

First Meeting of the United Nations Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms

Meeting Summary

14 February 2018 (15.00-16.30 CET) – Video Conference

Background documents

- 1-Provisional agenda
- 2- Concept note to facilitate discussions of the first focal point conference-call

1. Introduction

The 1st meeting of the focal points of the United Nations Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms was organized on February 14 via video-conference. The meeting was chaired by Mr Satya S. Tripathi, UN Assistant Secretary-General; Head of New York Office, UN Environment and Secretary, UN Environment Management Group (EMG). The meeting aimed to seek preliminary views of the focal points on the concept note (the objectives, the main areas of work, the structure and approach), shared on February 8, 2019. The comments received during this meeting will facilitate preparations of the Terms of Reference and the work plan of the Coalition. 11 UN agencies attended the call which list is available in annex 1.

2. Opening Remarks

The Chair opened the first meeting by welcoming the focal points. He recalled the decision of the 24th Meeting of the EMG Senior Officials ([issue note](#)), which agreed to form a Coalition to Combat Sand and Dust Storms including UN agencies and other non-UN organizations and research institutes, to address this growing challenge. The chair also thanked the members who had kindly nominated focal points, following an invitation by the Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme. The chair stated that the purpose of the meeting was to seek preliminary views of the focal points on the concept note to assist with the next stages of planning and drafting of the Terms of Reference.

3. Adoption of the Agenda and presentation of the Concept Note

After adoption of the Agenda, the Chair invited Mr Hossein Fadaei, Head of the EMG Secretariat to present the concept note.

4. Comments on the concept note

Participants were invited asked to present their preliminary views on the Coalition and the proposals contained in the Concept Note.

Participants were generally happy with the concept note, in both its level of detail and the structure which it proposes to catalyse the efforts of the UN system on sand and dust storms to help countries address SDS issues more sustainably.

Some issues were raised, including a request for clarification of how the goals of the coalition are directly related to the four main areas of work, and whether the four work areas are crosscutting. The Secretariat clarified that the work areas are crosscutting and that the working groups will work together in a collaborative manner.

WMO presented its interest in leading the working group on early warning and preparedness, highlighting their mandate on early warning and advisory systems, offering support to the SDS Coalition and willingness to work with other UN agencies to address the SDS challenge within their capacity. WMO representative shared examples of WMO's efforts which could be of interest to the Coalition, such as the Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems (CREWS) as an international initiative to strengthen early warning systems in vulnerable low-income countries to support climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and sustainable development. He also referred to the work with UN Operations and Crisis Centre (UNOCC) which provides information on supporting policy and decision making at the UN HQ. Stressing their work with WHO on health and socio-economic impacts of SDS, he suggested WHO as an important actor in the Coalition. Emphasising the importance of the upcoming Climate Summit in NY in September 2019, he proposed taking advantage of this event to raise awareness and political interest towards the SDS Coalition in the context of climate change and desertification.

UN-Habitat underlined the adverse impacts of SDS to human settlements and wellbeing of urban populations. Recognizing the great work carried out by ESCAP in the Asia Pacific and UNDP and the World Bank in urban management. Stressing that many countries are able to take action themselves internally but are dealing with storms coming from across their borders which is an issue which could be addressed by the UN system. Emphasizing some countries are in need of immediate and concrete actions and it is best for the Coalition to have a strategic approach focusing on technical level assistance. He underlined that if the UN Coalition aims to address the country needs, it should speed up the proposed action plan and consider the role of member states in a strategic way.

UNESCAP made a short presentation of ESCAP's work including on data and knowledge management and resolutions on SDS mentioning success stories in East Asia which could be expanded and upscaled to other regions. He explicitly focused how regional cooperation mechanisms fill in the existing gaps in data and information and can offer a platform for regular dialogue and facilitate risk informed collective action among experts and other stakeholders. In this regard, he mentioned the ESCAP's regional institute - the Asian and Pacific Center for the Development of Disaster Information Management (APDIM), based in Tehran, that provides innovative information management solutions and

may provide the necessary institutional support to establish the regional cooperation mechanisms for combatting Sand and Dust Storms, especially in South West and Central Asia

UNDP touched upon their previous work on World Dryland Report with EMG Secretariat and showed interest in continuing such collaborations. Highlighting their efforts on source mitigation and work on sustainable land management, UNDP expressed willingness to support the Coalition and UNCCD in producing concrete results at country level.

UNCCD emphasised on the decisions made at the UNCCD COP 13 in 2017, which mandates UNCCD to work on SDS. This includes the development of a technical guide, a global SDS source base-map and SDS training materials in collaboration with other organizations including UNEP and WMO. He highlighted the opportunities at the upcoming UNCCD COP 14 in October 2019 in India to address SDS and facilitate policy and decision making on SDS, as well as, possible launch of the Coalition on an SDS day, noting the UNCCD COP as a venue to attract high-level participation and media coverage for SDS.

FAO after asking for clarifications on the concept note stressed the need for global response and a mechanism to deliver cross sectoral implementation and planning on SDS. Highlighting the importance of their role in sustainable agriculture, sustainable forestry, rangeland and land management for adaptation and mitigation of SDS. FAO colleagues based in Cairo mentioned the importance of duplicating successful regional cooperation models in Central Asia in other regions such as Near East and North Africa.

UNECE stressed the importance of transboundary and regional cooperation in Central Asia among countries affected by SDS and salt storms. Mentioning Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan including Iran and Kazakhstan as important countries to engage in this discussion. He suggested that all members of the Coalition to put together a note similar to the one shared by ESCAP on their initiatives related to SDS to inform the EMG Secretariat of existing programmes. He referred to the success in mitigation through planting trees and supported the UN -Habitats views on the need for a more strategic approach towards SDS.

World Bank welcomed the fact that the Coalition is bringing together agencies and expertise from the UN system and beyond. He stressed the need to approach the SDS challenge at different levels and stages. He showcased the knowledge sharing platform of World Bank which could be used to share land management and restoration information related to SDS (e.g. how land management impacts air quality and the socioeconomic impacts on populations).

UN Environment outlined its recent activities on SDS, particularly its efforts in preparing the UN Secretary General's report on Combating SDS in 2018 (A/73/306) and the fact that it will be compiling a second Secretary General's report on Combating SDS in 2019, as requested in General Assembly resolution A/RES/73/237. Coalition partners will be requested to contribute to this report in due course. UN Environment will be convening a Sand and Dust Storms Project Technical Scoping Meeting in Geneva, 15-16 April 2019.

ESCWA expressed interest to contribute to the capacity building and training pillar/working area at the regional level as well as joining the adaptation and mitigation working group as co-lead.

The chair summarized additional comments by the participants as following:

- SDS is a transboundary issue with specific political sensitivities which need to be considered in the work plan of the Coalition.
- There is the need for strategic planning to be able to assist affected countries in the next 3-5 years.
- SDS needs to be addressed at various levels, local (source and farm level), regional and at global policy level.

5. Next Steps

The meeting was concluded agreeing on the below next steps:

- Members to share concept note within their respective teams and come back to EMG Secretariat with their comments within 2 weeks.
- Members to share their ongoing initiatives, events, resolutions, reports and all efforts on SDS with EMG Secretariat.
- EMG Secretariat to reach out to colleagues at WHO and UNISDR on their participation to the Coalition.
- EMG Secretariat to gather and incorporate all information to be used in draft ToR and action plan.
- EMG Secretariat to create a webpage to include SDS Coalition information, member activities and calendar of events (<https://unemg.org/our-work/emerging-issues/sand-and-dust-storms/>).
- It was also agreed that a list of names and email addresses of the interested and involved focal points be circulated among the attendees for ease of their future contacts
- The following upcoming events were suggested for possible activities on SDS

Upcoming events

- Climate Summit 2019 to be used as an opportunity to raise awareness regarding SDS in the context of climate change.
- FAO Global Symposium on Soil Erosion, 15- 17 May, Rome.
- FAO Regional Land and Water event in April 2019, Cairo.
- UN Environment SDS Project Technical Scoping Meeting, April 15-16, Geneva

- UNCCD COP SDS training October 4, SDS day October 11 in India. UNCCD COP can be considered as a possible venue to launch the SDS Coalition and for focal points to meet in person.
- Suggestions made by members on their role lead and co-lead in the suggested working groups

Possible lead or co-leads for working groups

1. **Forecasting and early warning:** WMO
2. **Health and safety:** WMO, WHO?
3. **Policy and governance:** UNCCD, UN Environment
4. **Mediation and regional collaboration:** ESCAP, UNECE
5. **Adaptation and mitigation:** UNDP, UNCCD, FAO, ESCWA (co-lead)

6. Closure of the meeting

The Chair thanked the participants and informed them that the minutes of the meeting will be shared for comments. The EMG Secretariat will inform the members on the next steps and meetings of the Coalition.

Annex 1: Participants

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