



AFRICAN UNION

**Strengthening the role of Science and Technology in combating
desertification in Africa: Follow up on the 1st STC Decision**

Background Paper

For information to the Ministers

**2nd Conference of the STC on Agriculture,
Rural Development, Water and Environment**

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Strengthening the role of Science and Technology in combating desertification in Africa: Follow up on the 1st STC Decision

Background

Africa continent is facing mounting development challenges. Environmental deterioration is making the situation worse. In recent years, most regions have experienced frequent floods and severe droughts leading to destruction of property and loss of life in some cases and also land degradation. Climate change is projected to make desertification even worse. The recently agreed SDGs in its objective 15.3 acknowledges the crucial issue of land degradation and the Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) was set as one of the targets to be achieved by the year 2030. Addressing the Desertification properly and strengthening resilience to Climate Change are key factors to making many African countries achieve sustainable development while contributing to peace and security globally.

The African Heads of States and Governments through the ambitious Decisions in 2013 (Resolution 479(XXI) and 2014 (Decision 492(XXII) have expressed their strong commitment toward the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in Africa.

The African Union Commission (AUC) was requested to take actions and implement programmes in order to assist Members States in tackling Desertification and Land degradation in the continent.

Objectives

In 2015, in a follow up to the above mentioned directives, the Semi-Arid Food Grain Research and Development Office (SAFGRAD) of the African Union (AU) in Burkina Faso launched an investigation to determine how future inputs of science and technology findings can support policy making in combating land degradation and desertification in Africa. One of the main objectives includes how the Science and Technical Correspondents (STC's) and National Focal Points (NFPs) collaborate at national and sub regional levels and how they can support the Bureau Committee of Science and Technology (CST), a subsidiary body of the UNCCD. All these targets could be achieved by establishing a Center of Excellence (CoE) for DLDD in each sub-region in Africa, by having more and regular meetings between STCs to provide a better advisory structure regarding UNCCD matters in Africa.

Four substantive decisions were made by the STC which includes:

- Urge continental, regional and national institutions to facilitate the collaboration between STCs, NFPs and policy makers.
- Request each sub-region to work closely with support of the AUC to identify and strengthen at least one centre of excellence to stimulate the exchange of scientific data and enhance collaboration between scientists and policymakers in the sub-regions.
- Request the AUC, RECs, Member States and development partners to facilitate, promote and provide the necessary resources for strengthening the role of science and technology in combating desertification in Africa.
- Request AUC to strengthen its specialized technical office for Semi-Arid Food Grains Research and Development (AU-SAFGRAD) by increasing the human capital in the areas of land degradation, water resources, irrigation, and partnerships to ensure critical mass of expertise for execution of its mandate.

Hence, the objective of this paper is to update on the implementation of the decision and seeks for guidance for futures actions

Follow up on the 2015 STC Decision

Whereas the negotiation and decision making processes should be backed up by sound scientific data, the participation of African scientists remains weak. In implementing the inaugural session of STC Decision in engaging knowledgeable scientists, AU-SAFGRAD in collaboration with partners has organised the first Scientific and Technical Correspondents (STC) meeting in margin of the Pre-COP 13 preparatory meeting in Nairobi. The meeting constitutes a unique opportunity for STCs and NFPs to interact and exchange views on Africa common positions in relation to Desertification and Drought. Operationalisation of the Science Policy Interface (SPI) seeks to link scientific knowledge with decision-making; this goes a long way in strengthening the link between the two entities and also with other actors like Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and development partners at the continent level. Sustainable land management is a key for addressing desertification/land degradation and drought, climate change mitigation and adaptation; rehabilitation, restoration and reclamation measures and practices in degraded lands. There is also a strong need to promote the analysis, dissemination and accessibility of best practices to all Members States.

Furthermore the meeting came up with key recommendations for better involvement and engagement of African Scientists in the UNCCD process. Particularly, the specific recommendations on the LDN conceptualization are submitted for discussion to the COP13 in China. These recommendations include:

1. Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN)

- The meeting recommends widening the LDN indicators capturing socio-economic aspects in order to include aspects of human behaviour and poverty particularly in the African context.
- The meeting recommends mainstreaming LDN indicators and activities within the appropriate national development frameworks to improve synergies at national level.
- The meeting noted that monitoring of the three proposed LDN indicators is lacking due to harmonised methodology, capacity, and financial assistance. The Conference further recommends that those aspects be addressed at national, sub regional and regional levels.

2. Centres of Excellence

- The meeting recommends that AU SAFGRAD, in close collaboration with the 5 RECs, identify and evaluate the skills and inputs by different organisations at national and sub-regional levels that meet the developed criteria important for the UNCCD.
- The meeting reaffirms that the Centres of Excellence, in addition to their scientific and technical expertise, will include networking activities within the sub-region.
- The meeting recommends AU SAFGRAD to network the identified Centres of Excellence.

3. Regular STC meetings

- The meeting recommends that the reporting to the CST should be a combined effort between African STCs and NFPs.
- The meeting recommends member States, RECs, AU SAFGRAD and development partners to contribute to strengthen STCs capacity in order to bring substantive inputs to STCs discussions that could be used by NFPs.
- The meeting recommends organising annually sub-regional meetings that include NFPs and STCs and regionally every two years a meeting between the STCs and the NFPs for the preparation of the COP in the same year.
 - The meeting encourages member States, RECs, AUC and development partners to support the above mentioned meetings

Roles and responsibilities

The implementation of these recommendations is of responsibility of all stakeholders starting at national and sub regional level. African Union Commission (AUC) through the AU-SAFGRAD will play key role in coordination and facilitation of all the processes. Regional Economic Communities

(RECs) are expected to be leading in putting in place the centers of Excellence. UNCCD and relevant partners will assist in conceptualizing the scientific framework for LDN at continental level.

Recommendations for the 2nd STC meeting

1. The STC to recommend that the reporting to the Committee of Science and Technology (CST) should be a combined effort between African Science and Technical Correspondents (STCs) and National Focal Points (NFPs).
2. The STC to recommend that member States, RECs, AU SAFGRAD and development partners to contribute to strengthen Science and Technical Correspondents (STCs) capacity in order to bring substantive inputs to STCs discussions that could be used by National Focal Points (NFPs).
3. The STC to request each REC to organise annually that include National Focal Points (NFPs) and Science and Technical Correspondents (STCs) and continentally every two years a meeting between the STCs and the NFPs for the preparation of the COP in the same year.