



INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2023/036

Audit of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

**The Convention needs to improve its
performance reporting and monitoring
framework and some aspects of
administrative services**

31 August 2023

Assignment No. AE2022-242-01

Audit of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes in ensuring effective management of the operations of the UNCCD secretariat. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2022. The audit reviewed the policies and processes relating to strategic planning, performance reporting and monitoring, structural arrangements, and the regulatory framework for administrative services.

The audit indicated that UNCCD needs to improve its performance reporting and monitoring framework and some aspects of administrative services.

OIOS made six recommendations. To address the issues identified in the audit, UNCCD needed to:

- Map the planned results and activities of the G20 Initiative with its work plans and results framework to facilitate performance reporting of consolidated results and coordination on overlapping areas of work;
- Strengthen its performance reporting framework by: (a) ensuring that all performance indicators and targets are measurable; (b) introducing mandatory unit level annual work plans and performance reports; and (c) considering the adoption of an information technology tool for more efficient performance reporting;
- Develop an evaluation policy and guidelines in line with the United Nations administrative instruction on evaluation (ST/AI/2021/3); and ensure that follow up and lessons learned reports are prepared in line with the established policy and guidelines;
- Improve its structural arrangements including: (a) review and streamline its structure; (b) maintain up to date records of job descriptions, organigrams, and terms of reference of organizational units; (c) establish institutional arrangements needed to operationalize the private sector strategy; and (d) use workload analysis to assess staffing gaps in the Administrative Service Section and their impact;
- Establish a mechanism for promulgating, updating, and disseminating policies and guidelines; (b) update the 2014 compendium of policies; and (c) consult with the United Nations Secretariat to review and update the arrangements agreed upon in 1998; and
- Issue a standard operating procedure on procurement defining: (a) the roles and responsibilities of staff and service providers; (b) the arrangements and requirements on procurement planning; and (c) the filing structure and requirements for maintaining a complete audit trail of the procurement process.

UNCCD accepted the recommendations and has initiated action to implement them. Actions required to close the recommendations are indicated in Annex I.

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Audit of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).
2. The Convention was established in 1994 and is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management. The Convention has 197 parties with the Conference of the Parties (COP) as its supreme decision-making body. All parties to the Convention are represented at the COP, at which they review the implementation of the Convention and any other legal instruments that the COP adopts and take decisions necessary to promote the effective implementation of the Convention, including institutional and administrative arrangements. COP sessions have been held every two years since 2001.
3. The UNCCD 2018-2030 strategic framework aims at contributing to achieving the objectives of the Convention and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 15 and target 15.3 which relates to: (i) combating desertification; (ii) restoring degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought, and floods; and (iii) striving to achieve a land degradation-neutral world.
4. The UNCCD secretariat was established in 1994 in Article 23 of the Convention. It is headquartered in Bonn, Germany and has offices in New York, Rabat, Santiago de Chile, and Istanbul. The secretariat is headed by the Executive Secretary at the Under-Secretary-General level, with a Deputy Executive Secretary at the D-2 level.
5. The Convention's secretariat includes the following sections and offices that report to the Deputy Executive Secretary: (i) the Administrative Services Section; (ii) the Science, Technology and Innovation Section; (iii) the Global Policies and Regional Cooperation Section; (iv) the Communications, External Relations and Partnerships Section; (v) the Evaluation Office; and (vi) the New York Liaison Office. It also includes the Governing Bodies and Legal Affairs Unit which reports to the Executive Secretary through the Chef de Cabinet.
6. In 2021, the secretariat established the G20 Initiative Office to support the implementation of the G20 Initiative which was launched in November 2020 at the Riyadh Summit of the G20 leaders with the main goal to prevent, halt and reverse land degradation and reduce degraded land by 50 per cent by 2040. The G20 Initiative Office was headed by a D-1 who reported to the Executive Secretary.
7. The Global Mechanism is a standalone unit headed by a D-1 reporting to the Executive Secretary. It was established under Article 21.4 of the Convention initially as a separate entity that was managed by the International Fund for Agriculture and Development. Pursuant to Decision 6 of COP 10 adopted in 2011, accountability and legal representation of the Global Mechanism was transferred to the secretariat and the two became one consolidated entity with two parts (the secretariat and the Global Mechanism). The consolidated entity is henceforth referred to as "the UNCCD secretariat" in this report.
8. The UNCCD secretariat had a total of 94 staff as of the time of the audit. Its total expenditure was \$15.6 million in 2020, \$18.6 million in 2021 and \$23.5 million in 2022.
9. Comments provided by UNCCD are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

10. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes in ensuring effective management of the operations of the UNCCD secretariat.

11. This audit was included in the 2022 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to the risk that potential weaknesses in management of the secretariat's operations could have an adverse impact on achievement of its objectives.

12. OIOS conducted this audit from February to May 2023. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2022. The audit reviewed the policies and processes relating to strategic planning; performance reporting and monitoring; structural arrangements; and the regulatory framework for administrative services.

13. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews with key personnel; (b) review of relevant documentation; (c) analytical review of data; (d) sample testing; and (e) surveys.

14. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

III. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Strategic planning

Need to map and integrate the G20 Initiative results and activities into the UNCCD secretariat's work plans

15. The 2018-2030 strategic framework had five well-defined strategic objectives that guided the implementation of the Convention. The UNCCD secretariat developed additional strategic planning documents to operationalize the 2018-2030 strategic framework. These included: (i) four-year work plans which were aligned with the strategic framework, the latest being the 2022-2025 work plan; and (ii) costed work programmes for 2020-2021 and 2022-2024 aligned to the four-year work plans. The four-year work plan and two/three-year costed work programmes were built on results frameworks which were approved by the COP and used as the basis for reporting and monitoring performance. In addition, the secretariat and the Global Mechanism had prepared some standalone strategies including the private sector strategy, partnership strategy and programmatic strategies such as the Changwon Initiative strategy. At the time of the audit, the resource mobilization strategy was being finalized.

16. The G20 Initiative Office had developed a detailed implementation strategy and work plan for the period 2022-2024 which had a results framework including impact statement, outcomes, outputs, and activities. However, the activities of the G20 Initiative Office had not been mapped into the UNCCD secretariat's work plans and results frameworks. This needs to be done to facilitate effective performance reporting and monitoring of the UNCCD secretariat's consolidated results. It would also help ensure that areas of overlap with other activities of the secretariat and the Global Mechanism are identified so that appropriate collaboration and coordination mechanisms can be established, and duplication avoided. There appeared to be differing opinions among staff as to whether or not the G20 Initiative Office was part of the UNCCD secretariat, which underscored the need to address the integration of the G20 Initiative Office's work programme into the UNCCD secretariat's strategic planning documents.

- (1) The UNCCD secretariat should map the planned results and activities of the G20 Initiative with its work plans and results framework to facilitate performance reporting of consolidated results and coordination on overlapping areas of work.**

The UNCCD secretariat accepted recommendation 1 and stated that as the G20 Initiative Office becomes properly established within the secretariat, its plans and work are integrated into the usual UNCCD planning tools. Implementation of this recommendation is expected to be completed in the next submission of the work plan to the COP, which is scheduled for December 2024.

B. Performance reporting and monitoring

Need to strengthen the performance reporting and monitoring framework

17. The results framework in the 2020-2021 costed work programme included activities, outcomes, indicators, and targets. In total, there were 9 outcomes and 34 targets, and a lead unit/section was identified for each target. The Evaluation Office issued guidelines and templates for reporting performance against the results framework. OIOS reviewed a sample of performance reports relating to the 2020-2021 work programme and noted that the results framework was appropriately used in preparing the internal and external performance reports.

18. However, 24 out of the 34 targets were not specific and measurable, and the targets did not always include baseline data. Details of how the data would be verified (means of verification) were also not specified which affected measurability of some of the targets. Failure to establish measurable targets and to predefine how the data would be collected increases the risk of subjectivity in data collection and affects the effectiveness of performance monitoring.

19. The performance reports did not also adequately address gaps in performance (planned versus actual), reasons for the gaps, and lessons learned. This was contrary to the UNCCD secretariat's guidance note on monitoring which stated that monitoring should be used to detect problems of delivery that can be corrected during the biennium, and to provide information that can be used for improving programming for the next biennium. Having well-defined measurable targets would help facilitate identification and assessment of performance variances and lessons learned.

20. Further, the UNCCD secretariat's results-based management framework required unit level work plans but only the Evaluation Office and two of the substantive sections (the Global Mechanism and the Science, Technology and Innovation Section) had prepared annual work plans. Deliverables and activities reflected in the approved results framework were indicative and could not be used as a basis for assessing unit level performance gaps. Unit level work plans were therefore necessary to facilitate effective performance reporting and monitoring at the unit level.

21. In addition, the UNCCD secretariat had not adopted an information technology (IT) tool for planning and reporting; instead, it manually consolidated the results of the various indicators and targets. The UNCCD secretariat needs to adopt Umoja or other appropriate IT tools (such as Power BI tools/dashboards) to improve the maturity of its performance monitoring framework.

- (2) The UNCCD secretariat should strengthen its performance reporting framework by: (a) ensuring that all performance indicators and targets are measurable; (b) introducing mandatory unit level annual work plans and performance reports; and (c) considering the adoption of an information technology tool for more efficient performance reporting.**

The UNCCD secretariat accepted recommendation 2 and stated that targets and baselines are defined for the 2022-2024 work programme. They will be further refined, based on the particularities and nature of work of the secretariat for the next submission of the work plan to the COP, which is scheduled for December 2024. The same timeline is expected for the unit work plans and the consideration of an IT tool.

Need for an evaluation policy and guidelines

22. The UNCCD secretariat had not developed an evaluation policy or guidelines to guide the selection of areas to be prioritized for evaluation and govern the approach and standards for conducting evaluations. An evaluation policy and guidelines would, for example, address quality assurance processes, arrangements for tracking evaluation recommendations, and other important elements such as integration of gender, human rights, and disabilities considerations in evaluations. In 2021, the United Nations Secretariat issued an administrative instruction on evaluation which the UNCCD secretariat could adopt and tailor it to its needs.

23. The absence of an evaluation policy and guidelines contributed to some gaps in the UNCCD secretariat's evaluation practices. The evaluation work programme lacked the rationale for selection of areas to be evaluated and other important information such as the type of evaluation and details of who would conduct it (consultant, Evaluation Office, or self-evaluation). There was a risk that important projects or areas of work may not be appropriately prioritized. OIOS also noted that the evaluation of one large project was not finalized due to quality issues. The UNCCD secretariat indicated that it had addressed lessons learned from the project; however, no formal lessons learned report was available.

24. The UNCCD secretariat had established a follow up approach for evaluation reports and developed a template for preparing follow up reports to track the status of evaluation recommendations and actions taken. However, OIOS' review of five evaluations conducted between 2020 and 2022 showed that no follow up reports were prepared as required. The Evaluation Office stated that the evaluation results were immediately taken into use and key findings directly translated into revised actions in programmes and projects; therefore, follow up reports were deemed not necessary. Such details of action taken need to be included in the follow up report in compliance with the UNCCD secretariat's own approach. This would enhance the sharing of knowledge and lessons learned.

(3) The UNCCD secretariat should: (a) develop an evaluation policy and guidelines in line with the United Nations administrative instruction on evaluation (ST/AI/2021/3); and (b) ensure that follow up and lessons learned reports are prepared in line with the established policy and guidelines.

The UNCCD secretariat accepted recommendation 3 and stated that it will be implemented by the end of 2024.

C. Structural arrangements

Need to review the organizational structure and improve clarity of responsibilities and reporting lines

25. The UNCCD secretariat's staffing had grown over the years with the in-housing of the Global Mechanism in 2011 and the establishment of the G20 Initiative Office in 2021. In 2019 and 2022, the COP requested the Executive Secretary to analyze the organizational structure and staffing to ensure effectiveness and efficiency in implementing the approved work programme. This was yet to be fully done.

OIOS observed the following gaps in structural arrangements that need to be addressed to help improve clarity and optimize effectiveness.

(a) Outdated job descriptions and organigram

26. Job descriptions had not been reviewed or updated in more than a decade, even for posts where the roles and responsibilities had evolved significantly. Further, the approved organigram for the Global Mechanism was outdated at the time of the audit. As a best practice, a regular review of the structure needs to be done as part of the strategic planning process and the organigram and job descriptions updated as appropriate.

(b) Issues with reporting lines

27. Having clear reporting lines is essential particularly for effective performance evaluation. The first and second reporting officers' roles are distinct and therefore both need to be in place. OIOS' review showed some issues with reporting lines for some staff as follows: (i) one case where none of the four staff under a P-3 supervisor reported to the P-3 staff; (ii) a resource mobilization staff member in the Global Policy Advocacy and Regional Cooperation Section actually worked in the Communications, External Relations and Partnerships Section, to whom she reported; (iii) an Administrative and Finance Officer employed under the G20 Initiative Office worked extensively with the Administrative Services Section with no clear reporting lines; (iv) there was lack of clarity with regard to second reporting officers for five staff of the G20 Initiative Office; and (v) two P-4 staff in two separate sections had the same supervisor serving as first and second reporting officer.

(c) Terms of reference for business units not clearly documented

28. The UNCCD secretariat had prepared an organigram with annexes addressing the Global Mechanism and the G20 Initiative Office organizational structures. Delegation of authority to both entities were also clearly defined. However, there was no formal document defining the terms of reference of each organizational unit/Section. Terms of reference and mandates for the various organizational units were addressed in different COP decisions and formal documents. For example, terms of reference of the G20 Initiative Office were documented in the donor agreement. For two of the units (the Global Policies and Regional Cooperation Section, and the Evaluation Office), the terms of reference had not been updated. The terms of reference of the new Communications, External Relationships and Partnerships Section which was established in 2022 had also not been documented. The absence of clearly documented terms of reference could affect clarity of responsibilities and authority and lead to unmanaged overlaps and duplication. Below are examples of aspects of the structure dealing with cross-cutting areas that need to be managed and coordinated.

- While the Global Mechanism carries out extensive capacity building work, there is also a substantive capacity building post in the secretariat, established in line with Article 19 of the Convention. The G20 Initiative Office also had aspects of capacity building in its work programme. Documenting terms of reference for the organizational units would help in ensuring that the division of roles and responsibilities on all matters relating to capacity building are clear, and areas needing collaboration are identified.
- Decision 5/COP.14 requested the UNCCD secretariat to continue working with key stakeholders, including youth, faith-based organizations, local governments, farmers, pastoralists, women's organizations, indigenous peoples, and local communities, underscoring the importance of partnerships in the work of the secretariat. The Decision was reiterated at COP 15 held in 2022. The UNCCD secretariat developed a partnership strategy in 2016 and both the secretariat and the Global Mechanism

had officers tasked with partnership management. However, there was no clear definition of how the roles of the various officers intersected, or who was responsible for what. Senior management had a clear idea of who would do what, but the staff themselves did not share a similar understanding. In two cases, delays in clearance of Memoranda of Understanding could be attributed to uncertainties in roles and responsibilities.

- A staff member of the Land Degradation and Land Restoration team in the Global Mechanism was, in fact, mostly under the G20 Initiative Office.

29. Having one document that summarizes the terms of reference for all organizational units, as well as the coordination mechanisms for overlapping areas is a good practice noted in other United Nations organizations that the UNCCD secretariat needs to adopt.

(d) Institutional set up to operationalize the private sector strategy had not been established

30. Decision 6/COP.14 requested the UNCCD secretariat to evaluate options for promoting greater participation of the private sector in the development and mainstreaming of innovative and sustainable solutions for combating desertification/land degradation and drought and achieving land degradation neutrality. To address this request, the UNCCD secretariat developed a Private Sector Strategy covering the period 2021 to 2030. However, the institutional set up defined in the strategy had not been established. In particular, the UNCCD secretariat had not set up a private sector solutions team consisting of members of the External Relations, Policy and Advocacy, Global Mechanism, Communications and Evaluation Sections/Offices that would be expected to meet at least once a month. This gap could lead to delays in operationalizing the strategy, including critical elements such as stakeholder mapping and development of criteria for engaging with the private sector. Further, in the organizational structure, there was no clear lead on the implementation of the private sector strategy. Some aspects of the work used to be handled by a resource mobilization team in the Global Mechanism but since the team was disbanded, the arrangements need to be reviewed.

(e) No analysis was done to show gaps in administrative posts

31. The Administrative Services Section is tasked with ensuring effective and efficient delivery of services to the UNCCD secretariat in the areas of financial management, human resources, travel, procurement, and information technology. Some of the administrative services were outsourced to the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and some were done internally. There was general concern by management and staff that the staffing levels in the Administrative Services Section had not grown commensurate to the increase in workload; there were recurring concerns regarding lack of back up arrangements for key posts. The Global Mechanism had 30 staff while the G20 Initiative Office had 9 staff which was evidence of growth in administrative support needs. However, no comprehensive workload analysis had been done to show the level of gaps and related risks.

32. To address recurring concerns about delays in procurement, in 2022 the UNCCD secretariat decided to in-house procurement and established a P-4 procurement officer post to add to the G-6 post that was already dedicated for procurement. There was no documented workload analysis to show that the post would be optimally utilized. Historically, the UNCCD secretariat's volume of procurement above \$10,000 was on average around 20 purchase orders per year. Unless there was a significant increase in volume, having a full-time procurement officer at P-4 level would not be justified. While the UNCCD secretariat indicated that the P-4 Procurement Officer would be utilized for review of partnership agreements and other duties besides procurement, this was not mentioned in the job description and appeared not to have been

considered in the recruitment process. Since the P-4 post was already filled at the time of the audit, there was a need to determine how the post could be optimally utilized.

33. Even though almost 50 per cent of the UNCCD secretariat's budget was funded by parties' contributions to the core budget, only 1 out of the 13 posts in the Administrative Services Section was funded by contributions to the core budget. The other 12 posts were funded by programme support costs. This meant that the administrative services largely relied on voluntary contributions, and any significant drop could further impact staffing levels. The gaps in staffing and their impact need to be assessed so that stakeholders can make informed decisions on staffing.

(4) The UNCCD secretariat should: (a) review and streamline its structure; (b) maintain up to date records of job descriptions, organigrams, and terms of reference of organizational units; (c) establish institutional arrangements needed to operationalize the private sector strategy; and (d) use workload analysis to assess staffing gaps in the Administrative Service Section and their impact.

The UNCCD secretariat accepted recommendation 4 and stated that on a regular basis, job descriptions for all newly advertised vacancies are updated and classified before being posted on the website. The job descriptions for the posts that were established earlier will be updated and classified as well, with the aim of having all of them up to date by the end of 2024. Terms of reference for all organizational units will be established in the course of 2023. On part (c) of the recommendation, the Global Mechanism will recruit a private sector lead towards the end of the year and therefore this recommendation will be implemented by the end of 2024. On part (d), while the secretariat is in principle in favour of this action and notes its importance, it may not be able to carry it out before the next COP.

D. Administration

Need to update the policy framework

34. A memorandum dated 22 April 1998 from the United Nations Secretariat to UNCCD's Executive Secretary outlines the arrangements for administrative support by the United Nations Secretariat to the UNCCD secretariat. The memo defines, among other things, the authority of the Executive Secretary on personnel and financial management matters. A clause in the memorandum stipulates that these arrangements would be kept under review by the United Nations Secretariat and the UNCCD secretariat and adjusted in light of evolving administrative experience. However, no such review had been undertaken, even though the UNCCD secretariat had evolved significantly in size and scope. Some aspects such as the delegation of authority for procurement, which was capped at \$50,000 needed to be reviewed, given that the UNCCD secretariat had engaged a P-4 Procurement Officer and planned to in-house more of the procurement function.

35. The 1998 arrangements empowered the Executive Secretary to administer UNCCD staff in accordance with United Nations staff regulations and rules and such special rules which may be established by the Executive Secretary in agreement with the Secretary-General. However, there have been no such special rules. There were a few provisions of the Staff Regulations and Rules on continuing appointments and compensatory time off which the UNCCD secretariat appeared not to have adopted. However, the decision not to adopt them had not been agreed with the United Nations Secretariat as required.

36. As stipulated in Section 2.3 of ST/SGB/2009/4, United Nations Administrative issuances are not mandatory for separately administered funds, organs, and programmes of the United Nations, unless

otherwise stated therein, or unless the separately administered funds, organs and programmes have expressly accepted their applicability. The UNCCD secretariat had chosen to largely apply the United Nations Secretariat's administrative issuances and supplemented them with its own internal policies and guidelines. In 2014, the UNCCD secretariat put together a compendium of all policies in use, including those issued by the United Nations Secretariat and those issued internally, and sent out a formal memo to staff informing them of the compendium of policies and guidelines.

37. However, the compendium had not been reviewed and updated since 2014. Some of the guidance it lists had become outdated, and new policies introduced after 2014 were not reflected. There was also no clarity on the relationship between the internal guidance and the United Nations Secretariat's administrative instructions on similar topics – whether they were supplementary, complementary, or they replaced one another. Some of the UNCCD secretariat's internal policies, such as the email usage and password policy, would also have benefitted from a more diligent review. OIOS' interview and survey results showed that most staff were not aware of the existence of the 2014 compendium. More than 60 per cent of the survey respondents did not have a clear idea about how to address misconduct or prohibited conduct. In addition, the UNCCD secretariat did not have an information technology policy of its own, and it had not clearly adopted the policy of the United Nations Secretariat. The Information Security Policy Directive of the United Nations Secretariat requires the establishment of a designated body for oversight of cybersecurity. The UNCCD secretariat did not have such a mechanism. There was a risk of similar gaps in other policies.

38. ST/SGB/2009/4 outlines the United Nations Secretariat's procedures for promulgation of administrative issuances. To address the gaps noted above, the UNCCD secretariat needs to develop a similar policy to govern how it would be promulgating new policies and procedures in terms of updating and adopting the United Nations administrative issuances, as well as establishing its own internal policies and guidelines.

(5) The UNCCD secretariat should: (a) establish a mechanism for promulgating, updating and disseminating policies and guidelines; (b) update the 2014 compendium of policies; and (c) consult with the United Nations Secretariat to review and update the arrangements agreed upon in 1998.

The UNCCD secretariat accepted recommendation 5 and stated that the policies and guidelines and the 2014 compendium will be reviewed and updated in 2023-2024. The secretariat has already discussed and continue to consult with the United Nations Headquarters in New York to review and update the arrangements agreed on in 1998.

Recruitment and management of consultancies were done in accordance with established guidelines

39. OIOS reviewed 34 consultancies and found that overall, the engagement of consultants was done in accordance with the United Nations administrative instruction on consultants and individual contractors (ST/AI/2013/4). The consultancy requisition and evaluation process were done through paper forms, which were later uploaded in Umoja for payment processing. Terms of reference were clearly defined, and applicants properly evaluated. The contract terms and fees were also in line with established guidelines, and performance evaluations were prepared as required.

Need to strengthen arrangements for procurement

40. During the period 2020-2022, the UNCCD secretariat purchased goods and services totalling \$3.2 million through 286 purchase orders. The UNCCD secretariat's procurement actions are governed by the United Nations Procurement Manual. Low value acquisitions below \$10,000 (LVAs) were fully done by the UNCCD secretariat, while procurement of goods and services above \$10,000 was outsourced to

UNFCCC. OIOS reviewed a sample of 61 purchase orders (30 LVAs and 31 cases above \$10,000) and identified shortcomings as discussed below.

(a) Inadequate audit trail

41. The United Nations Procurement Manual emphasizes the need for a complete audit trail which it defines as “a clear and concise documentation in a suitable format, normally a written log, describing the actions and decisions taken throughout the handling of a case”. Section 13.9 of the Procurement Manual defines the minimum information that should be maintained in a procurement case file. OIOS’ review of the 61 procurement cases showed that the UNCCD secretariat did not consistently maintain proper and complete audit trail of its procurement actions.

42. There was evidence of competitive selection through Request for Proposal (RFP) or Request for Quotation (RFQ) in 9 of the 31 cases above \$10,000 reviewed. However, there was no clear approved list of vendors invited to bid (list of invitees) as required in Section 5.8 of the Procurement Manual. Further, evidence such as emails showing the issuance of solicitation documents to vendors were not consistently maintained on file as required. In the absence of clear underlying records, the details of number of vendors invited to bid could not always be validated. The list of invitees is essential for demonstrating transparency and competitiveness of the procurement process and should be documented in Umoja.

43. Regarding LVAs, Section 6.3.2.1 of the Procurement Manual states that if a requisitioner or procurement official is not able to produce at least three quotations despite best efforts, a written explanation of the reasons must be recorded in Umoja for the approval of the certifying officer or procurement approving authority. Only 5 of the 30 LVA cases reviewed had evidence of competitive bidding, and 9 were procured through long-term service agreements (LTAs). The remaining 16 cases appeared to have been sole-sourced, as there was no evidence of comparative analysis of bids from various vendors. There was no documented justification for not conducting competitive selection. In a few cases, the rationale was evident in emails but in most cases, OIOS was unable to ascertain whether the use of sole source was justified. Further, in 2 of the 5 LVA cases where there was evidence of competitive bidding, less than three responses were received, with no documented explanation for not soliciting additional bids.

44. In total, 31 of the 61 cases reviewed (9 LVAs and 22 cases above \$10,000) were procured through LTAs of UNFCCC and other United Nations entities. This was a good practice for efficient and timely procurement. However, in 4 of the 22 cases above \$10,000, no LTA information sheet was maintained, and there was no evidence that the UNCCD secretariat had obtained approval to use the LTA from the responsible United Nations entities. Further, the justification for using the LTA was not always clear because there was no mechanism for documenting the rationale or decision. For RFQs and RFPs, source selection plans were not consistently prepared.

45. Other key supporting documents including statement of requirements or terms of reference, solicitation documents issued and/or evidence of issue, and signed purchase orders were also not consistently maintained in Umoja or filed in Sharepoint.

46. Maintaining a proper audit trail is essential to ensure that procurement actions are done in a transparent and competitive manner.

(b) Splitting of requisitions and need to improve procurement planning

47. There was evidence of splitting of contracts to avoid formal solicitation in seven of the LVA cases reviewed. The UNCCD secretariat explained that this was done to expedite the procurement process. OIOS also noted that LVAs were used to procure some recurring needs such as interpretation and design services,

which could have benefited from system contracts or blanket purchase orders. Further, in the two cases of RFPs where source selection plans were prepared, the planned timelines showed that only two months' lead time was provided from the requisition date to the date the goods or services were required. This showed that the procurement actions were not planned and initiated in a timely manner. The UNCCD secretariat needs to improve its procurement planning to ensure that adequate time is provided for the solicitation process.

(c) Lack of clear division of roles and responsibilities with the administrative service provider

48. The memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the UNCCD secretariat and UNFCCC for the provision of procurement services did not clearly define the division of roles and responsibilities and performance indicators. OIOS noted that in practice, the UNCCD secretariat conducted most of the procurement actions whereas UNFCCC only signed the purchase orders. The role of UNFCCC in overseeing the procurement actions done by the UNCCD secretariat before approving the purchase orders was unclear and could blur accountability. With the appointment of a P-4 Procurement Officer, there is need to clarify UNFCCC's role, if any, in procuring goods and services for the UNCCD secretariat.

(6) The UNCCD secretariat should issue a standard operating procedure on procurement defining: (a) the roles and responsibilities of staff and service providers; (b) the arrangements and requirements for procurement planning; and (c) the filing structure and requirements for maintaining a complete audit trail of the procurement process.

The UNCCD secretariat accepted recommendation 6 and stated that it will issue a standard operating procedure by the end of 2024. The procurement planning for 2023 has been communicated to units. Also, a training on low value procurement was conducted. Currently, all files are uploaded to Umoja, and the remaining recommendations will be implemented in the course of 2023-2024.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

49. OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the management and staff of UNCCD for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

Internal Audit Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical¹/ Important²	C/ O³	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date⁴
1	The UNCCD secretariat should map the planned results and activities of the G20 Initiative with its work plans and results framework to facilitate performance reporting of consolidated results and coordination on overlapping areas of work.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that a mapping of how the 2022-2024 work plan of the G20 Initiative Office aligns to the UNCCD secretariat's work plans and results framework has been done.	31 December, 2024
2	The UNCCD secretariat should strengthen its performance reporting framework by: (a) ensuring that all performance indicators and targets are measurable; (b) introducing mandatory unit level annual work plans and performance reports; and (c) considering the adoption of an information technology tool for more efficient performance reporting.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that: (a) the performance indicators and targets have been reviewed and refined to ensure they are measurable; (b) mandatory unit level work plans and performance reports have been introduced; and (c) a business case for adopting an appropriate IT tool for performance reporting has been prepared and assessed.	31 December 2024
3	The UNCCD secretariat should: (a) develop an evaluation policy and guidelines in line with the United Nations administrative instruction on evaluation (ST/AI/2021/3); and (b) ensure that follow up and lessons learned reports are prepared in line with the established policy and guidelines.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that: (a) an evaluation policy has been developed and promulgated; and (b) follow up and lessons learned reports have been prepared for the evaluations conducted in the second half of 2022 and 2023.	31 December 2024
4	The UNCCD secretariat should: (a) review and streamline its structure; (b) maintain up to date records of job descriptions, organigrams, and terms of reference of organizational units; (c) establish institutional arrangements needed to operationalize the private sector strategy; and (d) use workload analysis to assess staffing gaps in the Administrative Service Section and their impact.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that: (a) the structure has been streamlined; (b) up to date records of job descriptions, organigrams, and terms of reference for all organizational units are being maintained; (c) institutional arrangements for operationalizing the private sector strategy have been established; and (d) a plan of action for assessing the staffing gaps in the Administrative Service Section using workload analysis has been prepared.	31 July 2025
5	The UNCCD secretariat should: (a) establish a mechanism for promulgating, updating and disseminating policies and guidelines; (b) update the 2014 compendium of policies; and (c) consult with	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that a mechanism for promulgating, updating, and disseminating policies has been established; the 2014 compendium of policies has been updated; and	31 December 2024

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	the United Nations Secretariat to review and update the arrangements agreed upon in 1998.			the 1998 arrangements have been reviewed and updated as appropriate.	
6	The UNCCD secretariat should issue a standard operating procedure on procurement defining: (a) the roles and responsibilities of staff and service providers; (b) the arrangements and requirements for procurement planning; and (c) the filing structure and requirements for maintaining a complete audit trail of the procurement process.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that a standard operating procedure on procurement has been promulgated addressing: (a) the roles and responsibilities of staff and service providers; (b) arrangements and requirements on procurement planning; and (c) the filing structure and requirements for maintaining a complete audit trail of the procurement process.	31 December 2024

¹ Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

² Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

³ Please note the value C denotes closed recommendations whereas O refers to open recommendations.

⁴ Date provided by UNCCD in response to recommendations.

APPENDIX I

Management Response

Management Response

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Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	The UNCCD secretariat should map the planned results and activities of the G20 Initiative with its work plans and results framework to facilitate performance reporting of consolidated results and coordination on overlapping areas of work.	Important	Yes	Director, G20 Initiative Office/Programme Management Officer	31 December 2024	As the G20 office becomes properly established within the secretariat, its plans and work are integrated into the usual UNCCD planning tools. Implementation of these recommendations is expected to be completed in the next submission of the workplan to the COP, which is scheduled for December 2024.
2	The UNCCD secretariat should strengthen its performance reporting framework by: (a) ensuring that all performance indicators and targets are measurable; (b) introducing mandatory unit level annual work plans and performance reports; and (c) considering the adoption of an information technology tool for more efficient performance reporting.	Important	Yes	Programme Management Officer/Chief of Administrative Services	31 December 2024	Targets and baselines are defined to the 2022-2024 work programme; they will be further refined, based on the particularities and nature of work of the secretariat, for the next submission of the workplan to the COP, which is scheduled for December 2024. Same timeline is expected for the unit work plans and the consideration of an IT tool.
3	The UNCCD secretariat should: (a) develop an evaluation policy and guidelines in line with the United Nations administrative instruction on evaluation (ST/AI/2021/3); and (b) ensure that follow up and lessons learned reports are prepared in line with the established policy and guidelines.	Important	Yes	Programme Management Officer	31 December 2024	To be implemented by the end of 2024.

¹ Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

² Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

Management Response

Audit of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
4	The UNCCD secretariat should: (a) review and streamline its structure; (b) maintain up to date records of job descriptions, organigrams, and terms of reference of organizational units; (c) establish institutional arrangements needed to operationalize the private sector strategy; and (d) use workload analysis to assess staffing gaps in the Administrative Service Section and their impact.	Important	Yes	Managing Director of the Global Mechanism/Chief of Administrative Services	31 July 2025	The secretariat aims to carry out most of the recommended actions by 2024. On a regular basis, job descriptions for all newly advertised vacancies are updated and classified before being posted on the website. The job descriptions for the posts that were established earlier will be updated and classified as well, with the aim of having all of them up to date by the end of 2024. Terms of Reference for all organizational units will be established in the course of 2023. On recommendation (c), the Global Mechanism will recruit a private sector lead towards the end of the year and therefore this recommendation will be implemented by the end of 2024. On recommendation (d), while the secretariat is in principle in favor of this action and notes its importance, it may not be able to carry it out before the next COP. Thus, this recommendation is accepted but the deadline for its implementation is set to end of 2025.
5	The UNCCD secretariat should: (a) establish a mechanism for promulgating, updating and disseminating policies and guidelines; (b) update the 2014 compendium of policies; and (c) consult with the United Nations Secretariat to	Important	Yes	Chief of Administrative Services	31 December 2024	The policies and guidelines and 2014 compendium will be reviewed and updated in 2023-2024. The UNCCD Secretariat has already discussed and continue to consult with UNHQ New York to review and update the

Management Response

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Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
	review and update the arrangements agreed upon in 1998.					arrangements agreed on in 1998. The implementation of this recommendation depends on the action taken by UNHQ New York.
6	The UNCCD secretariat should issue a standard operating procedure on procurement defining: (a) the roles and responsibilities of staff and service providers; (b) the arrangements and requirements for procurement planning; and (c) the filing structure and requirements for maintaining a complete audit trail of the procurement process.	Important	Yes	Chief of Administrative Services /Procurement Officer	31 December 2024	The secretariat will issue a standard operating procedure by the end of 2024. The procurement planning for 2023 has been communicated to units. Also conducted training on low value procurement. Currently, all files are uploaded to Umoja and the remaining recommendations will be implemented in the course of 2023-2024.