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**REPORT ON THE TRAINING OF AFRICAN NEGOTIATORS ON THE UNITED
NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION
(UNCCD)**

ALGIERS, ALGERIA, 10-11 SEPTEMBER 2011

**Report on the Training of African Negotiators on the United Nations
Convention to Combat Desertification
(UNCCD)**

Objective of the Mission

The objective of the mission was for the MEAs Project to organize in collaboration with the Republic of Algeria and the Secretariat of the UNCCD a training workshop for UNCCD negotiators in Algiers, in preparation for the upcoming Conference of Parties of the UNCCD.

Background

The Capacity Building Project on Multilateral Environmental Agreements (the MEAs Project) is an EU-funded project within the Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA) with main objective of strengthening the capacity of African ACP countries, the African Union Commission and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to effectively implement or coordinate implementation of MEAs with the view of positively impacting on sustainable development and poverty reduction on the continent. As part of the implementation of its program, the MEAs Project is supporting activities related to enhancement of negotiation skills on MEAs, such as that of the UNCCD.

The UNCCD is one of the major conventions that emerged from the Rio Earth Summit and entered into force in 1996. The Convention has more than 180 country Parties and all 53 countries of Africa have ratified it. It is actually the only Rio Convention initiated by Africa; hence its particularity. The Convention has been specifically set up to address the problem of desertification. Desertification is at the root of political and socio-economic problems and poses a threat to the environmental equilibrium in affected regions. Desertification can lead to land areas being vulnerable to flood, can cause soil salination resulting in the deterioration of the quality of water, as well as silting of rivers, streams and reservoirs. It is therefore a phenomenon that can worsen poverty, forcing people to migrate to more fertile lands. Since desertification is closely linked with global climate change and loss of biodiversity, synergies are strongly encouraged between the three so-called Rio Conventions - the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the UNCCD and the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) and to coordinate activities related to environmental protection and natural resource management. In fact, it is predicted that some 60 million people will move from the desert areas of Sub-Saharan Africa towards northern Africa and Europe in the next 20 years. The UNCCD has therefore been established to address desertification, a serious problem which is particularly affecting Africa. Since the coming into force of the UNCCD, several meetings of the Conference of the Parties and other subsidiary meetings have been held in which countries and regions engaged in negotiations to see that their interests are considered in the Convention.

African countries at the last session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the UNCCD Convention held in Bonn in February 2011 expressed their concerns that their limited capacities in negotiation is affecting their ability to effectively ensure that the decisions made during the COPs are reflecting the African needs, and these concerns were communicated to the African Union Commission. The Commission has been actively participating in the COPs of the UNCCD, albeit as an observer, in providing invaluable support to facilitate meetings of the African negotiators. Despite these efforts, negotiations in the interest of Africa have been so far not very effective due to lack of a proper coordination mechanism. It is against this background that the AUC decided to engage with partners to train African negotiators of the UNCCD, with financial contribution of US\$20,000 from the MEAs Project. This training is also important in that it is a key milestone towards the achievement of the objectives of the MEAs Project.

Introduction

The MEAs Project in collaboration with the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), the Government of Algeria, the UINCCD Secretariat and the UNCCD Global Mechanism organized a two days training workshop back-to-back with the Regional Consultation Meeting on UNCCD, in Algiers, Algeria, from 10-11 September 2011. Due to budgetary constraints, the training was attended by only 23 participants drawn from the 5 regions of Africa and their selection was based on the criteria of not only equitable geographical representation but also on the fact that they represent Africa on the core themes of the UNCCD negotiations. They were also selected because they confirmed their availability for COP 10. About ten Algerian students also attended the training as observers. The training was facilitated by a resource person from Benin and two experts from UNEP. The AUC (DREA and MEAs Project) co-sponsored all the resource persons, experts and negotiators. The AUC was represented by the MEAs Project Coordinator, Ms. Fatoumata Jallow Ndoeye; the Policy Officer for Desertification and Land Degradation, Mr. Almami Dampha; and the Account Assistant for the MEAs Project, Mr. Patrick Aplogan.

Opening statements were made by the UNCCD Representative, the UNEP Representative and the AUC Representative in the person of Mr. Almami Dampha. In his statement, Mr. Dampha talked about the excellent relationship between UNEP, the UNCCD and the AUC and the importance that the AUC attaches to the UNCCD negotiations and hence the need to enhance their capacity. He thanked the Government and people of Algeria for their hospitality and expressed gratitude to the European Union, UNEP and UNCCD Secretariat for their collaboration with the AUC to hold the training.

The Opening statements were followed by a power point presentation made by the MEAs Project Coordinator. In her presentation she reminded the participants of the importance of the MEAs Project for Africa, the activities undertaken and planned by the MEAs Project, the constraints encountered at member state level in the implementation of the project, and the important partnership forged with institutions like UNEP, UNCCD, the Food and Agricultural Organization, the Global Environmental Facility, the Strategic Approach to Integrated

Chemicals Management (SAICM), Regional Economic Communities, regional scientific centers.

Training Workshop Objectives

The objectives of the training were:

- To strengthen the negotiation capacities of African negotiators on UNCCD
- To better prepare the negotiators for future negotiations
- To secure a common African position on specific issues of relevance to the continent.
- To ensure that Africa's interests during the upcoming and other UNCCD COPs would be better defended

Training Sessions

The workshop took the form of presentations by the resource persons followed by discussions and clarifications. The focus of all the presentations was on the positions adopted during the previous 3 days of consultation and to strategize on how to promote and develop them, bearing in mind the upcoming UNCCD COP. The plenary sessions were co-chaired by UNEP, UNCCD and AUC. The AUC delegation made substantial contribution to the discussions and recommendations.

The second half of Day 1 was devoted to group work on resolutions/decisions in which two separate groups were each requested to draft a Decision and to present the Decision at plenary.

Simulation Exercises

3 simulation exercises were conducted in Day 2 in which participants represented negotiators from countries from different regions of the world (China, EU, Italy, etc) and even a participant representing the AU as an observer and lobbying in the corridors for Africa's interests.

The simulation exercises were as below:

- 1st simulation exercise: This session entailed plenary simulation where participants on the basis of positions developed were requested to make general opening statements, specific statements on the simulated issue and proposed drafting text for the draft decision.
- 2nd simulation exercise: This exercise focused on Contact/Drafting Groups; On the basis of general and specific statements made in Plenary, participants were requested to form Contact Groups or Drafting Groups to negotiate and draft decision (one or two key paragraphs) for consideration and adoption by Plenary

- 3rd simulation exercise: This was a plenary simulation: participants in this exercise were requested to debate, consider and adopt the proposed draft decision.

After the simulation exercises there was plenary in which there was feedback and discussions on the simulations. At the end of the training exercises, the AUC requested participants to complete evaluation forms in which they were also asked to give not only their impressions but also the impact the training had on them. The AUC also invited the negotiators to register on the data base of African experts on MEAs established for the MEAs Project by the AUC Department of Communication.

Key Issues dealt with at the training workshop:

- priority issues and expected outcome at COP 10
- importance of the COP agenda, particularly COP 10 and familiarising with the background documents
- key issues likely to create controversies and those of priority for Africa at COP 10
- Africans preparation including selecting the right delegation, identifying lead negotiator; knowing the various players, coordinating with countries with similar interests, preparing negotiation checklist and delegate's brief
- Importance of good negotiation strategies including defining options; tactics and techniques; adversarial and problem-solving orientations; making good interventions; strengthening negotiating positions such as making alliances to strengthen negotiating positions
- African participation in debates and working groups in COPs including the attributes of a good negotiator, etiquette and effect of negotiating language
- Importance and mechanisms of environmental diplomacy in resolutions and decisions
- Synergies among instruments and processes

Impact of the training:

From the evaluation forms completed by the participants, it was revealed that:

- the training was very good, timely and apt for the participants
- the subjects were relevant, educative and useful to the participants
- the negotiators were more confident and courageous to participate in international negotiations
- the negotiators were better focused and more articulate on MEAs in general and the UNCCD in particular
- the process to reach a common position was better understood by the negotiators

- the participants were better aware of the common interest for Africa and the need for a common position and cohesion
- the group will negotiate better in the contact groups during the future COPs
- the UNCCD structures were better understood
- the challenges involved for African negotiators was better understood
- the negotiators were better prepared and equipped to negotiate internationally and to tackle challenges because the techniques and strategies of negotiations were better understood
- the negotiators were pleased and satisfied with the leadership role played by the African Union Commission and the interest it showed in the negotiation process.

Recommendations:

The following were the workshop recommendations:

- More training sessions should be conducted and for future training, more simulation exercises should be done
- Training sessions should be longer
- Francophone African negotiators should be supported to enhance their knowledge in the English language as this is the sole language used in most contact groups
- The representatives in the different contact groups should be supported so that they would arrive earlier than other participants at COPs to enable them better review and discuss the African position
- African Union Commission should continue to be proactively involved in MEAs negotiations

Way Forward:

- The African Union Commission to mobilize more resources to conduct such training
- African negotiators to put into practice at COP 10 the knowledge and skills acquired during the training



