

**Comments and Views of the Executive Secretary on the JIU Report
Including the UNCCD Management Response on the Review of the
Management, Administration and Activities of the Secretariat of the UNCCD
by the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations**

**Comprehensive Review of the Activities of the Secretariat,
as Defined in Article 23, Paragraph 2, of the Convention, the Relevant
Articles of the Regional Implementation Annexes,
and in the Relevant Decisions of the COP**

Note by the Executive Secretary

The report of the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations entitled “Review of the Management, Administration and Activities of the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)” was transmitted to COP 7 in conformity with Article 11.4 (d) of the statutes of the Joint Inspection Unit. It provided comprehensive inputs under the following broad headings:

- The activities of the secretariat as mandated by the Convention
- The evolving role of the secretariat
- UNCCD in the context of the three Rio Conventions
- The role of the secretariat in resource mobilization
- Specific issues in planning, programming and budgeting.

In conformity with decision 23/COP.6, a comprehensive review of the activities of the secretariat, as defined in article 23, paragraph 2, of the Convention, in the relevant articles of the regional implementation annexes, and in the relevant decisions of the COP, took place at the seventh session of the COP. By its decision 3/COP7, the COP requested the Executive Secretary to provide the Parties and the working group with comments and views on the JIU report, including his management response to the recommendations pertaining to the secretariat contained in the report and invited the Executive Secretary to provide additional comments and views to further the work of the Working Group. This report responds to these requests. The secretariat intends to produce in a second stage a matrix table of implementation of approved/accepted recommendations.

I. Executive Summary

1. The report of the inspection team adopted a participatory approach in the preparation of this report, encouraging all constituencies to put forward their views in a series of questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires were also addressed to the Parties to the Convention, to United Nations partner organizations of UNCCD, and individually to senior staff members of the UNCCD secretariat, the GM and IFAD. It is worth recalling that this wide consultation yielded many different assessments and opinions.

2. The Inspectors emphasize the strength of opinion of countries, in both the developed and developing groups, about the current interpretation by the secretariat of its proper role and responsibilities. They stated that this stems from political differences –some rooted in the very origins of the Convention– that can only be resolved by the Parties themselves. They also believe that implementation of the Convention risks sliding into sclerosis as long as these differences are prolonged. They advocated that what is first required is an agreement between the Parties on the specific mandate, functions and activities of the secretariat at this point in time.

3. The secretariat welcomes the Inspectors' timely findings and conclusions that identified the need for greater strategic clarity to enhance the resulting respective role of the secretariat and, one may assume, of the Global Mechanism, which shall be under review at COP 8. A sensible benchmarking framework for the secretariat performance must be identified in the broader context of the UNCCD process.

4. Indeed certain flaws in the governance of the UNCCD identified in the report can threaten the sustainability of this instrument. Defficient implementation of the Convention would translate in high social, economic and environmental losses for the international community, which would then come short of its goals with regards to human well being and poverty reduction, maintainance of eco system resilience and protection of soil fertility. We believe, however, that Parties at COP 7 responded to the call of the Inspectors in decision 3/COP7. We are confident that the proposed mechanism can help to address the issues raised by the Inspectors and identify a firm basis for charting a consensus path for the UNCCD implementation process.

II. Policy issues

Recommendation 1:

The COP should invite (a) the affected country Parties to integrate and prioritize their National Action Programmes (NAPs) into their national development plans, and (b) the developed country Parties to mainstream UNCCD objectives into their development programmes/projects.

The UNCCD secretariat fully subscribes to the recommendation that COP should invite (a) the affected country Parties to integrate and prioritize their National Action Programmes (NAPs) into their national development plans, and (b) the developed country Parties to mainstream UNCCD objectives into their development programmes/projects.

The first part of this recommendation is fully in line with ongoing support provided by the secretariat on request to affected country Parties. It is also in line with the conclusions of the conceptual paper produced by the secretariat on this subject for CRIC 3.

To this end, UNDP, the WB and Regional Development Banks, as implementing Agencies of the GEF involved in the UNCCD process with a large field presence in affected country Parties, would have a comparative advantage in assisting the country driven mainstraming process and could be invited by the COP to do so. In the meantime, the secretariat should be allowed to pursue its catalytical support in cooperation with the GM.

The second part of this recommendation is in conformity with recommendations made by CRIC 1 and CRIC 3. The secretariat subscribes to the remark that, in many developed countries, the ministry of cooperation/foreign affairs has responsibility for UNCCD, but these ministries are unlikely to see desertification as a priority issue. Henceforth, policy advocacy towards developed country Parties should be a joint priority of the GM and the secretariat so as to engage the development agencies of developed countries to become more powerful advocates of the Convention implementation.

The IIWG may address the clear need to improve the integration of UNCCD programmes and activities into the respective development support initiatives of development partners in the light of Art 6 of the Convention.

Recommendation 2:

The COP may wish to invite all country Parties to designate high-ranking officials of relevant ministries to be in charge of UNCCD affairs.

The Executive Secretary welcomes the suggestion that the COP may wish to invite all country Parties to designate high-ranking officials of relevant ministries to be in charge of UNCCD affairs. Such a call was already made in the past. Parties should be invited to follow up this matter and report back to the COP in due course.

The IIWG may review what type of supportive interaction by resident offices of development partners would be helpful to enhance institutional effectiveness in developing countries. Closer cooperation with the GEF focal point and the focal points of other Rio Conventions would also strengthen the response of the UNCCD focal points.

More importantly, such institutional developments should take place in the context of a renewed common understanding and an enhanced recognition of the substantive role of the UNCCD. It is an international treaty that brings into a coherent and action oriented framework the environmental and development objectives of the international community that address water and land management issues with both potential local and global benefits. Political willingness to recognize the above is key to the success of these and other recommendations of the JIU report.

Recommendation 3:

The COP should request the Executive Secretary to monitor and report to each session of the COP on the implementation of the above recommendations.

Should the COP so request, the Executive Secretary shall monitor pertinent institutional development related to national focal point and national coordinating bodies for the UNCCD and include them in his report on activities to each session of the COP.

III. Governance

Recommendation 4:

The COP may wish to consider giving the Bureau sufficient legislative power to enhance its authority so as to meet any emergencies when the COP is not in session, and may wish to revise the Rules of Procedure of the COP accordingly.

The report identified an intersessional vacuum in terms of the UNCCD governance, and a consequent lack of a mechanism to guide or instruct the secretariat in case of emergencies. Such an emergency was indeed experienced during the bienniums 2002-2003 and 2004-2005 by the fluctuation of exchange rates between USD and euros, which adversely affected the income of the secretariat. The consequences of decision 23/COP7 that severely curtails the capacity of the secretariat to deliver required services, illustrates the acuity of this issue. In that context the report advises that COP may wish to consider giving the Bureau authority so as to meet any emergencies when the COP is not in session. However, the COP (decision 23/COP 7 op5) decided otherwise while stating that decisions, which affect the overall level of the core budget, can only be taken by a body where all Parties are represented. Nevertheless, the financial implications of convening, an extraordinary session of the COP (23/COP7 op 9) to address an emergency cannot be covered through available resources (notably participation of eligible countries), and no guidance is provided on this specific matter by the said decision.

Under such conditions, we are of the view that the challenge identified by the Inspectors has not been concretely addressed by the COP and this remains a matter of concern. The secretariat is of the view that the IIWG may wish to review the mandate of an intersessional subsidiary organ (such as the CRIC), which could be expanded, as indeed is the case in intergovernmental bodies of other processes, to address emergencies mentioned in the quoted decision.

Recommendation 5:

The COP may wish to (a) schedule the sessions of the CST prior to the sessions of the COP, and (b) request all country Parties to designate officials with relevant expertise as their representatives on the CST and to establish a specific procedure to this effect.

It is indeed highly desirable that the COP (a) schedules the sessions of the CST prior to the sessions of the COP, and (b) that all country Parties designate officials with

relevant expertise as their representatives on the CST, establishing a specific procedure to this effect.

According to article 24 of the Convention, the CST is mandated to perform the following major functions: providing guidelines for country submissions on the status of desertification, land degradation and socio-economic conditions under a common format; providing methodological reports on the science and technology of desertification; evaluating and reviewing NAPs for their scientific and technological feasibility and providing inputs to the CRIC; establishing links and interactions with other institutional mechanisms (multilateral environmental agreements); providing consultation to research and technology funding agencies; promoting science and technology projects to understand, assess and mitigate desertification, land degradation and poverty and improving capacity building on science and technology.

The CST has carried out its work according to its mandate, but has been constrained by the fact that it meets at the same time as the COP. This arrangement does not offer time for the decisions and deliberations of the CST to be assimilated by the COP for effective decision-making.

In order to achieve the efficiency and effectiveness of the CST as envisioned by the COP through its decisions 17/COP.4 and 17/COP.5, it is imperative that a better way be put in place to enable the deliberations and recommendations made by the CST to find their way into the process of the COP, and time be allocated for their meaningful consideration.

The Bureau of the CST, after reviewing the concerns by the Committee and the COP decisions on this matter, and attempting to look for the best way to have the CST decisions transmitted to the COP, has arrived at specific conclusions, *inter alia* the need to hold inter-sessional meetings of the CST, as occurs in other Rio conventions. This recommendation was contained in the report of the Bureau to the CST during COP, but, unfortunately, it was not considered. This is a critical issue that needs consideration by the COP, with its attendant budgetary implications in order to make the CST more effective in fulfilling its mandate.

The matter of raising the profile of the CST within the individual country Parties has been addressed by decision 15/COP.7 that encourages country Parties to select a science and technology correspondent to the CST under the coordination of the national focal point.

Parties may wish to advise how to monitor adherence to this decision, the level of representatives with the relevant expertise taking up the issues of the CST, and the resulting quality of inputs to the meetings of the Committee.

IV. Functions and activities of the UNCCD Secretariat

Recommendation 6:

In preparing submissions for the COP, particularly those on programme and budget proposals, the Executive Secretary should follow closely the guidance given by the COP, and adopt results-based planning, programming and

budgeting, including on the implementation of additional activities called for in the various decisions of the COP.

In preparing submissions for the COP, particularly those on programme and budget proposals, the Executive Secretary is committed to follow the guidance given by the COP and has improved the past format of the programme budget documents in this context. However, with respect to the adoption of result based planning, programming and budgeting, including on the implementation of additional activities, we would like to share the following recollections.

At COP 4 in 2000, the secretariat, as requested by decision 3/COP 3, presented options for improving the budgeting process. One of these options was to move to results-based budgeting. COP 4 discussed this issue in detail, demonstrating major division between the opinions of the developed and the developing country Parties. Consequently, COP 4 made no conclusion on this issue.

In this respect, Parties questioning the move to RBM recalled, *inter alia*, that RBM methodology goes hand in hand with the *ex ante* allocation of predictable resources to managers, who are then made accountable for the delivery of results to be achieved with the use of such resources. In the case of the secretariat, the core budget of the UNCCD covers administrative expenditures, while programme activities are funded on a voluntary basis through Supplementary Fund, and thus do not have the same level of predictability. This point is also made by the Inspectors when they quote the JIU report on managing for results in the United Nations system. It emphasizes the importance of the predictability of resources for effective management and programme planning. To achieve long-term objectives, “managers need a reasonable level of resource predictability in order to set their targets and be held accountable for meeting them in a given financial period”. The secretariat welcomes the fact that the Inspectors support the incorporation of programme activities into work planning, so that they would be reviewed, approved -and presumably financed- by the COP.

After COP 4, the secretariat took some steps towards results-based budgeting in the budget proposals to COP 5 and COP 6 by including information on the expected outcomes in the budget proposal documentation and on the results achieved in the performance reports. Provisions of such information proved to be of limited use in the absence of indicators, and often the expectations and achievements were presented as quantitative aspects -the number of documents produced or meetings organised- that were verifiable.

Prior to COP 7, some developed country Parties requested the secretariat to move to results-based budgeting. As there still were no instructions towards this move from the COP, and keeping in mind the differing views of Parties on this issue, the secretariat had to maintain the earlier programme budget approach, while including further elements of results-based budgeting in the documentation for COP 7. Taking into account the report’s comments, the secretariat took measures to revise the format of the budget presentation, including the following elements to improve the transparency of financial information and budget documents:

- Overall strategic framework and priority-setting for the next biennium;

- Clear articulation of UNCCD articles and COP decisions that served as the basis for activities to be carried out under each programme;
- Statement of the objectives for each programme;
- Statement of the expected outcomes for each programme, in line with the related UNCCD articles and COP decisions;
- Clear articulation of activities to be carried out under the core budget by each programme, and the role of activities financed through the supplementary fund;
- Clear articulation of financial, staff and other resource needs under each programme.

By decision 23/COP 7, the COP has now requested the Executive Secretary to prepare a report to COP 8 on the implications of results-based planning, programming and budgeting.

The JIU study insists that the starting point for a RBM system is a shared understanding of clearly defined responsibilities among the organization's main Parties and the consequent formulation of consensus long-term objectives for the organization. The organization's programmes, as well as its resources, must specifically respond to long-term objectives. A corresponding performance monitoring system must be in place.

In this context the secretariat welcomes the opportunity to improve its management systems for enhanced efficiency and effectiveness and more accountability in resource use. A UNCCD results-based management (RBM) system, that embraces wide-ranging reforms of the planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring, evaluation and reporting cycle and of the human resources and information management strategies, must be based on a sound guidance from Parties.

To the extent that resources to this effect are available, we would wish to benefit from evaluation findings that would be fed back into the planning and programming cycle. We subscribe to the assessment of the Inspectors that these are critical success factors as benchmarks for the organization to measure its progress towards RBM. However, the IIWG may accept that progress on this front has financial implications.

The secretariat is gratified that many countries responding to the Inspectors found the services of the secretariat to be excellent or very good, while noting that responses were polarized in relationship to the diverging views of developing and developed country Parties. The study makes it clear that what is required now is an agreement between the Parties on the exact role of the secretariat. The secretariat expects that the needed guidance mentioned above shall now be provided through the report and draft strategic UNCCD plan and framework to be submitted to COP 8 by the IIWG. The secretariat does need this consensus outcome as the Inspectors clearly emphasize: they expose the strength of opinion of countries in both the developed and developing groups about the current interpretation by the secretariat of its proper role and responsibilities.

The Inspectors are of the view that, to some extent, this stems from political differences -some rooted in the very origins of the Convention- that can only be resolved by the Parties themselves, while they find, on the whole, the pro active

response of the secretariat in service of affected country Parties to be commendable. They also believe that implementation of the Convention is at risks as long as these differences are prolonged.

On the specific issue of the compilation and synthesis of national reports, that is also related to the recommendation below, while noting that the assessments of the Parties with respect to the secretariat's support to national reporting were generally favourable, the secretariat disagrees with the observation of the Inspectors that the use of consultants in assisting the secretariat to perform this task is not appropriate. This support, under our tight scheduling circumstances, is in line with common practice and, the more, necessary to deliver the expected output now that the staffing tables of the secretariat have been severely affected by financial constraints. In addition to the normal workload, it is not possible for a staff member to deliver a complete analysis and synthesis of 50 reports with around 20 pages each in one month.

With respect to CRIC facilitation, the secretariat has organized two intersessions of the CRIC thus far and is keen to improve the process as the Parties provide more concrete guidance. The Inspectors recall Parties' recognition of both the considerable preparatory work done by the secretariat and the usefulness of the information produced for the implementation process. Efforts will be pursued to make the sessions more interactive and the format of CRIC 5 shall be adjusted in the light of the report's comments.

With respect to the catalytic support to action programmes and interregional activities, including support to mainstreaming NAPs into development plans and strategies, building partnerships and exploring synergies, the Inspectors correctly observe that the secretariat's facilitation of priority implementation processes remains constrained, however, by its limited access to voluntary funding. Some countries provided extra budgetary support to the secretariat for the JWP with the GM and the CBD. They allowed us to keep a minimum ongoing momentum. We hope the IIWG shall consider that the secretariat needs programme resources to develop meaningful JWPs. The importance of our advocacy role in mainstreaming was commonly stressed.

The secretariat must also record here that it strives to serve efficiently and equitably all Regional Implementation Annexes but its resources to do so have been further curtailed by the budgetary implications of decision 23/COP7.

Recommendation 7:

The Executive Secretary should ensure that the Secretariat focuses on its catalytic role in its interactions with the affected country Parties under Article 23, paragraph 2 (c) of the Convention.

The Executive Secretary indeed is to ensure that the secretariat focuses on its catalytic role in its interactions with the affected country Parties under Article 23, paragraph 2 (c) of the Convention. The secretariat provides support at the request of affected country Parties in the preparation of their national reports. However, for their financial needs, the secretariat depends entirely on bilateral donors and the responsiveness of the GEF and its Implementing Agencies.

Under such circumstances we are gratified that the Inspectors are of the view that EDM and the regional facilitation units of the secretariat are carrying out these tasks as effectively as possible. With respect to the quality of the national reports, the Inspectors recognize that it depends not only on the support provided by the secretariat, but also on the efforts of the reporting governments and their access to financing. We also note that the majority of the Parties had a favourable assessment of the secretariat's activities in the compilation of these reports, with more than one quarter of respondents rating this work as excellent and some 37 per cent as very good.

We invite the IIWG to agree on a threshold of critical support to the UNCCD process that may be needed beyond COP 8 to insure quality monitoring and exploitation of lessons learnt through the CRIC. Financing for the national reporting is beneficial for the implementation process as can be seen from the completion report of the MSP on supporting capacity building for the elaboration of national reports and country profiles by African country Parties to the UNCCD. Strengthening capacity of national coordinating bodies, raising awareness for SLM, facilitating stakeholders ownership and improving the usefulness of environmental information for decision makers is not a one time issue. We thus invite the IIWG to take a clear stand on international co-financing for the national reports in eligible country Parties. The difficulties that were met in raising funding for the Africa reports and their negative impact on our work plan are briefly referred to in the response to the next recommendation.

Recommendation 8:

The developed country Parties are invited to ensure that (a) sufficient technical and financial support is provided to the affected developing countries for the compilation and communication of information required under the Convention, in accordance with Article 26, paragraph 7, and (b) higher levels of voluntary funding are provided to UNCCD trust funds to place them in a better position to support the implementation of the Convention.

We agree with this recommendation that endorse the course of action followed by the secretariat: we repeatedly invited developed country Parties to ensure that (a) sufficient technical and financial support is provided to the affected developing countries for the compilation and communication of information required under the Convention, and (b) higher levels of voluntary funding are provided to UNCCD trust funds to place them in a better position to support the implementation of the Convention as envisaged in the relevant provisions of the UNCCD.

With respect to the first part of the recommendation, the secretariat is mandated under Art 23.2(c) to facilitate assistance in the communication of information required under the Convention. However, it remains gravely concerned by the lack of predictable funding: arrangements for the present reporting cycle were secured with difficulty and on a modest basis only, a fact underlined by the Inspectors. The mobilization of this funding with the GEF and its Implementing and Executing Agencies were subjected to severe delays, making it impossible to maintain the initial scheduling of CRIC 3 in 2004. This, in turn, complicated our resource mobilization efforts for CRIC 3: too little funding was secured too late as donors were not easily prepared to fund two major meetings (CRIC3 and COP7) in the same calendar year.

The secretariat trusts that the forthcoming UNCCD strategic review will provide guidance on how to improve this process. The Inspectors note, for instance, that affected countries received on average in the first round of reporting in 1999 only a modest amount (up to a maximum of US\$ 22,000 for national reports and related activities in the case of Africa). This is in sharp contrast to the UNFCCC process, where the Non-Annex I (NAI) Parties can receive up to US\$ 405,000 each from the GEF for the preparation of their national communications.

With respect to the second part of the recommendation, as the findings of the study indicate, the engagement of developed country Parties would have to be strengthened in the light of a) the marked differences in access to financial support by UNCCD and its sister Rio conventions; b) the lack of a clear and stable financial commitment to UNCCD by the developed country Parties; c) the consequence that this, in turn, may contribute to a deficient UNCCD prioritization in affected country Parties, which see little incentive in integrating UNCCD objectives into overall national development plans.

One may add that the overriding priority of mobilizing political will for the Convention, also in developed country Parties, has been rightly identified as the enabling condition for progress. The IIWG may find that an updated consideration of the global interactions of desertification would help. Beyond consideration of the potential benefits of UNCCD induced SLM in the strategic areas of the Bonn Declaration, these considerations could include:

- The aggravated impact of declining eco system services in drylands, notably under scenarios of climate change and the related cost of inaction.
- The role of combatting desertification and drought in the prevention of humanitarian emergencies and the mitigation of natural catastrophes.
- Preventive action in conditions of environmental scarcity to reduce/mitigate conflicts and forced migrations.
- Economic opportunities in the drylands and poverty reduction.

Recommendation 9:

The Executive Secretary should, as a matter of priority, propose revised procedures for the participation of non-governmental organizations in the COP and other activities, including clear selection criteria and a mechanism to ensure a balance of participants from different regions.

The Conference of the Parties at its first session requested the Secretary-General to establish a Supplementary Fund to be managed by the head of the Convention Secretariat. The Supplementary Fund shall receive contributions for, among others, supporting the participation of some representatives of non-governmental organizations from affected developing country Parties, particularly the least developed among them, in sessions of the Conference of the Parties.

At the time the report of the JIU was prepared, NGOs accredited to the Conference of the Parties, and therefore potential participants to the sessions of the COP, amounted to over 720. Out of this group, the majority of NGOs are eligible for funding through the Supplementary Fund, clearly underlining two key aspects of the problem at stake:

- The huge demand for sponsorship,
- The limited resources earmarked for NGO participation in the UNCCD process, and
- Many donors indicate that their sponsorship should go to NGOs from a specific group of countries or regions (LDC, Africa).

In this context, the secretariat has consistently endeavoured to maximize the impact and cost efficiency of those limited resources, which in the best of cases, have been able to ensure the participation of 35 representatives from the non-governmental organizations. Another important aspect to highlight in this respect refers to the late confirmation of resources available for NGO participation by different donors, which hampers the consultation process. Of major concern is certainly the fact that we have been unable to secure an adequate level of funding for participation of NGOs in the COPs or CRIC processes, where their active participation is considered as a prerequisite for the success of the CCD process.

In order to ensure that the selection process meets the indispensable standards of transparency and representativity, the NGO community must play a key role in the process. Accordingly, the UNCCD Secretariat needs to rely on the existing regional and international NGO networks in this selection process.

Since the very inception of the Convention, the RIOD or “Reseau des ONGs sur la desertification” has been the most active network in the CCD implementation at all levels and assumed a recognized leadership in that regard. However, the progressive dismembering of RIOD in some regions and in some instance, its lack of representativity, encouraged the multiplication of networks. Nevertheless, the structure of RIOD, divided in sub-regional and national focal points around the world, strongly facilitated the selection process for civil society representatives to UNCCD meetings.

Upon the effective identification of resources available for NGO participation, the secretariat systematically requests existing networks and national NGO coordinating committees for the implementation of the CCD, to consult among their constituencies and nominate their representatives. In the letters addressed to the networks, it is stated that a compulsory gender and geographical balance needs to be considered prior to the nomination. It is further underlined that such a nomination should be done on the basis of active involvement in the UNCCD implementation at the national level (participation in the NAP implementation, preparation of National Report, members of the National Coordinating Committees) and representativity.

Additionally, at the last session of the Conference of the Parties, the UNCCD secretariat requested sponsored NGO representatives to submit a report on the consultations undertaken at the national and regional levels, including specific mention of the organizations consulted in the process.

Furthermore, NGO representatives that have benefit from the sponsorship, were required to submit an additional report two months after the conclusion of the COP on their participation at the Conference, as well as on the sharing of information with the

NGOs that were not able to attend the COP. In the invitation letter it was underlined that future funding will depend on the submission of such a report.

We see merits in the Inspectors' conclusions that the selection criteria could be reviewed in consideration of developments in civil society and its representative organizations, provided Parties would support such a development and its potential in terms of timely financial support. The Executive Secretary would then report on the procedures for the participation of non-governmental organizations in the COP and other activities, including clear selection criteria and a mechanism to ensure a balance of participants from different regions.

Recommendation 10:

The COP should endorse the benchmarking framework for results-based management.

This series of important recommendations must be seen in the light of the content of decision 3/COP 7. It is expected that the COP 8 will take a decision on the basis of the report of the ad hoc Intergovernmental Intersessional Working Group (IIWG) that would devise a clear long-term strategic framework for the work of the UNCCD secretariat, thereby also endorsing the benchmarking framework for results-based management.

We shall invite the IIWG to take into account the Bonn Declaration on the commitments under the Convention to enhance implementation of the obligations of the UNCCD (decision 8/COP.4, annex), when translating its orientations into the strategic areas sustaining a more elaborated long-term framework.

In terms of timing, decision 3/COP7 did not agree with the time frame for establishing a results-based management system suggested by the Inspectors, who had not taken into account the scheduling needs of the required intergovernmental consulting process. The Inspectors estimate it should be possible to move to RBM in the 2008-2009 biennium.

Recommendation 11:

The COP should approve the establishment of a Task Force comprising the main UNCCD constituencies that would use the results-based management benchmarking framework to draw up a long-term strategic framework for UNCCD, that would establish the exact functions and activities of the UNCCD secretariat and enable the Executive Secretary to draw up a medium-term plan.

Recommendation 12:

The COP should request the Executive Secretary to contract an independent expert entity to conduct a desk-to-desk workload analysis as part of a needs assessment review of the human and financial resources required to deliver the expected results under the medium-term plan.

Recommendation 13:

The COP should request the Executive Secretary to put forward results-based budget proposals based on the findings of the needs assessment review, and linked to a medium-term plan, in line with the benchmarking framework for results-based management.

We are gratified that the Inspectors attach considerable value to the catalytic role of the secretariat in its interactions with the affected country Parties. As stated, the Inspectors are of the view that differences between the Parties on the functions and activities of the secretariat must be swiftly resolved within the framework of formal strategic planning processes. While they note the need to coordinate efforts and develop a coherent long-term strategy at all levels and quote the Bonn Declaration as a reference framework, they also record the lack of Parties' responsiveness to the previous attempts of the secretariat to facilitate the development of a strategy during COP2 in Dakar and COP3 in Recife.

The draft ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the UNCCD for transmission to COP 8 in 2007, now under review by the IIWG, should be seen in relationship with the review of the terms of reference of the main substantive body of the UNCCD, the CRIC. This, in turn, should influence the final decision of the COP on improvements to UNCCD procedures for communication of information, now under review by a Working Group. All of these mentioned processes could serve in creating a consensual basis for the long-term objectives for the Convention; and also in identifying the role of the secretariat and other main actors in this context.

The Inspectors recognize that the secretariat has shown awareness of the need for specific planning horizons, while Parties were not forthcoming on this point. The secretariat therefore considers now that the preparation of the benchmarking framework and the consequent needs assessment should benefit from the outcomes of the mentioned intergovernmental processes. Technical preparations and training for applying the results-based management and budgeting should, however, begin already before COP 8, provided resources are available.

Consequently and in the light of the stated process, the Executive Secretary recognizes the merits of contracting in due time an independent expert entity to conduct a desk-to-desk workload analysis as part of a needs assessment review of the human and financial resources required to deliver the expected results under the medium-term plan. This would be followed by results-based budget proposals to be submitted to COP 9, based on the findings of the needs assessment review, and linked to a medium-term plan, in line with the benchmarking framework for results-based management. Activities of the secretariat, would then be clearly spelled out within the proposed framework of objectives, outputs and expected results, and assessed through performance indicators.

As regards monitoring and evaluation, the secretariat invites the IIWG to encourage additional resources for an external evaluation of assistance provided under the Regional Implementation Annexes and related modalities of regional cooperation (TPNs). As the Inspectors recognize, in the context of a move to RBM, the UNCCD monitoring, evaluation and reporting activities would need to be strengthened. In that

context, the services provided by the Regional Coordination Units could also be objectively reviewed.

V. Relationship between the Secretariat and the Global Mechanism

Recommendation 14:

The Task Force to be established under Recommendation 11 above should be requested to:

- (i) Make a clear distinction between the functions, responsibilities and activities of the secretariat and those of the Global Mechanism.**
- (ii) Review the current administrative arrangements for the GM as contained in the MOU between IFAD and the COP, including the possibility of separate budget submissions and performance reporting to the COP.**

The Inspectors have reviewed the relationships between the Global Mechanism and the secretariat emphasizing the need for both institutions to better focus on their specific mandate.

In the case of the secretariat, the boundary between a catalytic and an operational role in implementation are perceived much more clearly in the light of a 10 years long experience. We agree with the Inspectors that, faced with instructions couched in general terms, the secretariat has tended to choose the proactive approach, within the limits of the resources available to it. We note that the Inspectors consider this to be understandable, and we are appreciative of the assessment that the secretariat is deeply committed to the Convention and dedicated to pushing forward the implementation phase.

However, at this stage in the life of this process, the secretariat would welcome that the IIWG would further review the functions, responsibilities and activities of the secretariat and those of the Global Mechanism. We also recommend that the Group endorses and invites more active support from donors to the JWP between the GM and the Secretariat.

The proposed review of the current administrative arrangements for the GM as contained in the MOU between IFAD and the COP may further clarify the respective responsibilities and performances in the light of decision 5/COP6, which calls for the third comprehensive review of the GM to be carried in the light of the review of the secretariat that is now being completed by the IIWG.

VI. Financial and budgetary issues

Recommendation 15:

The COP should adopt and apply similar procedures for its decision-making processes as those contained in Rule 153 of the Rules of Procedure of the United Nations General Assembly.

The secretariat agrees that the COP should adopt and apply similar procedures for its decision-making processes to those contained in Rule 153 of the Rules of Procedure of the United Nations General Assembly. Too often in the past, decisions were taken without a willingness to consider financial implications.

Rule 153 of the Rules of Procedures of the United Nations General Assembly reads as follows:

“No resolution involving expenditure shall be recommended by a committee for approval by the General Assembly unless it is accompanied by an estimate of expenditures prepared by the Secretary-General. No resolution in respect of which expenditures are anticipated by the Secretary-General shall be voted by the General Assembly until the Administrative and Budgetary Committee (Fifth Committee) has had an opportunity of stating the effect of the proposal upon the budget estimates of the United Nations.”

The secretariat is formulating, at the recommendation of COP 7, a procedure whereby all matters presented to the COP shall be accompanied by an estimate of expenditures prepared by the Executive Secretary. This has previously been done only for those matters that are approved by the various bodies of the COP for submission to the COP.

Recommendation 16:

The COP should consider adopting euro budgeting and a single currency system of assessment –the euro– from the 2008-2009 biennium.

Measures taken by Parties to protect the secretariat’s income from further erosion due to the fluctuation of exchange rates is of paramount importance as the secretariat is now operating under severe constraints resulting from the reduction of its staff. Thus, with respect to the consideration of the COP on adopting euro budgeting and a single currency system of assessment –the euro– from the 2008-2009 biennium, one may recall the pertinent paragraphs of decision 23/COP7:

“3. Measures to deal with currency fluctuations

12. Requests the Executive Secretary to determine with the assistance of UNHQ and UNOG the costs of any changes to the IMIS accounting system and any other related costs to account for the activities of the secretariat in euro, and to report back to the President of the Bureau of COP 7 regarding the costs necessary to implement such changes;

13. Decides to introduce the euro as the budget and accounting currency from 2008–2009, and requests the Executive Secretary to report on all necessary changes in the programme and budget document for COP 8;

14. Consequently authorizes the Executive Secretary to notify UNOG that until the 31 December 2007 contributions received in euro and any interest thereon should be treated as euro assets of the secretariat and accounted for as such; while

contributions received in US dollars and interest thereon should be treated as US dollar assets of the secretariat and accounted for as such;”

As the secretariat explained during COP 7 negotiations on this item, the above changes require certain adjustments in the underlying IMIS accounting system utilized by UNCCD and other UN organizations. It may be noted that decisions of the COP are not, as such, opposable to UNOG. In the aftermath of the COP7 budget decision, UNOG has been approached but their initial response does not suggest a willingness to implement such changes. As a result, while seeking further consultation with UNHQ, this office is not yet certain how or when the required changes will be implemented in IMIS to properly comply with the changes necessary as a result of the COP decision. Further developments in this matter will be reported to the Bureau of the COP. However, Parties’ effective capacity to act on such matters and provide guidance to the secretariat seem to depend also on issues debated under recommendation 4 above.

VII. Other issues in administration and management

Recommendation 17:

The COP should request the United Nations Secretary-General to delegate full authority to the Executive Secretary of UNCCD through a comprehensive statement of all delegated authorities and associated accountabilities, which would replace earlier delegation instruments which should be revoked.

The UNCCD secretariat supports in its entirety the recommendation that Executive Secretary of UNCCD be given full authority so that all delegated authorities and associated accountabilities are incorporated in one text, which will supersede previous delegation instruments.

As mentioned in the report, the interoffice memorandum of 22 April 1998 between the Under-Secretary-General for Management and the UNCCD Executive Secretary has been in force and constitutes a good basis for the arrangements for administrative support by the United Nations. A new arrangement, preferably in the form of a MOU, should be concluded between these two parties, which will comprise the delegations of authority for the establishment of a Joint Local Committee on Contracts (Joint LCC) and a Joint Local Property Survey Board (Joint LPSB).

In this regard, the Under-Secretary-General for Management, pursuant to the provisions of ST/AI/2004/1 dated 4 March 2004, authorized the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD and the UNFCCC by a Delegation of procurement authority to the Executive Secretary of UNCCD for the establishment of a Joint Local Committee on Contracts of UNCCD and UNFCCC (JLCC) of 1 September 2004 (replacing the earlier Delegation of procurement authority of 11 September 2000). The UNCCD secretariat would also like to see its delegation of authority extended to cover procurement transactions up to USD 200,000, as is the case for the UNFCCC secretariat.

Likewise, on 5 April 2001 the Executive Secretaries of UNCCD and UNFCCC were authorized to establish a Joint Local Property Survey Board (Joint LPSB). However, uncertainties still exist on the delegation of authority about property with an individual inventory value in excess of USD 25,000 as well as instances of loss or damage, regardless of the amount, and any case involving gift, donation, other free transfer or sale at a nominal price.

More generally, UNOG is either unable or unwilling to provide support to UNCCD regarding the change as recommended in Decision 23/COP7 to shift its currency of accounting from the United States dollars to Euro. See recommendation 16. This is a matter of concern. The UNCCD financial and other administrative processes must remain embedded in UNOG as the COP is most unlikely to accept the administrative and financial implications of de-linking the UNCCD from UNOG.

Recommendation 18:

The Executive Secretary should elaborate a strategy for human resources management as an essential part of the proposed results-based management strategy.

The Executive Secretary will elaborate a strategy for human resources management following upon and consistent with the guidance from the IIWG and as a part of any move to a results-based management strategy. At this stage, it is not expected that significant changes in human resources management can occur during this biennium. Restrictions on funds for training of staff, plus the staff reductions that have occurred, make further changes or improvements difficult in the present budgetary circumstances.

Recommendation 19:

The Executive Secretary should:

- (i) Review the gender balance at the Professional level and above and, as opportunities arise in the secretariat, make efforts to move towards the target set by the United Nations General Assembly.**
- (ii) Review the geographical distribution at the Professional level and above and, as opportunities arise in the secretariat, make efforts to achieve a more equitable distribution.**

Due to the reductions in staffing required as a result of the COP 7 budget decision, it has not been possible to properly and adequately consider all gender balance issues at this time. In each new recruitment, gender balance and geographical distribution of staff has been considered and efforts are made to move towards the United Nations General Assembly targets for gender balance, and in achieving a more equitable geographical distribution of staff.

Recommendation 20:

The Executive Secretary should develop, for consideration and approval by the COP, a comprehensive information and communication technology strategy to support the proposed results-based management strategy.

Recommendation 21:

Following the development and approval of the ICT strategy, the COP may wish to establish a dedicated ICT Fund preferably within the framework of the core budget.

In response to the two above recommendations, and in order to implement and design the Information & Technology strategy based on result based management strategy (RBM), key aspects under consideration and progressive implementation are:

- Policies and procedures of the *United Nations* as described in ST/SGB/2003/17
- Implementation of the Report of the Secretary General entitled “*Information and communication technology strategy*”(A/57/620)
- United Nations standard on ICT products as described by “*United Nations, Information and Communication Technology Product Standardization Taskforce*”(ITSD/05-00218)
- United Nations budgetary policy (ST/AI/295), in order to envisage the resources required and level of system development, in terms of financial resources required.

UNCCD ICT strategy in that regard will identify a series of initiatives, driven by foreseeable substantive needs, that address the core of these issues and which support the process of reform.

The ICT strategy will ensure that ICT investments are aligned with the programmes of the Organization. Taking into consideration the diversity and number of substantive activities undertaken in the UNCCD secretariat, focus of ICT strategy requirements will systematically target areas and levels with a recognized potential to produce and reflect tangible returns.

The ICT Strategy will aims to ensure the delivery of high quality services, ensuring thereby that the secretariat staff and partners are provided with the required tools, skills and access to information that allows them to effectively deliver their mandate to the Parties.

In order to ensure the effective oversight of ICT, in compliance with *ST/SGB/2003/17 (Information and Communications Technology Board)* a mechanism has been established in the form of *ICT Strategy Policy and Advisory Committee* covering frequency of meetings, composition, relationship with other management bodies, decision making authority, organization of roles and responsibilities for IT staff, establishment of policies and procedures so as to ensure that all the departments and offices in the secretariat progressively reach a level of information and communication technology usage consistent with their needs in terms of programme delivery and management. However required IT improvements would also mean finding ways to mitigate the severe impact of the COP7 budget decision.

Recommendation 22:

The COP should request the Executive Secretary to make an estimate of the increased operating costs of the new premises and recommend how best to meet these additional requirements.

The Government of Germany has indicated that the operating costs for the first two years of occupancy of the new premises will be no higher than those for the current premises under certain conditions. It should be noted that the building has been extensively renovated, and estimates of costs for the operations of this “new” building are not yet final, subject to revision and adjustment, as operations commence in the current biennium. Also, UN security requirements have been substantially increased, and the costs associated with the final design and operation of new campus equipment and facilities are not yet known. The budget for the 2008–2009 biennium will reflect the UN share of the then current estimate of the operating costs of the new premises.

Recommendation 23:

The Executive Secretary should continue to explore the possibilities for the expansion of cost-saving common and joint services with his counterparts in Bonn and systematically report on progress to the COP.

The Executive Secretary agrees with this recommendation. He is continuing to explore possible cost-saving common and joint services with other Bonn-based UN organizations. Presently, it is contemplated that procurement activities will be combined with UNFCCC in 2006. Planning for the UN Campus in Bonn has been a collaborative effort on the part of all of the organizations in Bonn with the aim of reducing costs and sharing common facilities. Also, other areas will continue to be studied, and, where appropriate, cost saving common joint services will be considered and implemented as is appropriate in the circumstances.

VIII. Coordination and cooperation

Recommendation 24:

The COP should direct the Executive Secretary to work with the Joint Liaison Group to strengthen cooperation in the implementation process of the Rio Conventions and boost synergies in order to move towards more concrete modalities of substantive cooperation, and to systematically report to it on progress made.

Both this and the following recommendation touching on the role of policy coordination and advocacy of the secretariat deal with activities that the secretariat is presently conducting but that the Inspectors would wish to strengthen. However these activities have transaction costs and, in case of concrete joint measures, developmental cost.

The Executive Secretary agrees to continue working with the Joint Liaison Group to strengthen cooperation in the implementation process of the Rio Conventions and to boost synergies in order to move towards more concrete modalities of substantive cooperation. It should however be noted that we must seek extra-budgetary assistance in terms of the financial implications of these efforts and that, in general, UNCCD may sometimes seem keener to progress on this front than its sister Conventions. The

secretariat already reports to the COP on the matter of promotion of synergies and hopes it can report on further progress made at COP 8.

Recommendation 25:

The Secretariat should make strenuous efforts to play a catalytic role between the concerned Parties and the various partner organizations to enhance cooperation between them in the implementation of the Convention. In this regard, it should elaborate a concrete plan of action and systematically report to the COP on progress made.

We understand the importance of our networking role but, as a matter of fact, the severe budgetary impact of the decision 23/COP7 does undermine the secretariat's efforts to play a catalytic role between the concerned Parties and the various partner organizations to enhance cooperation between them in the implementation of the Convention. This has been one of the main activities of the secretariat documented before the COP and we do not see the necessity of a separate plan of action. We will continue to report on these issues to the COP.

The Inspectors believe that the secretariat should have access to higher levels of voluntary funding to place it in a better position to support the implementation of the Convention. One may expect that this question shall be taken up by the IIWG in the light of the strategic objectives it sets for the implementation process, where do Parties want the UNCCD to be 10 years from now, and what they expect this process to deliver. While discussing our role in this context, the IIWG may consider that the engagement of multilateral agencies for the UNCCD objectives cannot be taken for granted and that a dedicated secretariat, which supports this complex process in a subsidiary manner, serves the interest of all Parties.

IX. The Rio Conventions: some comparisons

We wish to comment on this matter as it has also some relationship with recommendation 24. UNCCD is the chosen international treaty to combine such essential objectives as the maintenance of the drylands eco systems that are home to a large proportion of the world poor, the protection of soil fertility and the promotion of sustainable water and land management practices. As such, the success of its implementation is a significant condition for the success of the other Conventions processes. In other words, the implementation of the three Rio Conventions should and can be mutually reinforcing. However, it is important for the Intergovernmental Working Group to consider that, in terms of the core budgets, UNCCD lags well behind the other organizations, as the Inspectors forcefully point out. Our approved budgets from assessed contributions for 2002-2003 and 2004-2005 are about less than 30 % of those of UNFCCC, and also less than those of CBD. We also receive a lower core budget contribution from the host country than UNFCCC. Differences in the staffing table are even more acute as a result of COP7. UNCCD also has less access to voluntary funding than UNFCCC, especially in the critical area of funding provided for national reporting processes, as documented by the Inspectors.

There are limits to the extent we can do more with less. The Inspectors have concluded that in terms of financial and human resources, UNCCD is undernourished as compared with the other two sister Conventions. The IIWG is expected to take into account their strong belief that the Parties to the Convention should attach more importance and provide timely policy guidance and adequate financial support to the activities of the UNCCD secretariat in facilitating the implementation of the Convention.