

CST Highlights no.1

Committee on Science and Technology



A Science that Serves Communities and Ecosystems



Way Forward After CST 9

Until now, the international community has made tireless efforts to get public attention and political action on issues of desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) with limited success.

Thus, the mobilization of political will and arousal of public interest and attention around the issue of climate change in particular puzzled activists and decision-makers alike, at least in the DLDD community.

It signaled, for many, that scientific consensus and the accumulation of knowledge are not to be underestimated in matters of public opinion and political will.

Consequently, they took up the issue of science and knowledge development with renewed vigor, will and interest in the context of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the

body with a legally binding mandate over DLDD matters.

UNCCD'S SCIENTIFIC AUTHORITY

At the 2007 Conference of the Parties to the Convention (COP), the science and knowledge dimensions of the Convention became a key area for action. Thus, one of the key goals of the 10-year strategy and plan for the implementation of the Convention for 2008-2018 that the COP adopted is to make the UNCCD “a global authority on scientific and technical knowledge pertaining to desertification/land degradation and mitigation of the effects of drought (DLDD).”

A key achievement then was the decision

to strengthen the capacities and structure of the Convention's committee on science and technology (CST) in order to boost its effectiveness in advising parties.

This goal was firmed up at the subsequent COP held in 2009, known as COP 9, with action taken in four areas. Parties agreed, henceforth, to measure the impact of their activities on the ground, to establish regular forums for interaction between scientists and policy-makers, to design short- and medium-term measurable work programmes for the Committee, and lastly, to strengthen the scientific institutions of the Convention.

IMPACT MEASUREMENTS

In a move that confirmed its seriousness with science, the CST recommended, and COP 9 accepted, the provisional use of a set of eleven impact indicators that closely match the goals of the strategy.

Two of the eleven measures are mandatory; one to assess the proportion of the population in the affected areas living above the poverty line; and the other to assess the status of land cover. Parties are expected to provide this data, for the first time, when they submit their reports at a special session of the CST in 2012.

The indicators are not exhaustive, but are an important starting point for capturing the results achieved in improving the conditions of the populations and ecosystems affected by desertification and in generating global benefits.

The methodology for measuring impact has been a long-standing issue for the

DLDD community, thus scientific consensus on the indicators, no doubt facilitated political progress. Still, much remains to be done.

To make this a reality, the COP has set a roadmap for developing and refining the other nine indicators, which is to be done through an iterative process involving scientists, the parties and relevant institutions, including the sister Rio Conventions.

This indicator-based monitoring approach is expected, over time, to lead to simple, verifiable, measurable, and comparable information for the reporting process.

UNCCD SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCES

COP 9 acknowledged the importance of scientific conferences in ensuring policy decisions are “based on the most up-to-date scientific knowledge,” and decided that similar events be organized regularly in future.

These scientific conferences will review the state-of-the-art knowledge on a selected



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theme and generate actionable recommendations for deliberation by the COP.

Accordingly, the outcomes of the first UNCCD Scientific Conference will be analyzed at a special session of the Committee in 2010 and translated into decisions at COP10 in 2011.

To facilitate this process in future, COP 9 requested the Committee to devise a system for organizing international, interdisciplinary scientific advice, and for channeling such advice into the Convention process. The system, COP 9 decided, must be devised through a consultative assessment.

Also, COP 9 decided to hold a second UNCCD Scientific Conference titled, "Economic assessment of desertification, sustainable land management and resilience of arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas." The Conference will examine the costs of desertification for building the case for investing in sustainable land management.

Economics of Desertification: This is a significant decision as until COP 9, there has been no recognition of the need to gather evidence at the national level on the cost of inaction in curbing desertification and land degradation, the returns from investing in sustainable land management and the economic scenarios associated with such evidence.

To be fair, there were estimates of the cost of desertification to the international community amounting to approximately US\$42billion per year. But the United Nations Environment Programme provi-

ded these estimates way back in the early 1990s.

STRATEGIC ORIENTATIONS

Work Plan: Building on the work undertaken by CST-8, at COP 9, the newly elected CST-9 bureau kick-started its follow-up action. It defined its first four-year work plan for 2010-2013 and two-year work programme for 2010-2011.

It identified the long-term strategic orientations for scientific cooperation and partnership with interested organizations, with a view to develop a dynamic fundraising plan. COP 9 approved the programme.

The COP also strengthened the leadership and engagement role of the CST Bureau by assigning it direct responsibility for the implementation of the Committee's work programme, and attainment of its objectives.

Knowledge Management: COP 9 also reaffirmed the key role of the Committee in promoting research on relevant traditional



Prof. Klaus Kellner, South Africa, CST Chairperson

and local knowledge, know-how and practices relating to DLDD.

To this end, the COP defined milestones for the development of a Knowledge Management System to facilitate an exchange of best practices, among other purposes.

Engaging the Stakeholders: Drawing on its mandate, the CST has embarked on building the capacity of the scientific aspects of the Strategy, especially the science and technology correspondents, the roster of independent experts and its fellowship programme. The CST plans to revise and fine-tune the UNCCD fellowship programme.

As mandated by COP9, the next CST sessions will discuss and streamline the roles and responsibilities of the science and technology correspondents (STCs). The correspondents' growth in number and contribution to the work of the Committee has become increasingly apparent and appreciated.

In addition, the Convention's roster of independent experts will be reactivated and its content and the technology used updated so that a Web-based search tool that is common to the sister Rio Conventions could be made available.

NEXT MILESTONES

In support of the decisions and work plans, the CST tentative plans for the next two years are as follows:

1-2 March 2010	CST 9 Bureau Meeting, Bonn, Germany
June 2010	CST 9 Bureau Meeting, Bonn, Germany
February 2011	Second Special Session of the CST (CST-2)
Autumn 2011	CST 10, Changwon City, Gyeongnam, Republic of Korea

The Members of the CST9 Bureau are:

- Prof. Klaus Kellner, South Africa, Chairperson
- Worapong Waramit, Thailand, Vice-Chair
- Cesar Altamirano B., Bolivia, Vice-Chair
- Dr. Lawrence Townley-Smith, Canada, Vice-chair-cum-rapporteur
- Prof. Mihajlo Markovic, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Vice-Chair

CST Highlights is a publication of the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) based in Bonn, Germany. The publication provides highlights and updates of work progress in the implementation of the CST activities and work plan as well as any related or relevant material to advance this work.

The Committee on Science and Technology is a subsidiary body of the Convention. Developed as a result of the Rio Summit, the UNCCD is a unique instrument that has brought attention to land degradation in some of the most vulnerable ecosystems and affected populations in the world.

Thirteen years after coming into force, the UNCCD benefits from the largest membership of the three Rio Conventions and is recognized as an instrument that can make an important contribution to the achievement of sustainable development and generate global benefits.

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