

The 3<sup>rd</sup> UNCCD international scientific conference on *“combating desertification, land degradation and drought for poverty reduction and sustainable development – the contribution of science, technology, traditional knowledge and practices”* will be held from **9 to 12 March 2015 in Mexico**, during the 4<sup>th</sup> special session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST S-4) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The working language of the conference is English. However, for opening and closing sessions, as well as most of the plenary presentations, simultaneous translation into the six UN languages (English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, Chinese) will be available.

## Objectives of the conference

The conference aims to attract the widest possible range of scientific, local and traditional knowledge that can be harnessed to achieve poverty reduction and sustainable development in areas susceptible to desertification, land degradation and drought. One of the major challenges facing delegates to the conference is the development of new scientific insights and recommendations to policy makers with regard to the assessment of vulnerability of socio-ecosystems to climate change and current and future capacities to adapt. The conference thus is expected to contribute to the combat against desertification and land degradation and to address impacts of drought, by delivering the following outcomes:

- Better anticipation and prevention of the impact of climate change on land degradation and desertification, through capacity building;
- Identification and promotion of sustainable and adaptive methods of using ecosystems to reduce poverty and environmental degradation, while achieving sustainable development;
- Identification of pathways towards a land-degradation neutral world: by way of reducing degradation processes and scaling up restoration activities, the objective is to maintain and improve the quantity and quality of productive land.

## Call for contributions

Interested experts are strongly encouraged to submit an extended abstract to the organizing committee on one of the three conference sub-topics (which will form the core conference sessions):

1. **Diagnosis of constraints:** How to best characterize and understand the vulnerability and adaptive capacities of ecosystems (in particular agro-ecosystems) and populations in affected regions, including regions newly susceptible to the consequences of climate change?
2. **Responses:** How to build efficiently on available knowledge, success stories and lessons learnt to promote implementation of better adapted, knowledge-based practices and technologies?
3. **Monitoring and assessment:** What are the new monitoring and assessment methods available to evaluate the effectiveness of these practices and technologies that provide improved insights on whether or how their implementation should be scaled up?

## **Conference sub-topics**

Contributions are to be submitted under one of three conference sub-topics (the targeted topics have to be informed in the submission form):

- 1. DIAGNOSIS OF CONSTRAINTS. How can key vulnerabilities of ecosystems and populations with regard to climate change in the various situations in the world be identified? How can they be characterized?**

*The prevalence of poverty and environmental degradation in areas where desertification, land degradation and drought occur reflects not only the difficulty of sustainably using natural resources but also the lack of development models appropriate to these zones, in which the availability of natural resources is strongly influenced by climate variability. In particular, the management of unpredictable events is key to rural communities' adaptation to climate change. Under such conditions, knowledge of the properties that enable a good understanding of ecosystems and production systems to adapt to fluctuations in the natural environment is of fundamental importance to ensuring system sustainability and to building rural development models. What have been the effects of the successive crises rural communities have had to face? What factors increase or decrease the resilience of farming and other land use systems? What strategies are implemented by communities in rural zones to address vulnerability and risk? What is the current capacity of resource-user communities in these regions, and what are their needs for capacity building to better cope with the situation? What are the long-term development trajectories for these communities and their various land use activities?*

Such information should be built up from local and traditional sources, through research, from local communities and the various organizations involved in the area.

- 2. RESPONSES. How can adaptive capacities be developed or maximized in the short-, medium- and long-term? What are the major contributions from traditional and local practices and scientific research? How are they related to specific settings? How can they be generalized so that they can be adapted and applied to broader settings? What are the obstacles to their more widespread use?**

*The fight against desertification, land degradation and drought is based on different domains of action aimed at improving living standards, reducing environmental degradation, stabilizing the balance between use and renewal of natural resources, and re-establishing viable community and political frameworks for managing natural resources including agricultural land. Such actions may take the following forms:*

- *Corrective methods, such as land rehabilitation and ecosystem restoration, which aim to halt and reverse degradation. Components of these methods include conservation of water and soils, protection or introduction of vegetation, water harvesting and management of droughts, ecological engineering, etc.;*
- *Improved management of ecosystems and in particular agroecosystems. These may include agroecology, agroforestry, conservation agriculture, sustainable agricultural practices for use in dry zones, etc.;*

- *Development of models for integrated management systems for shared natural resources. These would address such issues as access to information, negotiation of access and user rights between local and national organizations, exchange of data, conflict management, etc.;*
- *Implementation of favorable institutional and policy settings that promote sustainable practices that achieve livelihood goals. These can include access to market for products from dry zones, diversification of the economy, payment for environmental services, land ownership rights, access to credits, training for farmers, insurance systems, public-private-partnerships etc.*

For all these actions, a "standard" or academic model often cannot be applied effectively in the field or be used to outscale practices from one region to another. Combining scientific research with traditional and local knowledge should be encouraged through participatory research to facilitate and enhance adoption of innovations so that they are well adapted to different social, economic, political and ecological contexts. Towards this end, focus should be placed on family farming systems and achievement of a better understanding of socio-ecological dynamics at micro- and landscape levels.

**3. MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT. How can we best measure the performance of actions to combat land degradation and desertification? How can we cost-effectively evaluate the efficiency of drought-mitigation strategies?**

*Monitoring and evaluation systems are required to measure the progress achieved in the fight against land degradation and poverty. They must in particular:*

- *Validate technical, economic and environmental standards for new farming and natural resource management practices and other income generating means;*
- *Define performance indicators to measure short-term effects and long-term consequences, for both biophysical (soil parameters, quantity and quality of water, plant and animal biodiversity, etc.) and socio-economic (production system sustainability of production systems, employment, income, food security, access to health and education services, access to knowledge and technologies, etc.) characteristics;*
- *Evaluate the efficacy of management and aid systems under crisis situations, including their impacts as an emergency response in the short-term and longer-term effects on the target populations, e.g. on vulnerability, reduction of poverty, and productivity.*

Questions need to be answered on the balance between and roles of scientific research and the use of traditional and local knowledge. Local populations often are stewards of a wealth of relevant knowledge, and are well placed to collect data and take part in monitoring and evaluation. Cooperation needs to be improved between scientists and those on the ground, including diverse men and women community stakeholders, technical advisors, administrators and policy makers. How can effective participatory research schemes be developed? Can we create a database that links scientific research to traditional practices to enable the transfer of knowledge and experience directly to those on the ground? How can forms of direct cooperation be set up between developing countries and/or countries in transition?

## Abstracts format

Extended abstracts must be submitted in English through the online submission portal: <http://3sc.unccd.int>, following the indicated guidelines, and not exceeding 800 words in total. They must comprise the following items:

- Title (30 words max.)
- Authors, affiliations and contacts
- Rationale (100-200 words)
- Methods used and partnership set up (200-300 words)
- Results (300-400 words)
- Outcomes (100-200 words)
- Acknowledgements (optional, 30 words max.)
- One figure (table, graph, photo, etc.)
- Figure legend (30 words max.)
- References (3 to 5, in alphabetical order)

References should be quoted in the text as name and year within brackets and listed at the end of the paper alphabetically. Where reference is made to more than one work by the same author published in the same year, identify each citation in the text as follows: (Collins, 1998a; Collins, 1998b). Where three or more authors are listed in the reference list, please cite in the text as (Collins *et al.*, 1998). References should be listed in the following style:

Dickie JA, Parsons AJ. 2012. Eco-Geomorphological processes within grasslands, shrublands and badlands in the semi-arid Karoo, South Africa. *Land Degradation & Development* 23: 534–547. DOI: 10.1002/ldr.2170

## Abstracts selection criteria

Abstracts will be reviewed by an established review commission, supervised by the conference scientific advisory committee (whose composition is given on the conference website: <http://3sc.unccd.int>). All accepted abstracts will be presented at the conference by their authors in poster format during dedicated interactive sessions organized within each workshop. All selected authors will be invited to submit a full-text paper for publication in the conference proceedings.

Submitted abstracts will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Thematic relevance with regards to the conference topic
- Overall scientific quality
- Overall readability
- Originality
- Relevance for policy-making
- Potential for dissemination / scalability
- Capacity-building potential

## Timeframe

	<b>From</b>	<b>To</b>
<b>Call for extended abstracts and online abstract submission</b>	15 May 2014	15 September 2014
<b>Notification of abstract acceptance to authors</b>	15 November 2014	30 November 2014
<b>Online registration for conference attendance</b>	15 November 2014	12 January 2015
<b>Online full text submission</b>	15 November 2014	15 February 2015