



# The global governance of desertification: what role for science?

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# Structure

- Research Puzzle
- Background
- Scientific institutions within the UNCCD
- Criticisms of the current architecture
- Comparative perspective (UNFCCC, CBD)
- Preliminary findings
- Summary

# Research Puzzle

- The UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) hardly taps scientific expertise on desertification/dryland degradation.
  - Why?
  - What are the implications for the UNCCD process?
  - Is it due to problems of institutional interplay?
  - Is it due to a problem of fit?

# Background

- Desertification – on the international agenda since the 1970s
- International negotiations to address desertification after the 1992 Earth Summit
- 1994 UNCCD adopted, 1996 into force
- Comprehensive sustainable development approach, unlike typical environmental agreements

# The UNCCD Regime

- **Conference of the Parties (COP)** = supreme governing body with permanent secretariat
- Subsidiary bodies: ***Committee on Science and Technology (CST)***, Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), Global Mechanism (GM)
- International partner agencies (e.g. FAO)
- Scientific, civil society and community-based actors and institutions at all levels

# UNCCD Scientific Institutions

- CST programme of work defined by COP
- CST – mandated to provide scientific advice to the COP
- International Roster of Experts
- Group of Experts and *Ad hoc* panels recruited from the roster to support the CST

# General Criticisms

- CST, Group of Experts and *Ad hoc* panels are criticised as too political, inflexible and ineffective
- Current architecture constrains meaningful scientific input to UNCCD process
- Potential synergies with scientific bodies from UNFCCC & CBD are not explored

# Specific Concerns

- Membership of scientific bodies
  - typically dominated by government representatives rather than scientific experts
- Operational issues
  - lack of substantive scientific discussions due to procedural quarrels
  - CST meets back-to-back with COP → consensual draft decisions rather than recommendations



# Specific Concerns

- Performance issues
  - outputs of scientific bodies lack authority
  - limited influence on COP debates
  - little effective scientific guidance for decision making and implementation of anti-desertification policies

# A Comparative Perspective

- Key Similarities
  - UNFCCC & CBD have scientific bodies with similar mandates (UNFCCC: SBSTA + IPCC; CBD: SBSTTA)
  - Output very similar in terms of quantity
- Crucial Differences
  - Stronger influence of scientific experts in both UNFCCC and CBD
  - CBD-SBSTTA meets between COP sessions
  - IPCC provided strong scientific base for UNFCCC-SBSTA from the outset

# Problem of Interplay or Fit?

- Problems of interplay
  - primarily between and within the different bodies within the UNCCD regime, notably its scientific bodies
  - due to current governance architecture

# Problem of Interplay or Fit?

- ...but also mismatches between
  - accessible scientific expertise on the biogeophysical problem, i.e. environmental degradation at local and regional levels
  - UNCCD politics, which focus on socio-economic concerns, notably development issues framed in a global context

# Summary

- UNCCD science-policy interface requires overhaul to
  - allow for substantive scientific guidance
  - address the environmental problem at the core of the convention, i.e. dryland degradation
  - provide an authoritative basis for implementation
- Explanatory power of interplay and fit to grasp causes of institutional ineffectiveness
- Further comparative research on similar conventions may help identify reform options

# Thank you!

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