prais

briefing

2. Results

Fostering evidence-based decision-making in UNCCD implementation: Initial results from PRAIS reports in 2010

Summary

The 2008-2018 UNCCD Strategic Plan introduced the 'Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System' (PRAIS), which developed and piloted a new monitoring, assessment, reporting and review system. The system provides the first authoritative baseline on the implementation of the Convention against its Operational Objectives.

PRAIS has revealed a mixed level of progress towards targets. High levels of progress have been achieved towards targets on advocacy, awareness, education, capacity building, science technology and knowledge but limited progress has been made on targets related to the policy framework and financing and technology transfer (Figure 1).

Overall, PRAIS has been a successful pilot of the UNCCD performance indicators and provides the first baseline of the implementation of the Convention by Parties. Future improvements in reporting and analysis techniques during future iterations and addition of impact indicators will further improve the reliability and validity of results out of this system.

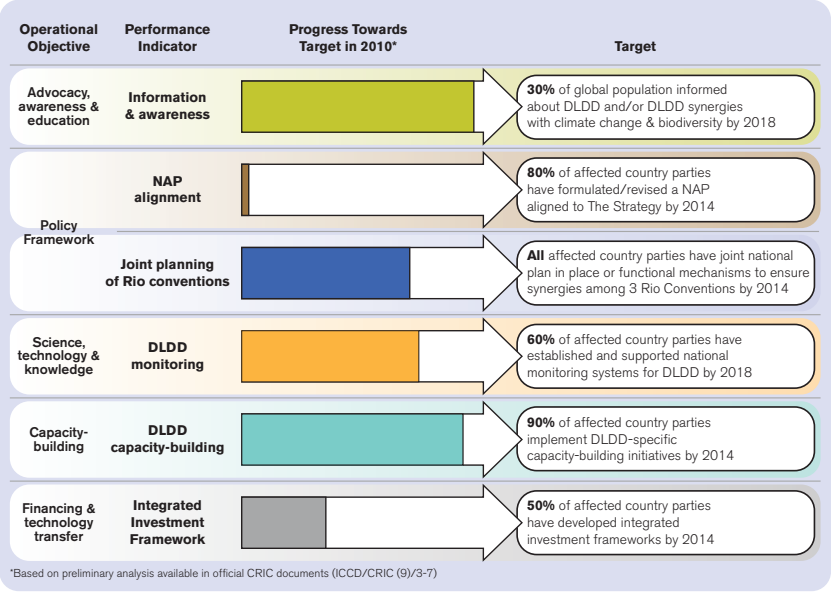

Figure 1 – Level of progress towards UNCCD targets in 2010

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Introduction

In 2007, Parties to the United Nation's Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) adopted a 10-Year Strategic Plan to revitalise implementation of the Convention (2008–2018, decision 3/COP.8). Mixed results in implementation and outcomes from the Convention prior to this had been attributed, among other things, to the lack of evidence from monitoring and assessment, and inadequate reporting systems that were poorly harmonised across countries (ICCD/COP(8)/INF.5).

Used during the three previous reporting cycles, the traditional UNCCD reporting system used national reports from country Parties as the primary source of information on the implementation of the Convention. These reports provided a mostly qualitative assessment of progress at the national level and have proven useful to assess the capacities of individual countries in responding to Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought (DLDD). However, the irregular interpretation of the questions country's needed to answer in their reports, and inconsistencies in the report templates between reporting cycles, have meant that comparisons between years and across countries have been difficult. In this respect, it is important to note that challenges in monitoring implementation and effectiveness are common to many environment-related Conventions (Balmford *et al*. 2005, Davidson & Finlayson 2007, ICCD/COP(8)/INF.5).

Some initiatives have conducted quantitative assessments of DLDD. While these were not necessarily intended to support or monitor the implementation of the UNCCD, and have been limited to just a few countries, they have contributed to the work of the Convention in the past. Examples include the Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands project (LADA), World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT), and KM:Land (Ensuring Impacts from Sustainable Land Management)[1]. Overall, these initiatives have helped to provide a baseline of evidence on DLDD, and have shown initial trends of the impact that the Convention has had. Despite these successes, the information is not detailed enough to directly inform UNCCD decision making and, crucially, none of these initiatives actually assess the performance of country Parties in implementing the UNCCD.

To overcome the lack of robust and scalable evidence on the implementation of the Convention, the Strategic Plan introduced the Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System (PRAIS)[2] which developed and piloted a new monitoring, assessment, reporting and review system. Its main purpose was to assist UNCCD Parties to build their capacity ready for the fourth national reporting round of the Convention. It focused on:

(i) the development of reporting tools;

(ii) capacity building among Parties to enable them to report effectively on the UNCCD performance indicators; and

(iii) the establishment of an online system - the 'PRAIS Portal' - to inform and guide assessments of the implementation of the UNCCD.

[1] An economic assessment, The Economics of Desertification, Land Degradation, and Drought (e-DLDD), is planned/under discussion with partners.

[2] For detailed information, see http://www.unccd.int/prais, http://vimeo.com/20251351 and Perez *et al*. 2011

Evidence from the 2010 reporting exercise: what does it tell us?

Overall, PRAIS provides the first authoritative baseline on the implementation of the Convention. Despite it being the first reporting cycle of its kind, the response rate was high - 101 out of 194 Parties submitted their reports within the deadline - providing a representative global summary. Reporting against Operational Objectives allows the assessment of the level of progress in 2010 towards achieving the targets (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of results reported by Parties through the PRAIS process

Operational Objective	Indicator reference	Indicator name	Target	Number of Parties reporting	Level of achievement reported to date
Operational Objective 1: Advocacy, awareness raising and education: To actively influence relevant international, national and local processes and actors in adequately addressing desertification/land degradation and drought-related issues.	O-O-1	Number and size of information events organized on the subject of desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) and/or DLDD synergies with climate change and biodiversity, and audience reached by media addressing DLDD and DLDD synergies.	By 2018, 30 per cent of the global population is informed about DLDD and DLDD synergies with climate change and biodiversity	83	A total of 25% of the population of the countries that reported is informed about DLDD by end of 2009 (results from CRIC 9)
	O-O-2	Number of official documents and decision at international, regional and sub-regional levels relating to DLDD issues.	By 2010 the Convention website has been restructured and includes a thematic database on relevant decisions and documents as part of the PRAIS	Not applicable for this analysis	Not applicable for this analysis
	O-O-3	Number of CSOs and science and technology institutions participating in the Convention processes.	A steady growth in the participation of CSOs and science and technology institutions in the Convention processes is recorded along the implementation period of the Strategy	88	No longitudinal data yet, hence assessing proxy for effort: 90% of affected countries undertook concrete action to increase participation of CSOs and STIs in DLDD-related activities (results from 12 November 2010 data)
	O-O-4	Number and type of DLDD-related initiatives of CSOs and science and technology institutions in the field of education.	A steady growth in the number of DLDD-related education initiatives undertaken by CSOs and science and technology institutions is recorded along the implementation period of The Strategy	86	No longitudinal data yet, hence assessing proxy for effort: 81% of countries undertook concrete action to increase the delivery of DLDD education initiatives (results from 12 November 2010 data)

[3] Results are based on CRIC 9 reports, where no data were provided by CRIC 9, results are based on the reporting deadline (12 November 2010). Indicators shaded in blue are discussed in detail in the text.

Operational Objective	Indicator reference	Indicator name	Target	Number of Parties reporting	Level of achievement reported to date
Operational Objective 2: Policy framework: To support the creation of enabling environments for promoting solutions to combat desertification/land degradation and mitigate the effects of drought.	O-O-5	Number of affected country Parties, subregional and regional entities to have finalized the formulation/revision of NAPs/SRAPs/RAPs aligned to The Strategy, taking into account biophysical and socio-economic information, national planning and policies, and integration into investment frameworks.	By 2014, at least 80 per cent of affected country Parties, subregional and regional entities have formulated/revised a NAP/SRAP/ RAP aligned to The Strategy	89	2 countries (<2%) have formulated a NAP and aligned it with the strategy by end of 2009 (CRIC 9)
	O-O-6	Number of partnership agreements established within the framework of the Convention between developed country Parties/United Nations and IGOs and affected country Parties.	By 2014 at least two UNCCD-related partnership agreements are active in each affected country Party	Information not available	Information not available
	O-O-7	Number of initiatives for synergistic planning/ programming of the three Rio Conventions or mechanisms for joint implementation, at all levels.	By 2014, each affected country Party has either one joint national plan in place or functional mechanism(s) to ensure synergies among the three Rio conventions	89	60% of countries are implementing joint planning for the three Rio conventions by end of 2009 (CRIC 9)
Operational Objective 3: Science, technology and knowledge: To become a global authority on scientific and technical knowledge pertaining to desertification/land degradation and mitigation of the effects of drought.	O-O-8	Number of affected country Parties, subregional and regional entities to have established and supported a national/subregional/ regional monitoring system for DLDD.	By 2018, at least 60 per cent of affected country Parties, subregional and regional reporting entities have established and supported national monitoring systems for DLDD	89	38% of affected countries have implemented DLDD monitoring system (results from CRIC 9)
	O-O-9	Number of affected country Parties, subregional and regional entities reporting to the Convention along revised reporting guidelines on the basis of agreed indicators.	By 2018, at least 90 per cent of affected country Parties, subregional and regional entities report to the Convention in compliance with the new reporting guidelines	Information not available	Information not available
	O-O-10	Number of revised NAPs/ SRAPs/RAPs reflecting knowledge of DLDD drivers and their interactions, and of the interaction of DLDD with climate change and biodiversity.	By 2018, at least 70 per cent of revised NAPs/ SRAPs/RAPs have successfully gone through a quality self-assessment	45	82% of reporting countries stated that in their NAP the identification of biophysical and socio-economic drivers is knowledge based. (results from 12 November 2010 data)

Operational Objective	Indicator reference	Indicator name	Target	Number of Parties reporting	Level of achievement reported to date
Operational Objective 3 (continued)	O-O-11	Type, number and users of DLDD-relevant knowledge-sharing systems at the global, regional, subregional and national levels described on the Convention website.	By 2010 the Convention website has been restructured and includes a thematic database on knowledge-sharing systems as part of the PRAIS	Not applicable for this analysis	Not applicable for this analysis
	O-O-12	Number of science and technology networks, institutions or scientists engaged in research mandated by the COP.	No target	Not applicable for this analysis	Not applicable for this analysis
Operational Objective 4: Capacity-building: To identify and address capacity-building needs to prevent and reverse desertification/land degradation and mitigate the effects of drought.	O-O-13	Number of countries, subregional and regional reporting entities engaged in building capacity to combat DLDD on the basis of National Capacity Self Assessment (NCSA) or other methodologies and instruments.	At least 90 per cent of affected country Parties, sub-regional and regional reporting entities implement DLDD-specific capacity-building plans, programmes or projects	60	71% of countries undertook DLDD capacity building activities in 2008 or 2009 (CRIC 9)
Operational Objective 5: Financing and technology transfer: To mobilize and improve the targeting and coordination of national, bilateral and multilateral financial and technological resources in order to increase their impact and effectiveness.	O-O-14	Number of affected country Parties, subregional and regional entities whose investment frameworks, established within the IFS devised by the GM or within other integrated financing strategies, reflect leveraging national, bilateral and multilateral resources for combating desertification and land degradation.	By 2014, at least 50 per cent of affected country Parties, subregional and regional entities have developed integrated investment frameworks	78	15% of countries have developed an integrated investment framework by end of 2009 (CRIC 9)
	O-O-15	Amount of financial resources made available by developed country Parties to combat DLDD.	No target	Information not available	Information not available
	O-O-16	Degree of adequacy, timeliness and predictability of financial resources made available by developed country Parties to combat DLDD.	No target	Information not available	Information not available
	O-O-17	Number of DLDD-related project proposals successfully submitted for financing to international financial institutions, facilities and funds, including the GEF.	A steady growth in the number of DLDD-related successfully submitted project proposals is recorded along the implementation period of The Strategy	Information not available	Information not available

Operational Objective	Indicator reference	Indicator name	Target	Number of Parties reporting	Level of achievement reported to date
Operational Objective 5 (continued)	O-O-18	Amount of financial resources and type of incentives which have enabled access to technology by affected country Parties.	No target	Information not available	Information not available

Advocacy, awareness-raising and education

Successful campaigns in national and local media have achieved a relatively high level of awareness (25% of population aware about DLDD against a target of 30% by 2018) among the populations of the country Parties (O-O-1). The majority of countries (90%) undertook concrete action to increase the participation of science and technology institutions (STI) and civil society organisations (CSO) in DLDD-related activities (O-O-3). Furthermore, 81% of reporting countries undertook action to increase the delivery of DLDD education initiatives (O-O-4). It is apparent that existing evidence on the implementation of Operational Objective 1, which these indicators represent, is very positive. However, due to the lack of longitudinal data, it is not yet possible to assess whether there is a steady growth in the participation of STIs and CSOs in the Convention (O-O-3), or a growth in the delivery of DLDD education initiatives (O-O-4).

Policy framework

Overall, the level of implementation under Operational Objective 2 has been slow. Critically, the percentage of affected countries which have aligned National Action Plans[4] (NAPs) is currently only 3%, despite a target of 80% by 2014 (O-O-5). On a more positive note, 63% of country Parties have a NAP, albeit not aligned, and 75% of reporting countries are planning to have their NAP aligned by the end of 2013. These results should be of concern to policy makers, because not only are NAPs important to managing the ecological and socio-economic effects of DLDD, but their participatory approach in development encourages buy-in and ongoing commitment from a broad range of stakeholders, both within and outside government agencies are crucial aspects of sustainable land use management. When asked why countries with NAPs prior to the Strategy have not aligned to it, 47 cited that the most important factor was a lack of financial resources (41 mentioned it; >50% state it as 'very important'). This was followed with lack of capacity, poor internal coordination, understaffing (22 out of 23 mentioned it; <50% state as 'very important'). Of minor importance were lack of time, not a priority for government, and other.

Furthermore, 66% of countries (72 in total) are implementing joint planning and implementation for the three Rio Conventions: Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and UNCCD (O-O-7). While this suggests good progress by some countries, it must be noted that the Joint Liaison Group between the three Conventions was already set up ten years ago (2001) and all countries are expected to implement joint planning by 2014.

Science, technology and knowledge

In terms of implementing Operational Objective 3, just over a third (38%) of all country Parties have implemented a DLDD monitoring system, the target for which is 60% by 2018 (O-O-8). Encouragingly, the majority of countries with DLDD monitoring system ensure that the system is functioning and regularly updated, 81% and 69% respectively. Of the countries without a DLDD monitoring system, 76% (38/50) have a monitoring system that partially covers DLDD.

It is very positive that 82% of reporting countries stated that the identification of biophysical and socio-economic drivers is built into their NAP (O-O-10). However, since few countries reported, the outcome may not be reliable and falls far below the target.

[4] National Action Programmes (NAPs) are one of the key instruments in the implementation of the Convention at the national level, and are strengthened through Action Programmes on Sub-regional (SRAP) and Regional (RAP) levels. They spell out the practical steps and measures to be taken to combat desertification in specific ecosystems.

Capacity-building

About three-quarters of countries are implementing DLDD-specific capacity-building projects–this is close to reaching the target of 90% by 2014 as laid out in Operational Objective 4 (O-O-13).

Financing and technology transfer

While Operational Objective 5 comprises five indicators, only two are associated with a target, one of which requires longitudinal data that is not available at this stage. Hence, evidence for assessing its implementation is limited. Despite this drawback, it is possible to assess indicator O-O-14, which shows that 15% of affected country Parties, sub-regional and regional entities have developed integrated investment frameworks compared to a target of 50% by 2014. This is particularly interesting, since the lack of financial resources was cited as the main reason for difficulties in NAP development and alignment. It has been recognised that there is a need to have a Strategic Plan and integrated investment framework in place before funds from international aid agencies, such as the GEF, flow to support action on DLDD.

From reporting results to an evidence base for decision-making

The 2010 PRAIS reporting round represents the first major baseline assessment of the implementation of the Convention. The new PRAIS process introduces data management and procedural advantages, but also new challenges.

A number of caveats must be considered when drawing conclusions on implementation from the data: validity, reliability, bias, comprehensiveness and gaps in the reports remain concerns. However, it should be emphasised that the current reporting cycle is a pilot initiative, as well as a baseline, and the comprehensiveness and reliability of the data will improve following subsequent iteration of the reporting exercise. An option to support this data validation would be the addition of an analytical module and public interface to the PRAIS online portal. By allowing access to a range of stakeholders, any questionable information may be highlighted and subjected to additional review. Furthermore, customisable online reporting tools would allow flexibility in the system and could support other initiatives such as the exchange of information across multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

With regards to the development and alignment of NAPs, Brunsson (2002) considered the delay currently evident by defining three steps of organisations: (i) talks about; (ii) decides about; and (iii) actually implements. To translate this to the UNCCD process, the three steps could be described as (i) the Convention negotiation; (ii) its ratification by Parties; and (iii) its implementation, in particular through the development of NAPs. Since the Situation Analysis (ICCD/COP(8)/INF.5), the 10-year Strategic Plan, and the alignment of NAPs all occurred or began in the latter half of the 2000s, this may be a sign of maturation within the stage of 'actually implements'. Weiss & Jacobson (1999) suggested that there may be a 'sunshine approach' to implementation of multilateral agreements, i.e. through demonstration of results by Parties, others will follow with more consistent reporting, better policies and more action, all leading to improvements in the systems themselves and in the outcomes.

McDonagh & Lu (2007) stated that the Convention's prioritisation of the development of NAPs and partnership agreements over field-level activity have undermined successful action on improving land, productivity, and food and livelihood security. Resource constraints, weak political will and the low priority often given by national governments to land degradation were seen as contributing factors, as well as the availability of funding. This latter element is expected to be improved in 2012 with the contribution of financial support from the GEF.

Consideration must be given to the fact that the results from the first phase of PRAIS refer to performance indicators. While these tell us much about the mechanisms set in place by country Parties for implementation, the process does not yet tell us anything about the results of implementation. More will be learnt about this latter aspect from the next phase of PRAIS with the inclusion of the impact indicators in the process.

Conclusions

The true strength of the PRAIS process is the value-added as a complementary system in considering the governance of DLDD, coupled with scientific trends. By supporting coordinated reporting across the related MEAs, PRAIS can help reduce costs for both the Convention Secretariats and their Parties, share information on a range of similar issues, and provide a means for data validation.

The next iteration of PRAIS will build national capacities for long-term monitoring and reporting to UNCCD on the Convention's 11 impact indicators. It will aim to use this information to strengthen NAPs on the basis of comprehensive assessments of biophysical and socio-economic baselines. Countries will be supported in developing country-level indicators (both on performance and impact), as well as national measurement methods and systems. Countries will be helped to build their capacity to collect baseline data collection and analyse it through guidance materials, case studies and workshops. This will inform the implementation and monitoring of NAPs and UNCCD reporting with a view to mainstreaming DLDD and SLM information into broader national-level processes.

The process has acted as both a pilot study and a baseline, and has also provided recommendations (in particular on data management) which will feed into continued improvements. This will help the system to provide consistent, reliable, comparable, regular and frequent evidence about Convention implementation. As the UNCCD impact indicators are added to the system, this strength will be even further enhanced.

Ultimately, PRAIS has given us a better picture of the extent to which Parties have set up or improved mechanisms to address DLDD, including the use or enhancement of NAPs. It is expected that this will continue to progress with future iterations and with the incorporation of the impact indicators.

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Project organization

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The project has worked in collaboration with 14 regional and sub-regional Reference Centres across the globe to deliver capacity building in indicator reporting through a 'training of trainers' approach.

Regional and sub-regional reference centres:

Learning Together, Working Together, For a Sustainable Future

More details at **www.unccd.int/prais**