

UNCCD CRIC 7 AND CST S-1: WEDNESDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 2008

The first special session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST S-1) commenced its work on 5 November 2008. After adopting the agenda, CST delegates conducted a general discussion on agenda items regarding preparations for CST 9, elements of the Strategy related to the CST, and the CST's four-year work plan.

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

CST Chair William Dar (the Philippines) opened CST S-1, highlighting that the special session represents part of the UNCCD reform process. He stressed that the session can help to ensure that science properly informs policy.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK:

Chair Dar introduced the CST S-1 provisional agenda (ICCD/CST(S-1)/1 and Corr.1), which the CST adopted without amendment. He then introduced the organization of work contained in Annex II of the agenda. He encouraged the CST to move the discussion on agenda sub-item 4 (d) (elements for provision of advice on how best to measure progress on Strategic Objectives 1, 2 and 3 of the ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention), scheduled for 6 November, to the morning of 5 November, because it would feed into discussions in CRIC 7. The CST adopted the organization of work as orally revised.

THE TEN-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN AND FRAMEWORK TO ENHANCE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION – CST:

Executive Secretary Luc Gnacadja introduced the documents developed by the Secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau of the CST and as requested by COP 8, on the ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (ICCD/CST(S-1)/4).

ADVICE ON HOW BEST TO MEASURE PROGRESS ON STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES 1, 2 AND 3 OF THE STRATEGY:

Elysabeth David, Knowledge Management, Science and Technology Coordinator, UNCCD Secretariat, introduced ICCD/CST(S-1)/4/Add.3 and Corr.1 on the provision of advice on how best to measure progress of the Strategy's Strategic Objectives 1, 2 and 3. Youba Sokona, Sahara and Sahel Observatory, served as a resource presenter on this topic.

The G-77/CHINA suggested following the IPCC model for the CST but underscored the need to respect scientific advice, and called for indicators and guidelines that could be used in designing Clean Development Mechanism projects that target land degradation and desertification.

The EU called for a more elaborate product prior to party consultation, a realistic schedule to develop the indicators further and an annex containing the sources used to develop the indicators. He recommended drawing on a limited number of simple and composite indicators using available data, and consulting monitoring and evaluation experts in assessing the assumptions made of the causal links from objective to impact.

SUDAN underscored the need for national-level research to facilitate monitoring and vulnerability assessment and generate broader baseline data. UGANDA stressed the need to carefully define the information to be gathered from the national level. MEXICO suggested identifying where the Convention wants to be in 2018 with regard to Strategic Objectives 1 and 2. ARGENTINA said further work should build on the CST's past consideration of indicators.

SENEGAL stressed the importance of transferring relevant information from the local to global level without data losses, and of harmonizing data collection at the sub-regional level. CHILE noted that the applicability of the chosen indicators must be evaluated and, along with INDONESIA, noted that adequate monitoring by parties has financial implications.

SAUDI ARABIA said achieving Strategic Objectives 1, 2 and 3 depends on implementing Strategic Objective 4 (mobilization of resources through building partnerships) and YEMEN said Objective 4 should be discussed ahead of Objectives 1-3. The GM emphasized the connections between all four strategic objectives, stressing that solid arguments are needed to mobilize resources.

TURKEY suggested that a major institution should be identified to collate site-specific data. The EU invited parties to join the EU, UNEP and their collaborators in developing a new World Atlas on Desertification. PAKISTAN stressed the importance of cooperation with the other Rio conventions, and learning from them.

IRAN said it is vital to introduce measurable and quantitative indicators for all items under Strategic Objective 3. PERU highlighted indicators for raising the awareness of decision makers. KENYA stressed identifying: existing institutions that have information and data; and data gaps. SOUTH AFRICA urged the CST to collaborate with other fora, and to translate scientific information into action.

Stressing that the required information exists, PANAMA said the CST needs only to determine the indicators and methodology to be used. CUBA called for simple and objective indicators. VIET NAM stressed the need for a common understanding of the concepts of land degradation, desertification, drought and deforestation, and for a set of verifiable benchmarks under each

core indicator. EGYPT underlined the CST's role in promoting South-South cooperation and called for the compilation of lessons learned from countries facing similar challenges and with similar geographic characteristics. ITALY highlighted that water is a crosscutting issue relevant to both desertification and climate change and urged its inclusion when developing indicators.

COSTA RICA said the CST must establish a solid scientific knowledge base to raise the Convention's profile. ZIMBABWE called for "systematic cascading" of reforms from the global to local levels. Fundación Ambiental Oasis de Vida (Colombia), on behalf of CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOs), emphasized the importance of high quality and reliable data, and traditional knowledge.

The Secretariat responded to comments, and noted that the joint CST-CRIC Bureau has proposed making regional assessments of the status of existing indicators. Sokona noted the need to build bridges with climate change and the IPCC, especially in the operationalization of adaptation indicators and the baseline situation in drylands.

FUNCTIONING OF THE CST: WORK OF THE CST BUREAU DURING THE 2008 INTERSESSIONAL PERIOD: Chair Dar introduced the work of the CST Bureau during the 2008 intersessional period (ICCD/CST(S-1)/2), highlighting two Bureau meetings, the preparation of documents for CST S-1, and the selection of a consortium to help with the preparation of CST 9.

RESHAPING THE OPERATION OF THE CST: The Secretariat introduced the report on progress in the preparation of CST 9 in a scientific and technical conference-style format (ICCD/CST(S-1)/3), highlighting that the Bureau selected Dryland Science for Development (DSD) as the consortium to assist in organizing CST 9.

The EU stressed that CST 9 should provide input on land degradation to the 2009 Climate Change Conference, be open to the entire scientific community and improve the articulation of the ecological and financial terms and the measures to quantify actions, which must be harmonized and coordinated with other conventions. JAPAN proposed involving the consortium in collecting the data on Strategic Objectives 1-3 and evaluating the indicators. Emphasizing the scientific and policy roles of the IPCC, BRAZIL, supported by CHILE, stressed the need to define CST 9's expected outcomes. SOUTH AFRICA and PERU stressed the need to include indigenous knowledge. Many speakers expressed their national and regional experts' interest in participating in the consortium, and requested information on the selection criteria, highlighting the importance of geographical balance. SENEGAL, supported by TUNISIA, said Africa is particularly affected by desertification and its experts will want to participate. TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO urged inclusion of experts from, and issues relevant to, small islands developing States.

The Secretariat said DSD would establish three Working Groups by January 2009. The DSD said each Group would consist of 30 experts, selected according to scientific knowledge and regional and gender representation. He said the DSD would initially select 10 experts per group, who would select an additional 20 experts, who would solicit global participation.

BRAZIL noted the DSD proposal emphasized land degradation and said the focus should remain on desertification, and stressed transparency in the working groups' work processes. SUDAN highlighted that desertification is land degradation in specific ecosystems, and said sound research, not just a review of research, is necessary. SPAIN asked how scientific and technical focal points would be incorporated. COLOMBIA, supported by FRANCE, suggested linking the consortium's work with

existing regional programmes. LEBANON suggested taking advantage of overlaps with other conferences and platforms. The Arab Maghreb Union said issues such as food security and water should also be discussed and the private sector should participate. FRANCE suggested developing a road map towards the scientific conference. A CSO representative urged involvement of CSOs in the consortium.

The DSD clarified that private sector and civil society members could be observers. He outlined the DSD strategy to publish results for different stakeholders, and said countries would need to disseminate information locally.

CONSIDERATION OF THE DRAFT MULTI-YEAR (FOUR-YEAR) WORK PLAN FOR THE CST: The Secretariat introduced its proposed four-year work plan (ICCD/CST(S-1)/4/Add.1) and related two-year work programme (ICCD/CST(S-1)/4/Add.2), noting that the latter would be revised to reflect the recommendations made on the work plan.

The EU said the four-year work plan is consistent with the Strategy, but called for a better definition of the role and contribution of the national focal points. On the work programme, he proposed harmonizing the Secretariat and CST Bureau's work, limiting the number of activities, elaborating a budget, and holding the scientific policy dialogue during COP 9 and CST 9 instead. BRAZIL emphasized quality over quantity of activities. PERU said work on indicator development exists, and suggested linking the plan's and programme's activities to ongoing activities and including work on traditional knowledge related to land degradation. JAPAN noted overlaps in the expected accomplishments and inquired about the Bureau's planned approach to gather performance data.

ARGENTINA recommended including an outcome on enhancing scientific networks. COLOMBIA agreed with Argentina and Brazil on the need to focus on desertification. CANADA suggested clarifying the logic between outcomes, accomplishments and activities and emphasized quality over quantity of performance indicators. MEXICO suggested that an international prize related to land degradation, desertification and drought be included in the work plan. MOROCCO cautioned against overlaps between indicators in the two-year work programme and four-year work plan.

IRAN asked what would happen between 2011 and 2018. CHILE, supported by CUBA, urged stressing the national dimension. YEMEN emphasized that desertification is land degradation in drylands, caused by human and climatic factors. CHINA said "hot topics" such as carbon sequestration in soil should be prioritized.

Delegates will continue their discussion on this agenda item on Thursday, 6 November.

IN THE CORRIDORS

While many thought the CST session was progressing smoothly inside the Plenary Hall, the outcome and impact of the US election was the focus of conversation for many participants in the corridors. With a Democrat as President, some hoped that US participation in international environmental agreements would change.

On a substantive front, the CST S-1 discussion of the first three Strategic Objectives led to some pondering about what comes first – the chicken or the egg – with resource mobilization being the preferred starting point for some. Meanwhile, some explained that an undercurrent that seemed to underlie participants' concerns about the composition of the consortium members is the risk of omitting developing country scientists and policy experts and therefore, in a departure from the IPCC model, de-linking technical from political interests.