

April 20, 2007

## UNCCD

### E-DN COMMENTS ABOUT THE IIWG TEN-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN AND THE RELATED VISION DOCUMENT

#### I - SOME OVERARCHING COMMENTS

**1 - The IIWG must urgently be requested to bring in more depth into the paper.** If the depth of the paper remains as it is, it will not add too much value to the existing discussions within the CCD process. The CCD Convention is very holistic (and rightly so) and therefore it would be very important that within defined periods of 5 or 10 years it focuses on some topics. E-DN recommends that clearly delineated strategic plans should from now on be defined in 5 to 10 years time concentrating on identifying and addressing timely topics. Global Change issues (climate, social...) are currently impacting and changing necessary strategies and tools at such a short pace, that the CCD aims have to be checked and may be redirected at very short intervals. Also, if a topical focus is not created then this risk is great that various subjects will be touched upon and nothing will be finalized due to lack of time and resources. So, E-DN suggests a better focus on specific topics with a strong interdisciplinary networking to address these topics adequately.

**2 - Regarding monitoring, E-DN suggests incorporating a set of indicators that address the multi-objectives of dryland degradation (desertification) and (rural) poverty in drylands at all levels.** UNCCD by its mandate deals with the complex, multi-faceted problem of desertification. Due to this multi-disciplinary aspect, the objectives and problems of desertification are not associated with a clear picture in the public, such as is the case of the UNFCCC where climate change can conveniently be summed up in, say, one figure (global warming in °C over a period of time). However, this perceived weakness can also become the strength of the UNCCD. UNCCD should be positively dwelling on the interdisciplinary nature of the desertification problem and its possible solutions, and find new ways of conveying the multi-faceted, interdisciplinary notion of desertification. One first and most important step would be to set up monitoring systems that should always be multi-purpose, including biophysical indicators (e.g soil quality, vegetation cover) as well as economic ones (e.g. poverty indicators in dryland households).

**3 - Currently, it is absolutely necessary to elicit and develop detailed pathways, milestones and indicators for preventing and combating desertification.** Not everything has to be investigated again and again. Since the 70ies indicator sets have been developed and discussed by various scientists. A kind of idea that E-DN would like to push is that a (research) initiative should help the

CCD to bring together these existing indicators, evaluate them, see what is relevant, identify missing indicators and then specifically ask for concentrated research activities to develop mechanisms to fill these gaps in the indicator lists.

#### **4 - Especially recently it has being criticised that social science is not strong in the CCD process.**

Looking for instance at the different national Roster of Experts or even the national research networks of European DesertNet evidences that natural science dominate. This dominance leads to an unsatisfactory supply of information on such important CCD topics like migration, poverty... So, E-DN highly recommends that the presence of social science should be just as strong as natural sciences in the entire CCD process. In the next 10 years E-DN would like to ask the IIWG to specifically address the strengthening of social and economic indicators for identifying lessons learnt and success stories and, thus, also to strengthen the focus of the CCD to adequately address poverty reduction, migration issues and food security (these are also major MDGs). The often random use of these social terminologies underscores the weakness of societal science in the entire CCD process. E-DN considers that a clear differentiation in the terminology between socio-economic and social and economic development should be made. In most cases it appears that the latter is actually meant in the IIWG plan.

**5 - E-DN strongly suggests that ways should be found to define/consolidate how science and scientific networks can contribute to the process of translating science in to action.** Also CCD/CST has to formulate concrete needs (contents and structures) to the scientific community.

These overarching comments can be taken into due consideration in each part of the IIWG ten years strategic plan and of the 'options for implementation' plan.

## **II - TEN-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN**

### **VISION**

**E-DN globally agrees** with such a vision that goes beyond physical considerations to clearly address social and economic issues within an UN framework, which is the relevant one. It is suggested however that the mission should also include preventive aspects so that land degradation/desertification and thus cost-intensive rehabilitation and restoration measures are not necessary in the first place. From a scientific point of view this would require a totally different set of technical and institutional tools and must thus be referred to specifically in the vision. Suggestion for the wording "*A world where land degradation/desertification is prevented and trends are reversed...*"

### **MISSION**

**E-DN globally agrees** with that topic that is coherent with the vision. It may raise 'political' (in the widest sense) problems that need to be identified and addressed in a diplomatic way. Some of these points are addressed hereunder. Again, UN is the proper framework.

It is suggested however that the development of a global framework should consider/integrate appropriate existing (political, institutional, networking and NGO's...) structures to prevent and reverse land degradation/desertification trends and mitigate the effects of drought and climate variability, thus, adding value and avoiding redundant work and structures.

Taking into account Comments 2 and 4, instead of "Provide a global framework to support the development and implementation of national and regional policies, programmes and measures to reverse land degradation/desertification trends and mitigate the effects of drought and climate variability through scientific and technological excellence, standard setting, advocacy and resource mobilization.", **E-DN suggests including as a foremost strategic need** for the next ten years to be more specific and highlight the importance of developing a proper monitoring system and a system of acknowledged benchmark indicators for improved land resources and economic success in drylands, by formulating as follows: "Provide a global framework to support the development and

implementation of national and regional policies, programmes and measures to prevent and to reverse land degradation/desertification trends and mitigate the effects of drought and climate variability through scientific and technological excellence; standard setting; more specifically the promotion of the establishment of a common monitoring and referencing system, as well as benchmark indicators by which to measure progress in reversing land degradation and enhancing economic well-being; advocacy and resource mobilization.”

According to Comment 3, such indicators should be based on existing ones, or new indicators can be created - the role of science in this selection and identification process is crucial. Certainly, some indicators will be more easily monitored than others (e.g. vegetation indices can be monitored from satellite images, whereas soil salinization processes or household poverty indicators will have to be elicited from ground work). The affected countries should be enabled – either by own funds or transfer of funds from developed countries – to set up the necessary monitoring facilities so that a uniform picture of the desertification baseline – in biophysical as well as economic and social terms – can be taken globally, and updated every 5 years.

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1**

**E-DN globally agrees with that strategic objective.** The actual issue is how to implement it – which is addressed further on.

However, one missing element here is the rehabilitation of degraded land and its associated benefits for biological diversity and climate change mitigation. This could easily be included under impact 1.3, as follows: “Global benefits and synergies are generated through the protection and rehabilitation of land and water resources, thereby contributing to the conservation of biodiversity and the mitigation of climate change”.

Also, a specific suggestion for Impact 1.3 is the following one. Developing synergies in plans and actions between CCD, CBD and FCCC is highly recommended in order to appropriately address the bullet point 1.3 on the conservation of biodiversity and the mitigation of climate change. Scientific panels and networks (e.g. IPCC, European DesertNet...) could create independent scientific communication networks to enhance the effectiveness and depth of existing joint programmes between the conventions and identify and fill gaps in addressing relevant issue within the networking of the conventions.

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2**

**E-DN globally agrees with that strategic objective.**

However, from a semantic point of view, a differentiated use of the terminology *socioeconomic* and “*social and economic*” is needed for sake of clarity and to avoid possible misunderstandings. It would certainly be better to use the terms “social and economic” in this paper (see bullet point Impact 2.2).

About Impact 2.1: “*The vulnerability of land and water resources and ecosystems to climate change and drought is reduced through the application of adapted land and water use patterns and practices*”, using the word “adapted” implies that once changes have been made to existing patterns and practices, the work is complete. E-DN suggests that “adapted” should be altered to say “adaptive” which would imply an element of dynamism under changing conditions and the iterative adaptation of practices.

## **OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE 1**

**E-DN sees this point as more critical.**

First of all, E-DN suggests to UNCCD to formalize existing links and establish new ones to scientific research networks regarding desertification. Desertification is a complex problem and requires scientific input from many disciplines. The present way of embedding science into the UNCCD via CST and GoE needs to be reformed. IIWG may wish to consider more specific ways of addressing this link, e.g. by linking up with the existing scientific networks more directly and efficiently.

More specifically, E-DN suggests also for UNCCD to link up with international research institutes dealing with land use and agriculture, most specifically conservation agriculture, and possibly, organic farming opportunities as a ways to effectively generate income. Desertification is promoted by human land use. Land use is mostly through agriculture. E-DN recommends a better linking of UNCCD with international agricultural research institutions, e.g. with those of the CGIAR system, as well as renowned national institutions of international recognition where pertinent. The introduction of such approaches should be multi-disciplinary, and be based on needs and opportunities analysis.

These suggestions are well in line with overarching recommendations 1, 2, 4, 5.

As a general statement, it should be understood that scientists are rarely guided by top-down directives. It is quite difficult for UNCCD to establish itself as “*coordinating a global network of scientists and such establish itself as an authority of scientific and technological excellence*”. This can be achieved only if bottom-up and top-down initiatives meet together. As a consequence, operational objective 1 should be expressed in a more flexible way to avoid counterproductive reactions. E-DN is a quite significant example of this convergence, since basically E-DN works only because there is a consensus between individual scientists. E-DN can join its forces with the above suggested research networks according to best scientific practices, such creating a sound scientific background for UNCCD to operate.

Also, effective knowledge sharing systems cannot be derived only from top-down objectives, but green lights from top levels are mandatory. The Ondongwa Declaration shows a scientific consensus about such an objective, but collecting and sharing data is not only a scientific issue. Policy makers have to be implied to agree with national data sharing (no data implies no practical knowledge). This may prove sensitive for various reasons (political and economic competition between countries must always be kept in mind behind generous but not binding declarations). Some scientists do not share the “Ondongwa vision” in order to block scientific competition. Actually, the development and acceptance of Data Sharing Ethics are immensely important in order to guarantee the continuous exchange of data and information. It should also be considered to discuss – as far as possible – standards for data so that within a global networking policy for sustainable development discussions and implementations can be sufficiently supported. It would be short-sighted vision to consider standardization just as a technical issue. Actually ‘Political’ implications lie behind it.

Global long-term monitoring capacity raises a critical issue: turning scientific observation networks to an operational phase (e.g. ROSELT), which raises funding and capacity building issues. GTOS (Global Terrestrial Observing System) is well aware of it.

E-DN globally agrees with Outcome 1.5, where knowledge of the interactions between social and economic factors- including poverty and migration- policy frameworks and ecosystem conditions is improved. E-DN suggests that “health” should be added alongside poverty and migration as it is a central factor at the level of land management and affects the implementation of sustainable practices.

In a more general way, E-DN also underlines that it raises the issue of interdisciplinary science, which is by no ways limited to desertification integrated science issue, but raises complex questions that have to be addressed from a broad scientific policy point of view.

## **OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE 2**

**E-DN globally agrees with that strategic objective, with some ‘caveats’.**

NAP are indeed the key issue, since the political decision framework is national. This does not mean that SRAP, RAP (plus international scientific standardizations efforts such as AID-CCD) are worthless – they have to bring their contribution to the overall coherence – but they need to be build and/or consolidated through bottom-up consensus from national managers. Syndromes such as ‘Not Invented Here’ or ‘National Sovereignty Violation’ have to be avoided. Coherence can be brought mainly through ‘facilitators’, not by people bringing turnkey solutions or even proposals.

## **OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE 3**

**E-DN fully agrees with that strategic objective.**

Building a consensus on it is certainly the less touchy part.

## OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE 4

**E-DN globally agrees with that strategic objective with some serious ‘caveats’.**

For that operational objective also (see operational objective 1) and for similar reasons linked to overarching comment 2, E-DN suggests to UNCCD to formalize existing links and establish new ones to scientific research networks regarding desertification.

An important omission here is the potential for the UNCCD to play a key role in working towards the Millennium Development Goals (especially 1 & 7). To reflect this, Outcome 4.2 could be amended to read: *“All Parties advocate the UNCCD as a key instrument for sustainable development, poverty alleviation and recognise its potential role in helping to achieve the MDGs.”*

In order to support global commitment on advocacy, awareness raising and education, it is suggested to include a bullet point stating that the CCD and national, regional and international networks strengthen information communication links among each other on all relevant initiatives because not only UNCCD should be represented in all relevant fora (bullet point 4.6) but also the e.g. scientific community, as a major partner for supporting sustainable development. This is one reason why the German Desert\*Net during the last two years undertook the effort to strive for and achieve a legal status in order to be able to participate and debate at official UN debates. Whether renowned national and international scientific networks in future should have to undergo this tedious and lengthy procedure of achieving a legal status in order to contribute to UN meetings should be considered. Finding more flexible solutions would be beneficial.

It is also suggested that 4.5 could be more diplomatically worded in line with above comments (avoiding the feeling of a ‘top-down’ or ‘imperialist’ approach).

In Outcome 4.6, again, human health which is a central component in pursuing SLM and sustainability goals is missing. To address this, E-DN suggests that 4.6 could be rephrased as follows: *“UNCCD is appropriately represented in relevant international fora, including those pertaining to agricultural trade, adaptation to climate change, biodiversity, rural development, sustainable development, human health and poverty alleviation”*.

## OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE 5

**E-DN sees this is as a positive but quite critical point which needs to be cautiously addressed,** because (among others):

- For developed countries, some political and/or strategic interests may lie behind supporting developing countries, so establishing a common platform may be very touchy. Bringing coherence in providing resources seems a more realistic approach. In addition, newcomers such as large developing countries have to be taken into account (see for instance the growing cooperation policy between China and Africa).
- There should be some feedback about efficiency of support, which can raise ‘technical’ problems in defining evaluation tools, but also and mainly ‘political’ problems (again ‘National Sovereignty Violation’ syndromes or even problems with some peculiar interests). The hard point is that such issues are never discussed in that way, so they have to be diplomatically anticipated. But it is clear also that without such feedback and efficiency evidence, donors (and public opinion) will tend to be more and more reluctant. General public opinion in developed countries is usually generous, prone to solidarity and ready to bring support to less favoured people, but knows that conflicts, powerful local lobbies, political issues... make this support poorly efficient (except perhaps when led by reliable NGO’s), which makes it much more reluctant or at least careful and sensitive to proved positive achievements.
- Outcome 5.3 is certainly a promising initiative that could solve some of the problems raised above.
- Also, implementing outcome 5.4 must be balanced between support to governments and direct support to local populations – the most adequate actor for this being endorsed NGO’s.

## IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

### E-DN globally agrees with that implementation framework

- E-DN agrees with the paragraph “All Parties” about appointed people, provided that the above ‘caveats’ are taken into due consideration.
- E-DN agrees also with the paragraph ‘Developed Countries Parties’ provided that the above ‘caveats’ are taken into due consideration (especially operational objective 5)
- COP – here, E-DN underlines again that ‘*enhance its authority*’ is probably not the wisest way to express the idea lying behind. ‘*Mobilisation capacity*’, ‘*emergency coordination platform*’ would probably be a most adequate wording.
- GEF – here E-DN fully agrees, but once again touchy feedback issues will have to be addressed.
- NGO – E-DN fully agrees and considers that point as a crucial one. The role of NGO’s must be enhanced, but again this may be a touchy exercise since this can be perceived by government authorities as shortcuts (which actually is more or less true – a high level of diplomacy is needed here).

## NEXT STEPS

**E-DN has no comments which could not be derived from above.** The idea of indicators and targets meet some of the above recommendations.

## IN SHORT

**This plan was much needed. In E-DN’s mind, the guidelines are right, but several ‘caveats’ have to be underlined.**

UNCCD should avoid any concept of wording implying a ‘top down approach’, both for scientists, governments, NGO’s and local populations (which are (significantly?) absent from that text). It would be better to see it as a coordinating unit (in short) acting under the auspices and authority of UN within the framework of a non binding multilateral Convention. This is not in contradiction with the text, but this ‘subsidiary’ vision should be better developed and be the very leading idea lying behind the wording of this 10 year strategic plan. Strengthening the role of social sciences within an interdisciplinary approach and clarifying the role of science in the overall process, better coordinating with other UN multilateral Conventions, better taking into account the MDG’s are also mandatory items to be better defined/refined. Some specific points have to be deepened in order to make this strategic plan a sound basis for the 10 years to come.

## III – “OPTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION” PLAN

The implementation plan derives from the ten-year strategic plan. So, all the comments made by E-DN are applicable *mutatis mutandis* to the implementation plan, and the suggested amendments also to apply to relevant sections of the “options” document.

E-DN finds evidence through the presented options that strengthening the RCUs to provide scientific liaison services would benefit all aspects of UNCCD implementation, while a more decentralised approach would more accurately reflect the overall approach of the UNCCD. From a scientific viewpoint, if an appropriate infrastructure could be established (e.g. as in option 3 page 5) it would enhance the contribution of networks such as European Desertnet and offer the possibility for more meaningful scientific input to meet the objectives of both the network and the UNCCD.

**In the section: “The CST”, Option 1** could also seek to improve in-country links between national representatives on the roster of experts and the National Focal Point and his/her ministry. This could

entail a clearer selection methodology for experts representing the national level, as well as better definition of the Terms of Reference for experts on the roster of experts.

**The section “The CST”, Option 2: revised mandates:** *“The CST is given a new focus on soil fertility, irrigation techniques or erosion control”* calls for some comments from E-DN. While E-DN can see the value to be gained from this, perhaps it would benefit from clearer articulation that although soil fertility is within the field of expertise of soil scientists, it also has a strong socio-economic element. Therefore, experts involved in addressing this focus should include those from a cross-section of environmental science and social science disciplines. The text may need to be changed to reflect this balance more clearly. This is consistent with E-DN’s overarching recommendation 4 about bridging social and physical sciences in an interdisciplinary approach.

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