

Decision 2/COP.3

Medium-term strategy of the secretariat

The Conference of the Parties,

Recalling its decision 7/COP.2^{1/} on the medium-term strategy of the secretariat,

Noting with appreciation the work done by the secretariat in preparing a new document on the medium-term strategy based on comments, suggestions and proposals made during the second session of the Conference of the Parties, as well as on written submissions by the Parties^{2/},

Noting also that the medium-term strategy may be used to guide Parties in their requests to the secretariat,

Emphasizing the fact that facilitating the effective implementation of the Convention requires a strong and capable secretariat,

Taking into account the mandate of the secretariat, in conformity with the provisions of the Convention and relevant decisions of the Conference of the Parties,

Having considered the document on the medium-term strategy of the secretariat,

1. *Takes note of the medium-term strategy of the secretariat as contained in document ICCD/COP(3)/6 and annexed for information to the present decision;*

2. *Requests the secretariat to establish priorities in its programme of activities;*

3. *Also requests the secretariat to facilitate the effective assessment of progress towards attaining the objectives of the Convention by compiling, summarizing and synthesizing all reports on implementation submitted to the secretariat;*

4. *Further requests the Executive Secretary to undertake an overall review of the secretariat activities and submit a report thereon to the Conference of the Parties at its sixth session for consideration.*

*12th plenary
26 November 1999*

^{1/} For decisions of the Conference of the Parties at its second session, see document ICCD/COP(2)/14/Add.1.

^{2/} ICCD/COP(3)/6*.

Annex**MEDIUM-TERM STRATEGY OF THE SECRETARIAT****Strategic focus for the secretariat in the context of the implementation of the Convention and programme proposals**

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I. CONTEXT

1. The worldwide effort to combat desertification, to reverse the processes of desertification and to mitigate the effects of drought in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, have substantial implications because of the geographical scope of these processes, the number of countries affected and the population groups who are the victims. They therefore stand at the heart of the strategies pursued by the international community in order to eradicate poverty, create propitious conditions for sustainable development and save the biosphere from the threats it faces. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, which has now been ratified by most countries members of the United Nations and observer countries, bears witness to the universal resolve to translate into new strategies, institutional arrangements and appropriate machinery for concerted action and cooperation, the determination of the signatories and country Parties to respond to this challenge.

2. The Convention joins other international legal instruments which strive to remedy the hurts sustained by the planet. But it is also an innovative instrument in that it has itself the role of relocating a clearly circumscribed problem in the context of sustainable development, particularly in affected developing countries. The Convention encourages further collaboration of activities carried out under its auspices and those of other international agreements, and notes the trend in the commitments of the international community not only to give new impetus to internationally coordinated efforts for improving the quality of life of people leaving in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas but also to deal with the issue of sustainable development in an integrated manner.

3. The Convention should not be seen as initiating a separate programme to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought: the purpose here is to offer to decision makers and all relevant actors, an appropriate tool which could contribute to putting affected developing countries on the road for an overall development planning strategy. In that sense, the Convention is as much a development as an environmental undertaking.

4. The purpose of a strategic framework for the secretariat should be seen as an effort to mainstream its activities and provide Parties and all interested actors with information on the main areas of intervention in the context of the UNCCD.

5. Now that the implementation of the Convention is beginning, it would seem necessary to promote under the guidance of the Parties and in accordance with the UNCCD provisions, a policy framework which could serve as an information source on the activities of the secretariat.

6. The Convention assigns specific roles and obligations to all relevant actors and the secretariat constitutes one prominent element of that framework. The strategy to be put in place will serve essentially to help affected developing country Parties to implement the Convention, bearing in mind that the secretariat has neither the mandate nor the operational capability to meet every request. It is however the secretariat's role to promote the implementation of the Convention by providing various Parties with information that will enable them to coordinate their efforts towards successful activities under the UNCCD.

II. STRATEGIC FOCUS FOR THE SECRETARIAT (2000-2001)

A. Mission statement

7. The Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought entered into force on 26 December 1996. Through it, the signatory and country Parties endorsed for the first time a concept of international law which extends well beyond the specialized topics that are generally the subject of such conventions. The international community, which recognizes the global dimension of the problem of desertification and the effects of drought as well as its social, economic and political implications, has enacted legal provisions which refer expressly to worldwide obligations relating to development and integrated action in the field of natural resources. The topic of desertification is thus no longer a specific environmental problem, but forms a framework which can help countries to act in a more structured and more consistent way in the various fields which influence the solution of the problems addressed by the Convention.

8. In this respect, the Convention makes a substantial addition to all the measures, programmes and resolutions which, since the first United Nations Conference on Desertification in Nairobi in 1977, have sought, with uneven or inadequate results, to respond to the challenges posed by this very grave threat. The Convention contains many provisions which refer to integrated approaches, methodologies, and specific and global measures which will make it possible to tackle desertification effectively and enhance efforts to mitigate the effects of drought. However, the Convention has yet to find a true identity, in the sense of the way in which it will be perceived by the actors concerned as an effective instrument for combating desertification and the effects of drought. It can hope to reach this goal only gradually, essentially by means of practical action combined with a substantial capacity for adaptation, and provided that major cooperating partners are fully involved and supportive of the efforts of the affected developing country Parties.

9. Indeed, the secretariat constitutes a key element of the machinery put in place by the Convention. Given the fact that desertification is only one of the major problems country Parties have to face, it seems important to have a secretariat which could perform, in the light of UNCCD provisions and decisions of the Conference of the Parties (COP), key functions such as servicing the Parties, and facilitating upon request the efforts of the affected developing country Parties in specific activities under the Convention. Further, the secretariat should continue its efforts to promote the comparative advantage of the Convention and to facilitate consultative processes leading to closer partnerships. This effort to link up with all actors, including the United Nations specialized agencies, developed countries and international organizations, would be a consolidation of previous roles played by this secretariat over the years.

10. It is important to underline that the functions mentioned can only be discharged by taking into consideration not only the actual resources available to the secretariat in responding to demand for services. Account should also be taken of the perception of the needs of the affected developing country Parties.

11. Taking into consideration the above, the secretariat would like to continue working in a manner that helps restore an agro-ecological balance in the arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, to take the necessary steps towards strengthening the capabilities for implementation of the Convention at various levels, and to support consultation on the participation process as well as the establishment of partnership arrangements.

B. Components of the strategy

12. An important element of the secretariat's role would be to continue providing support to initiatives that may be taken by the Parties to ensure the effective implementation of the Convention. Of importance here are the primary positions of the specialized United Nations agencies and other international partners, which have complementary roles to play in UNCCD implementation.

13. The main elements of the secretariat's strategy in the coming years would be to facilitate the achievement of the objectives of the Convention, notably by:

- Making effective arrangements for and providing high-quality services and documentation to sessions of the COP and its subsidiary bodies;
- Ensuring the linkages with other sister conventions and deriving maximum benefit from the coordination of its activities with secretariats of other relevant international bodies;
- Strengthening public awareness;
- Contributing to building appropriate methodologies for participatory approaches;
- Ensuring the promotion of cooperation with public and private entities;
- Contributing to strengthening efforts to eradicate poverty in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas through a UNCCD approach;
- Continuing the promotion of the role of women and other major groups, including the non-governmental organizations community;
- Continuing the assistance to affected developing country Parties on request and in accordance with the UNCCD and decisions taken by the COP.

14. This is a huge task, and the secretariat can only discharge it by working progressively towards a well identified medium-term objective supported by the Conference of the Parties. It is expected therefore that efforts will be made to ensure that the role of "advocacy" and "synergy" of the secretariat can effectively be increased.

**III. MAIN AREAS IN THE PROPOSED SECRETARIAT
PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES**

15. Since the adoption and entry into force of the Convention, the secretariat has been involved in various activities under the guidance of the country Parties. Reports on these activities have always been presented to the Parties during negotiation sessions and the first two sessions of the Conference of the Parties. The areas of action under the proposed programme are essentially a continuation of the secretariat's efforts to fulfil its functions in the context of the UNCCD. The said areas are as follows:

- (a) Providing core secretariat services;
- (b) Facilitating UNCCD implementation processes, including supporting participatory development;
- (c) Cooperating with the secretariats of other sustainable development conventions;
- (d) Promoting awareness creation and facilitating dissemination and exchange of information.

A. Providing core secretariat services

16. In keeping with the provisions of the Convention, the action undertaken under this heading will essentially be aimed at providing the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies with the services functionally devolving upon the secretariat. Such services include institutional, legal and logistic support for the smooth operation of the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies. They also include liaison and external relations functions, as well as administrative and budgetary functions. As requested by the Conference of the Parties, the secretariat will also continue to provide services to the Committee on Science and Technology (CST). Action will take the form of organizing periodic and ad hoc meetings of the CST; carrying out the studies requested by the CST; and facilitating the work of the CST between sessions.

B. Facilitating UNCCD implementation processes, including supporting participatory development

17. In the light of the Convention and the regional implementation annexes, the action undertaken in this field will be aimed at urging the Parties to the Convention to draw up action programmes at various levels. The secretariat will continue to facilitate the consultative processes, which will lead to the conclusion of partnership agreements and mobilize the commitments of major international cooperation partners. The role of the secretariat will also be to take stock of action taken and evaluate progress made in the implementation of the Convention. For this purpose, the secretariat will work closely with the existing specialized agencies that are in a position to take part in the UNCCD process. In that sense, it is expected that more institutional arrangements will be concluded with other international agencies and organizations. The whole purpose here is to put at the service of affected developing country Parties the support that could facilitate their efforts to implement the Convention.

C. Cooperation with the secretariats of other sustainable development conventions

18. As stipulated in the relevant provisions of the Convention and decisions of the COP, the secretariat will continue the collaboration initiated with other convention secretariats and international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Arrangements have already been made with the secretariats of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Ramsar Convention. Similar arrangements are being finalized with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), UNESCO, UNEP and the GEF. The rationale to promote cooperation with these bodies includes the fact that they present a convergence of objectives for achieving sustainable development. In the context of the UNCCD, this cooperation would contribute to a more effective implementation of the action programmes at various levels. Efforts will be made to develop in particular the following: capacity-building, exchange of information, networking, research and development, and the transfer, adaptation and development of technology.

D. Promoting awareness creation and facilitating dissemination and exchange of information

19. The secretariat proposes to continue creating awareness among actors and world public opinion regarding the challenges posed by the need to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought. In a media environment dominated by the globalization of the world economy, the problems relating to the long-term risks of environmental degradation remain widely ignored by public opinion. The objective is essentially to prompt collective awareness of the worldwide risks arising from desertification and the effects of drought. This action will be targeted on the main actors involved and the public at large. The limited financial resources allocated to efforts to combat desertification and the effects of drought constitute one of the most significant pointers to the marginalization of the "environmental emergency".

20. Pursuant to the Convention and under the guidance of the Conference of the Parties, the secretariat has the role of an ombudsman for the timely and efficient implementation of the Convention. It is the task of the secretariat to continue publicizing the text of the Convention and to draw the attention of the general public to the challenges presented by the UNCCD.

21. The secretariat would like to put the accent on disseminating information on the action taken so far. Hence the secretariat should address in particular the decision makers in the governmental apparatus as well as civil society and public opinion in general. Effort should be increased to introduce the subject of the Convention into the fields of politics, law, education, research, science and ethics. The Conference of the Parties would ensure that the secretariat is provided with adequate means to fully carry out these tasks and thereby promote the effective implementation of the Convention.

**IV. OUTLINE OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES
FOR THE SECRETARIAT**

22. In line with the provisions of the Convention and decisions of the COP, the secretariat can only stimulate most of the proposed activities. Most of these activities are to be carried out by the Parties themselves.

A. Institutional, legal and logistic support provided to the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies

23. The provision of institutional and logistic support for the organization of the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies, is a fundamental task of the secretariat. These activities involve the preparation of reports before and after the sessions as well as the activation of a permanent system for monitoring and evaluating the application of the Convention. This would also include support to the CST by creating contacts with research institutions and facilitating linkages between the CST and the international scientific community. The secretariat will also continue to provide legal services for issues raised by the implementation of the Convention.

B. Liaison and external relations

24. The secretariat is the appropriate body to facilitate the initiatives required for the launching of the processes of integration of effort to combat desertification as a specific dimension of almost all development programmes in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas. Based on the previous work undertaken in this area, the secretariat will continue to discharge its functions in close contact with existing institutions that are involved in the UNCCD related activities. The external relations functions will also comprise the information, communication and consultation services described in other sections of the proposed programmes of work.

C. Evaluation of progress made in the implementation of the Convention

25. Evaluation of progress made in the implementation of the Convention is also one of the secretariat's basic functions. The secretariat's task here would be to collect and analyse data reflecting progress made in the implementation of the Convention. The objective would be to serve the needs of various actors for reliable information on the trend of desertification. In so doing, the secretariat will facilitate and support the effective assessment of progress towards attaining the objectives of the Convention. It has to be noted however, that this activity requires the full support of the Conference of the Parties and the involvement of various specialized agencies and institutions.

D. Facilitating UNCCD implementation processes, including supporting participatory development

- (a) Contributions to promoting consistency between national action programmes and the approaches recommended in the Convention

26. In partnership with other institutions, the secretariat would have the task of promoting consistency between the national action programmes to be drawn up by the Parties. The role of the secretariat here is mainly to assist, on request, the organization of seminars and workshops; stimulate efforts to tackle issues arising in terms of the legislative and regulatory frameworks; promote participatory pilot projects for local development; and assist national coordinating bodies to fulfil their obligations under the Convention. This support could take the form of assistance in preparing national reports, capacity-building, and formulating specific projects related to the national action programme processes.

- (b) Fostering consultative meetings and forums

27. The secretariat will continue to stress the need for support towards a full implementation of the Convention, especially in affected developing country Parties. It is the secretariat's task to recall that the Convention provides a unique opportunity to establish partnership agreements and coherence by bringing together all major players to support anti-desertification activities. It is crucial therefore that the secretariat explore further with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Global Mechanism ways and means to facilitate the implementation of the Convention in the framework of specific arrangements. The secretariat will also develop and strengthen its cooperation with other partners including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, the World Bank, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), regional development banks and other financing institutions.

- (c) Specific contributions to help in the preparation of subregional and regional action programmes

28. The secretariat will continue to facilitate activities upon request to assist the subregional and regional organizations, in the context of the UNCCD. This support could take the form of facilitating the organization of meetings, seminars and workshops; facilitating the mobilization of expertise likely to assist in the identification of priorities; formulating specific projects; and monitoring and evaluating action programmes.

- (d) Support for interregional initiatives

29. The secretariat will continue to support interregional initiatives as it has begun to do, by organizing the consultative meetings, which aim at promoting cooperation among regions. At this stage, important steps have been taken by the country Parties concerned towards closer cooperation between Asia and Africa; Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean; and Central Asia, the Caucasus and Eastern Europe.

- (e) Supporting participatory development

30. The strengthening of cooperation with non-governmental organizations constitutes one of the activities of the secretariat. However, if this cooperation is to be developed, the approach to mobilize non-governmental organizations would be to pass on the message relating to the existing networks of institutions involved in environmental issues.

E. Facilitating dissemination and exchange of information

- (a) Creation of awareness among actors and public opinion

31. Creation of awareness among actors and public opinion in general is a fundamental dimension of the UNCCD process. The public at large should be informed of the risks posed by desertification and the effects of drought. It should also be persuaded that it has a role to play by contributing to currents of opinion and taking initiatives in support. The creation of this awareness involves a public information policy which is consistent and multifaceted. Such a policy could be based on the production of information material aimed at the general public, the dissemination of educational material for use by teachers, press campaigns and a permanent interaction with the media.

- (b) Production of information material

32. The secretariat will continue the efforts already undertaken to produce information material. It will include in particular a quarterly newsletter, press releases, publications on evaluations and studies, programmes for radio and television, information tools for the public (kits for spreading information about the Convention, posters, etc.).

- (c) Establishment of a reference unit

33. This unit will include an internal library with the possibility of consulting documentary references over the Internet. It will also include a computerized system for access to the main data banks dealing with the issues covered by the Convention. It should be noted that the secretariat has become a recipient of

information and that it is therefore acquiring a reference collection of general interest.

(d) Establishment of an information and communication system

34. The secretariat has developed an information and communication system based on Internet technologies. Electronic networks have been developed, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean. It might be expanded by devising specific programmes to help national focal points and other participants involved to acquire appropriate equipment and training in its use. The information "products" offered to the Parties might include specific data banks dealing with the activities of the secretariat, the Conference of the Parties and the subsidiary bodies, interactive information systems on regional activities to implement the Convention (electronic regional forums, country information networks, etc.), and networking of the institutions and agencies expected to cooperate under the Convention's regional action programmes to combat desertification.

V. CONCLUSION

35. The implementation of the proposed programme for the biennium 2000-2001 should be seen as a consolidation of the previous activities in which the secretariat has been involved since the adoption of the Convention: they have aimed at promoting the Convention and facilitating the formulation and implementation of the action programmes under the guidance of the COP. The activities undertaken by the secretariat have always been initiated at the request of the country Parties and within the limits of the functions of the secretariat.

36. The programme before you aims at providing a comprehensive picture of the secretariat's role during the years to come and specific activities to be envisaged in the context of the implementation of the Convention, especially in affected developing country Parties.

37. It is to be noted that the activities envisaged can only succeed if the secretariat continues to mobilize collaboration and appropriate support of the United Nations specialized agencies, relevant international organizations and the non-governmental community. Efforts made by the secretariat to support the UNCCD processes could be evaluated periodically by the Parties.

38. The Conference of the Parties may wish to consider the proposed programme for the next two years and provide guidance to the secretariat in the areas of activity outlined in this document.