



Toulouse, May 3 , 2013

To the attention of the UNCCD secretariat

Subject : AGTE – Draft preliminary recommendations – April 2013

A rapid review of the report cited in reference has triggered the following comments I would like to bring your attention to, as we have been invited to do so during the last CST special session in Bonn.

General remark:

The work of the AGTE presented here is an important contribution to the refinement of the impact indicators developed throughout the Strategy of UNCCD, and a sound realignment of some relevant concepts. However, the exercise seems to have been here more focused on academic considerations and less on the practicalities for the countries to report. The goal seems to have been the ideal design of a refined indicator based monitoring and evaluation system, whereas the affected countries are still waiting for very simple, practical and achievable measurements of their condition in terms of desertification.

Specific remarks

- 1) If there is an academic rationale for it, the request to change to indicators 'of progress' is just relabeling the same thing and likely to bring confusion to the endusers instead of helping them to implement indicator-based monitoring. We are indeed here speaking of the same impact indicators the UNCCD is struggling to develop and implement since years. They are meant to answer the question: do the policies, actions , programs of the country have an impact on living condition of the affected populations, on the ecosystems condition and do they bring global benefits. As an example, the already adopted impact indicator 'land cover' is meant to measure if there is stagnation, decrease or *progress* of the vegetation cover, it is a first simple measure of ecosystem condition (with unavoidable inherent imperfections). A relabeling of this already deployed indicator seems simply pointless and even counterproductive.

- 2) Strong emphasis is put on the concepts behind the indicators. At the same time we see that each report brings a new vision of the concept (refined and/or more complex). This demonstrates that it seems vain to attempt to have a final conceptual framework to define indicators and to start to use them (para 21 indirectly acknowledge this).
- 3) Hypotheses on the desertification mechanism, such as the current DPSIR integrated framework, are indeed useful to organise indicators and to make their relationships explicit. However hypotheses are constantly challenged and evolving, which is the essence of the scientific approach. The framework presented here does not evade this rule. As a consequence while the framework is not so stable, it may be more useful to concentrate on designing potentially long lasting indicators, as little as possible likely to be affected by changes in the desertification paradigms.
- 4) Emphasis should be made on developing and fostering measuring systems and networks, providing unbiased reliable basic data, on the long term. Basic data can be combined into various indices, existing and future ones : data will remain whereas the concepts evolve. As a consequence, the priority task should not be here to imagine a sophisticated desertification scheme and related well suited indicators. It is rather to identify what are the basic parameters characterizing desertification and likely to be useful a long time to measure the changes in “desertification condition” of affected countries. Challenging the statement 5 of page 27, I provocately conclude that, ideally, these parameters should be as independent as possible of the moving representations academics have of desertification mechanisms.
- 5) I believe this emphasis on basic data is supported by the recurrent difficulty underlined again and again by the less developed countries : the lack of data to monitor their condition in its various aspects. Basic data serve of course the monitoring of many environmental and societal issues, desertification being one of them.

Thanking you for providing the opportunity to contribute to the discussion,
Sincerely,



Dr Richard Escadafal,
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