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**COMMITTEE FOR THE REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION**

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**Outcome of the High-Level Policy Dialogue on the Strategic Orientations of  
the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification,  
held in Bonn, Germany, 27 May 2008**

**Note by the secretariat**

*Summary*

By its decision 3/COP.8, the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties adopted the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) ten-year strategic plan and framework (The Strategy) to enhance implementation of the Convention 2008–2018. Parties also invited the Executive Secretary to consider engaging in policy dialogue on The Strategy, to foster awareness of, and buy-in to, The Strategy among relevant policy decision makers.

The High-Level Policy Dialogue (HLPD) was held at the UNCCD secretariat in Bonn, Germany, on 27 May 2008, with the support and under the chairmanship of Her Excellency Mrs. Karin Kortmann, State Secretary, Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany.<sup>1</sup>

The event aimed at facilitating exchanges on major issues linked to the implementation of The Strategy including: how to forge the necessary global partnership; how to provide the related

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<sup>1</sup> The Chair would like to use the opportunity of the publication of this document to add a few words concerning the outcome of the HLPD. “Along with the honour of chairing the High-Level Policy Dialogue came the duty of summarizing our discussions, together with the UNCCD secretariat and participating experts, and of preparing proposals to help orient action. The following text cannot hope to record all the many dozens of important statements, arguments and appeals made by participants. But I hope very much that it will serve to build the momentum towards collective action; for whether we are Parties to the Convention, farmers and rural communities, decision makers in public or private sectors or ordinary citizens, our next steps together will determine success or failure in the fight against desertification.”

global institutional platform and enact the reforms necessitated by and deriving from The Strategy; and how UNCCD bodies and institutions could help to achieve the goals of The Strategy.

Ministers and other high-ranking officials from a representative number of country Parties to the UNCCD and international institutions participated in the HLPD with a view to consolidating understanding within the context of the Convention's strategic orientations.

This document contains the conclusions of the Chairperson. It is transmitted to Parties for further consideration on the occasion of the seventh session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention.

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## I. Introduction

1. Far-reaching environmental change is indisputable. The accompanying loss of ecosystem services<sup>2</sup> directly affects human well-being, development and security. Environmental tipping points are fast approaching and an unprecedented era of natural resources scarcity is looming, brought on by global shifts in our climate, reduced access to water, and food shortages. This threat must be faced.

2. Left unchecked, increased food prices will undermine the progress the world has made towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). And food is about land. For the truth of the matter is that most countries facing, or at risk of facing, a food crisis today are also those facing land degradation problems. It is also clear that climate change will hit the drylands hardest, with an expected severe decline in rainfall in most areas and further threats to food security. Therefore, securing the productivity of drylands, rehabilitating degraded land and enhancing land tenure regimes, as required by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), are indispensable steps the world must now take in the fight to prevent future structural food crises and to enhance our resilience to the impacts of climate change.

3. The benefits will be far-reaching, for investing in sustainable land management is a win-win response, as it also implies carbon sequestration in soils and vegetal cover, thus contributing to the mitigation of climate change.

4. **The bridge to local action:** Our Convention has a central role to play in securing the conditions essential to stable rural development, agricultural productivity and food security. Without it, all three will falter. Achieving the MDGs and fulfilling the mandates of the other two Rio Conventions on climate change and biodiversity preservation can be done only through proper implementation of the UNCCD. Quite literally, the UNCCD brings climate-change adaptation and mitigation down to earth, down to the land.

5. The Convention protects land as a global common. It is the responsibility of the international community to maintain this global common for the survival and livelihoods of future generations. Yet success will not come through international action alone. Sustainable Land Management (SLM) means local action. Building the bridge between global responsibility and local action is our challenge.

## II. Policy development

6. **The global context of desertification:** Today's global challenges comprise the threats of climate change, environmentally-induced migration, the food crisis, the rising demand for biofuels, conflicts in the drylands and poverty. However, these trends are reversible through improved policies, partnerships, innovative finance and communication, notably towards and at

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<sup>2</sup> Ecosystem services are the benefits and amenities generated for society by the existence and development of the natural environment: land, water and air, their flora and fauna and related ecosystems. There are three main types: disposal services act as an absorptive sink for waste and residuals, productive services include raw materials and energy used to produce goods and services as well as physical space, and consumption services provide for the physical and recreational needs of human beings.

the local level. Partnerships at all levels are the necessary building blocks of the required global coalition to combat desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD). Affected countries, in cooperation with the international community, are urged to move the issues of land management and soil conservation up their list of national and global priorities.

7. **Poverty and hunger:** The geography of endemic poverty and hunger coincides with the map of land degradation. The challenge of rising food prices is an additional crisis for the most vulnerable populations, an aggravation of the silent plight of the roughly one billion of the world's poorest people, most of them affected by DLDD. Food production systems under stress contribute to the "push" factors of enforced migrations and put at risk the human right to food. MDGs and food production targets to feed growing populations are unlikely to be met under the present trends regarding the loss of arable land. The implementation of the UNCCD ten-year strategic plan and framework (2008–2018) (The Strategy) must channel resources towards strategic fields of intervention such as soil fertility and sustainable water management, and must also be linked with national planning instruments such as poverty reduction strategies and agricultural policies.

8. **Climate change, land degradation and MDGs:** Today, climate change is forcing humanity to adjust the focus of international cooperation. By investing more in sustainable land management (SLM), the problems and goals of today (particularly MDG 1 on poverty and hunger and MDG 7 on the environment) can be addressed while helping to reduce the vulnerability, and enhance the resilience, of populations under climate stress tomorrow. Improved land management and rehabilitation, the cornerstone of the UNCCD national action programmes (NAPs), can be re-energized. By strongly linking the UNCCD NAPs with the UNFCCC national adaptation programmes of action (NAPAs), the necessary bridges between development and adaptation initiatives can be built, notably in the drylands.

9. **Biodiversity, forests and land degradation:** Land-use change is a major threat for biodiversity and an avoidable source of greenhouse gas emissions; continuous land-use changes are in turn driven by land degradation. There must therefore be recognition at the next Conference of the Parties in 2009 (COP 9) that investment in SLM is a prerequisite to achieving both biodiversity targets and forest protection while at the same time contributing to the mitigation of climate change.

10. **Rural development:** The participants at the HLPD shared the views recently expressed by the United Nations Secretary-General on the global food crisis, and felt that action must be taken with a greater sense of urgency and decisiveness. Not only must the immediate needs of vulnerable populations be met, the structural and policy issues that contribute to this crisis, such as trade, tax policies and land tenure, also need to be addressed.

### **III. Dialogue on mobilizing for a forward-looking strategy**

#### **A. The UNCCD reform agenda**

11. The UNCCD COP 8, held in Madrid in September 2007, mobilized a consensus amongst all Parties on the need to address the above-mentioned challenges. The adoption of The Strategy is an important impulse towards enhancing implementation of the Convention. Together with the

reform process of the UNCCD, The Strategy opens the way to a revitalized implementation process.

12. The participants at the Bonn High-Level Policy Dialogue (HLPD) fully endorse the UNCCD reform agenda, emphasizing synergistic action and coalition-building for full mobilization of all resources in order to achieve the Convention's global benefits.

13. They recognize that this reform agenda does not only belong to governments but must also involve civil society and, moreover, mobilize private-public partnerships.

14. They expect that better services will be delivered to Parties through the restructuring of the UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM), through consensus on expected deliverables through results-based management and through strategic plans and work programmes. They endorse the establishment of baselines and indicators through the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) and look forward to the benefits of assessment and lessons learned through the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC).

15. The secretariat is called upon to strengthen dialogue and consultation at the global and regional levels.

16. National efforts are needed on the part of affected countries in order to implement The Strategy. These efforts must be actively supported by, and integrated into, national planning and investment frameworks.

## **B. Financing The Strategy**

17. In future negotiations relating to investment for climate change and food security, Parties urgently need to highlight the win-win equation between sustainable land management, improving livelihoods and food security and mitigating climate change.

18. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is invited to simplify procedures further. The GEF secretariat and GEF Council members need to respond specifically to The Strategy with robust funding to combat land degradation. Experience with coherent programme approaches under the GEF, such as TerrAfrica, deserves our attention. This includes the joint formulation of investment strategies blending GEF finance with international funding and national counterpart funding, relying on diverse methods for multiple impacts and encouraging systematic coordination.

19. Governments, civil society and the private sector should together devise incentive systems for market-based funding mechanisms so as to encourage the restoration of degraded land.

## **C. Enhancing investment in land management**

20. The current food crisis and climate change issues are affecting mainly poor people in rural areas. The decline and neglect of investment in agriculture and land management since the mid-1980s are part of the problem. Participants at the HLPD emphasize that:

(a) Measures to counteract DLDD offer a direct entry point into reducing the vulnerability of people and ecosystems.

(b) Sustainable agriculture must be promoted through best practices and new conservation-oriented technologies, including mitigation through carbon sequestration and adaptation. Science and policy advocacy under The Strategy must now contribute actively to the dissemination of successful innovation, supportive land management and effective social practices.

(c) Market forces play a both positive and negative role. While the private sector can introduce necessary technology or generate off-farm income and thus alleviate pressure on land, it can also foster trading patterns that severely undermine local food production.

(d) Vast dryland areas might offer the potential to host sites for the production of a second generation of bio-fuels with the help of new technologies, thus generating income opportunities. Nevertheless, given the socio-economic and environmental risks, guidelines for sustainable bio-fuel production need to be developed.

(e) More synergism between the UNCCD, the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) and the UNFCCC at implementation level needs to be achieved. The UNCCD could recommend practical projects with a focus on increased land productivity, which simultaneously takes into account the issue of climate change and addresses biodiversity issues.

#### **IV. Parties' views on responses to emerging challenges. What can be done?**

21. The following elements should provide orientation and impetus to the thematic and substantive discussions at CRIC 7 and also help shape the agenda at COP 9 dealing with the priority fields of application of The Strategy.

##### **A. Partnership and shared responsibilities**

22. Implementing The Strategy is a matter of concern to all Parties to the Convention and demands their full commitment.

23. **Affected-country Parties** should prioritize the fight against DLDD, undertake the consequent governance and policy reforms, assure appropriate land tenure rights and provide for allocating funds in national budgets. NAPs should be harmonized and aligned with national development strategies and policies, fostering cooperation with civil society and the private sector.

24. **Developed-country Parties** should acknowledge the renewed relevance of DLDD in the context of the emerging food crisis, climate mitigation and adaptation, and biodiversity conservation. They are invited to earmark additional funds, before COP 9 takes place, in support of rural development, agriculture and food security as spelled out by strategic objective 4 of The Strategy.

25. **The UNCCD secretariat and the GM** are to give advice, support the sharing of experience and support advocacy and mainstreaming. Participants welcome the efforts and the progress of the secretariat in launching the reform process and look forward to more effective collaboration between the secretariat and the GM. They are in favour of the GM's role in supporting financial strategies for enhanced UNCCD implementation at national level.

26. **The role of the private sector** as an actor in implementing The Strategy needs to be promoted by all Parties.

## **B. Advocacy**

27. Critical action must be taken in consensus-building to reorient the Convention on the path towards concrete actions that benefit affected countries and help generate global benefits. The Convention carries an important message: land conservation is a global common and the land is the medium through which global food security, social security and peace, biodiversity, and mitigation of climate change can be achieved. The economic value of land conservation and restoration must be properly assessed under The Strategy. By setting a reference value for land as a public good, funds could be raised both to help finance programmes to combat DLDD and to clarify the Convention's contribution to assuring these vital services.

28. Calls were made for a "Stern report" on land degradation. Parties must follow through with their promise to consult and specify regional commitments for The Strategy before COP 9 in the autumn of 2009.

29. Parties and UNCCD bodies should advocate that the interrelation between DLDD and climate change adaptation and mitigation are made more explicit and recognized through institutional and financing arrangements in the post-Bali road map. They should also advocate programmatic and synergistic approaches for SLM under the GEF's fifth replenishment round (GEF 5: 2011–2015).

30. In the current post-Bali period of the UNFCCC process, the secretariats of the UNCCD, the UNFCCC and the CBD, together with the Rome-based agencies (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP)), should undertake pilot studies of joint implementation of measures to increase carbon sequestration in vegetation and soils.

31. Under GEF 5, support for The Strategy of the UNCCD could be emphasized through stronger scientific evidence, assessment and capacity-building, long-term monitoring, reduction of knowledge gaps and understanding of impacts. Advice regarding such knowledge should be made available to countries for action at the local level.

32. The UNCCD secretariat is invited to organize a global private-sector advocacy forum and to document economic opportunities in the drylands, with a view to a major information campaign.

### **C. Funding**

33. The promises made in Rio (1992), Monterrey (2002) and Gleneagles (2005), and the prospects for support to affected countries from the multilateral system, must refocus priorities onto the rural scene and the 2012 horizon when the Kyoto Protocol expires.

34. Measures for combating DLDD, including action programmes at all levels, will benefit from the necessary return of investment into rural development and sustainable land and water use. They should thus become an integral part of national and regional policies securing the conditions for agricultural production and food sustainability. Bilateral development partners and the investment banks must pro-actively integrate SLM into their policy and procedures. The COP should invite the secretariat and the GM to develop and propose a management matrix for such cooperation.

35. A fresh review of the current portfolios of the international financial institutions will help to identify the potential of DLDD investments in the context of agricultural sector programmes and rural development and their contribution to agricultural production.

36. Today, climate change must be regarded as one of the most important paradigms of international cooperation. Parties in the pertinent forums must gradually build an international land coalition and pursue advocacy for climate finance to combat land degradation. An aim for The Strategy should be increasingly to enable policy change and to assist affected countries in finding or fine-tuning access to existing, emerging or innovative climate funding, such as market-based mechanisms or carbon funding. Resources such as the \$25 billion dollar International Development Association (IDA) replenishment in the World Bank, which includes adaptation as a cross-cutting issue, might thus be used to implement The Strategy at country level.

37. Efforts must be taken to resist the tendency to marginalize UNCCD issues within GEF finance, and the building of links between the GEF and the UNCCD NAPs must be facilitated. In order to foster implementation of The Strategy, Parties should set markers for assessing the effectiveness of the Convention, including quantitative targets.

### **D. Knowledge and science**

38. Parties stress the lack of consistent assessment of economic and financial losses resulting from DLDD and the related loss of ecosystem services, as well as the neglect of the potential of drylands for alternative income generation. The absence of the topic of land degradation in discussion of the current food price crisis suggests that UNCCD actors must build their capacity to deliver ready-made information, arguments and solutions whenever the situation calls for them.

39. In addition, The Strategy needs quantitative goals, underpinned by evidence-based facts and a clear assessment methodology, in order to attract investment.

40. Work towards a better understanding of the existing links between climate change adaptation and mitigation schemes for drought preparedness on the one hand and mitigation in



the UNCCD context on the other must be undertaken. This includes issues to do with drought risk management.

41. To buttress the knowledge base on livelihood, climate change and biodiversity, it would be appropriate to create an intergovernmental panel on land and soil. In the interim, a report on climate and land degradation by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) would be welcome.

42. A methodology should be developed and presented to the Clean Development Mechanism Executive Board to identify the land, agriculture and sequestration nexus. Together with this, major data providers and analysts should team up under the Convention's reformed CST in order to articulate the trends of land degradation and its effects on food security, other relevant MDGs, climate change and loss of biodiversity.

43. Analysis of successes and failures and scientific output on data, facts and trends must be made more informative in order to enable policy choices. It is particularly necessary that enhanced scientific information on DLDD should motivate policy makers who do not always have at hand the necessary materials for addressing longer-term environmental challenges.

44. Robust science that can strengthen the evidence base for sound environmental and socio-economic policy on land- and soil-related issues under The Strategy must be encouraged.

#### **E. Regional implementation**

45. Given the structure of the Convention, cooperation within regions will continue to be an important vehicle through which to address DLDD. Regional coordination mechanisms should pave the way for effective implementation.

46. Better scientific dialogue and regional studies could investigate concrete needs and activities which create real comparative advantage by addressing them at the regional rather than the global or national level. Such issues might include, for example, a better division of labour for analytical work and application research, management of trans-border ecosystems, such as joint management of watersheds, leveraging the potential of economies of scale for administration and implementation of certain programmes, and the development of financial strategies.

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