between objectives of the two strategies.

31. Four objectives will contribute to the LD FA goal and drive the development of the GEF-5 portfolio:

- (a) Maintain or improve flow of agro-ecosystem services to sustaining the livelihoods of local communities;
- (b) Generate sustainable flows of forest ecosystem services in arid, semi-arid and sub-humid zones, including sustaining livelihoods of forest-dependent people;
- (c) Reduce pressures on natural resources from competing land uses in the wider landscape;
- (d) Increase capacity to apply adaptive management tools in SLM.

32. Similarly, four strategic objectives will guide the actions of all UNCCD stakeholders and partners in the period 2008–2018, to achieving the above-mentioned long-term vision:

<sup>6</sup> As defined in *Sustainable Land Management: Challenges, Opportunities and Tradeoffs*. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, Washington, DC, 2006. Sustainable land management (SLM) is a knowledge-based procedure that helps integrate land, water, biodiversity, and environmental management (including input and output externalities) to meet rising food and fibre demands while sustaining ecosystem services and livelihoods.

<sup>7</sup> GEF Secretariat: *GEF-5 land degradation strategy*. Washington D.C., October, 2010 <[www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/documents/document/GEF5-LD-Strategy.pdf](http://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/documents/document/GEF5-LD-Strategy.pdf)>.

<sup>8</sup> Decision 3/COP.8, annex, paragraph 8.

- (a) To improve the living conditions of affected populations;
- (b) To improve the condition of affected ecosystems;
- (c) To generate global benefits through effective implementation of the UNCCD;
- (d) To mobilize resources to support implementation of the Convention through building effective partnerships between national and international actors.

33. For both the UNCCD and the GEF, three objectives are focused on substantive aspects of combating land degradation. The fourth strategic objective of the UNCCD, focusing on resource mobilization and partnerships, anchors the role of GEF as a financial mechanism. On the other hand, the fourth objective of the land degradation strategy for GEF-5 reinforces the need for sustainability and adaptive management in combating land degradation.

34. Substantive areas of alignment are best defined by the first three objectives of the two strategies. The UNCCD strategic objectives focus on achieving long-term benefits for affected populations, affected areas, and the global environment. The GEF-5 strategy addresses the main barriers to sustainable agriculture that can be linked to the policy, legal and regulatory environment, human and institutional capacities and access and transfer of knowledge and technology relevant to the management of agricultural lands. It also focuses on removal of barriers to sustainable forest management by promoting the enabling environment, access to technology, and best practices combined with large-scale applications on the ground. Furthermore, it addresses the pressures on natural resources from competing land uses in the wider landscape; this third objective reinforces objectives 1 and 2 by emphasizing cross-sector harmonization and multi-integration of SLM.

35. Although GEF-5 will fund four years of GEF operations and activities (beginning on 1 July 2010 and ending on 30 June 2014), the LD FA objectives are clearly designed to enhance long-term benefits from integrated approaches to SLM. GEF incremental financing enables countries to leverage GEF resources in a manner that also enhances long-term delivery of UNCCD strategic objectives.

36. Assessing impact of GEF investments, including in the LD FA, has high priority on the GEF agenda. Over the course of GEF-5, the GEF will continue to strengthen its results-based management, including strengthening its capability to collect and report on portfolio level indicators – outcome and output. At the same time, the UNCCD process is moving towards impact assessment through indicators relating to the strategic objectives of The Strategy. This offers ample room for cooperation, coordination and synergy.

37. Portfolio-level monitoring of GEF investments is based on indicators and targets set out in each focal area results-based management framework. As mentioned above, the overall goal of the LD FA is “to contribute to arresting and reversing current global trends in land degradation, specifically desertification and deforestation”. The long-term impact of the work of the GEF in this focal area will be the “sustained productivity of agro-ecosystems and forest landscapes in support of human livelihoods”. The associated indicators are:

- (a) Change in land productivity (greenness measure as proxy – net primary productivity (NPP), normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI) – corrected by rain use efficiency (RUE));
- (b) Improved livelihoods in rural areas (farmer income);
- (c) Value of investment in SLM (funds generated from diverse sources, co-financing in projects).

38. The first two GEF indicators are aligned with the UNCCD sub-set of impact indicators selected as the minimum required for reporting by affected countries, beginning in 2012 (see document ICCD/CST(S-2)/7):

- (a) Proportion of the population in affected areas living above the poverty line;
- (b) Land cover status also measured as NPP and RUE trends as obtained through long-term series of NDVI data.

39. Some alignment between the GEF and the UNCCD sets of impact indicators would be beneficial to the two institutions and to Parties that would be requested to use or report on the selected impact indicators. For instance, some of the GEF project-level impact indicators could be rolled up to the national level when there was an overlap of purpose. That is, certain GEF project-level indicators may also be useful when aggregated for portfolio or country-level monitoring or reporting by UNCCD country Parties for impact indicator reporting under the performance review and assessment of implementation system (PRAIS) (for example, improved livelihoods in rural areas).

40. Participation of the GEF, through its Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP), in the iterative process for the refinement of the UNCCD set of impact indicators would be important. The involvement of the GEF is also in line with paragraph 4 (c) of decision 17/COP.9 which requests the secretariat, under the guidance of the CST Bureau and using an iterative process, to refine the set of impact indicators and associated methodologies, taking account of, inter alia, possible synergies with relevant programmes, projects and institutions, including those associated with the other Rio conventions.

41. The following steps were taken to ensure effective participation of the GEF-STAP in the refinement of the UNCCD set of impact indicators:

- (a) GEF-STAP was invited to participate in a meeting on methodologies and data needs for the sub-set of impact indicators, held on 11 June 2010. The meeting was intended to give an opportunity to participating institutions and/or agencies to exchange information on international developments relating to impact indicators and to share their experiences in implementing them;

- (b) A GEF-STAP informal review of the report on the UNCCD set of impact indicators, prepared in September 2009, was used as a basis for the scientific peer review of the relevance, accuracy and cost-effectiveness of the set of impact indicators launched in August 2010 as part of the iterative process.

42. Further involvement of the GEF-STAP in the scientific peer review and in the technical workshop (see paragraph 20 above) for the refinement of the UNCCD set of impact indicators was envisaged. Additionally, the need to explore with the GEF, as well as with other partners, how to provide assistance for pilot impact-indicator tracking exercises at the national level (see paragraph 23 above) was recognized, and consultations between involved institutions have taken place prior to CST S-2.

43. The methodological work for the refinement of the UNCCD set of impact indicators is instrumental to achieving the long-term goal of establishing a solid assessment and periodic monitoring of desertification and land degradation. The achievement of this long-term goal would require the development of specific capacities at the national level.

44. In a cooperative effort to develop a comprehensive capacity-development programme, which will enhance national reporting under the Convention, the UNCCD secretariat, the Global Mechanism (GM), the GEF secretariat and the United Nations Environment Programme, Division of Global Environment Facility Coordination (UNEP/DGEF) formulated a full-sized project to assist Parties to fulfil their new reporting obligations under the PRAIS. The first part of the reporting and review exercise (2010–2011) will culminate in the first review of implementation against performance indicators,

financial flows in the implementation of the Convention and best practices on SLM technologies, including adaptation.

45. This process would need to be maintained and further sustained in the following biennium, when additional and more substantive engagement would be required to address impact indicator reporting, together with reporting on performance, financial flows and best practices, and would conclude the first review cycle under the PRAIS. In this regard, it is worth recalling that the COP:

(a) In decision 10/COP.9, welcomed the joint initiative of UNEP, GEF and the UNCCD secretariat to engage in a long-term capacity-building initiative relating to monitoring and implementation of The Strategy;

(b) In decision 17/COP.9, requested the UNCCD secretariat and the GM to include impact indicators in their comprehensive capacity-building initiative assisting affected country Parties and to seek assistance with particular regard to the GEF.

46. A global programme on capacity-building for reporting under the UNCCD, including reporting against impact indicators, could be linked to country-level activities, in order to ensure coherence and consistence across regions and over time. At the same time, eligible country Parties could receive support from GEF-5 for implementing enabling activities on reporting, which will complement the capacity development programme at global level.

47. The production of a joint action plan was envisaged as an outcome of a one-day retreat between the UNCCD secretariat and the GEF secretariat. This joint action plan would include a set of recommendations for strengthening collaboration between the UNCCD secretariat and the GEF secretariat as a means for advancing implementation of the Convention and The Strategy, and of the GEF LD FA.

#### **IV. Concluding remarks**

**48. The CST at its second special session may wish to review the roadmap designed for the development of the iterative process to refine the set of impact indicators and make recommendations to the COP on its further implementation both in its first iteration, during the period 2010–2013, and in future iterations.**

**49. The CST may wish to take note of the findings of the scientific peer review process as contained in document ICCD/CST(S-2)/INF.1, and give further guidance for optional inclusion of impact indicators in reports by affected countries in 2012.**

**50. Taking into account the results of consultations which took place prior to CST S-2 on impact indicators and on the reporting process, the CST may wish to recommend to the COP a series of actions aimed at streamlining cooperation with the GEF in a longer-term framework to support progress in measuring the implementation of strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3 of The Strategy.**