

Decision 2/COP.4

Interim report of the Ad Hoc Working Group for the
in depth review and analysis of reports submitted to the
third and fourth sessions of the Conference of the Parties

The Conference of the Parties,

Having considered the interim report of work of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the outcome of the nine sessions held from 15 to 21 December 2000, attached to the present decision,

1. *Takes note* with appreciation of the interim report of the Ad Hoc Working Group;
2. *Decides* to include the interim report as an annex to the report of the Conference of the Parties on its fourth session.

*12th Plenary
22 December 2000*

Annex

**Interim report of the Co-Chairmen on the first session of the
Ad Hoc Working Group on the review of implementation of the UNCCD**

Held during the Fourth session of the Conference of the Parties
to the UNCCD, Bonn

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A. LEGISLATIVE MANDATE AND BACKGROUND

1. Legislative mandate

By its decision 6/COP.3, the Conference of the Parties decided to establish an ad hoc working group to review and analyse in depth, at the fourth session, reports submitted at its third session and reports that will be submitted at its fourth session in order to draw conclusions and propose concrete recommendations on further steps in the implementation of the Convention. By the same decision, the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD was requested to make all necessary arrangements for the above-mentioned ad hoc working group (AHWG) to fulfil its mandate and to meet at the fourth session.

Further to consultations with interest and regional groups and in order to facilitate the decision on the ad hoc working group, the Secretariat prepared document ICCD/COP(4)/3/Add.7 (A), outlining a proposal for the work plan of the ad hoc working group and its objectives. This document, was well received by the Parties.

Pursuant to decision 1/COP.4, the AHWG received its procedural guidelines. It is worth recalling here that one of the criteria for selecting national reports to be reviewed at COP4 was the date of ratification and the adoption and/or elaboration of a national action programme of the countries. Some subregional and regional reports were also considered. In this context, inputs from reports of developed country parties, United Nations organizations, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, that supported project activities in the concerned affected country Parties, were expected to also enrich this review.

Due to the size of the report review exercise, the Parties agreed on an inter-sessional meeting of up to 15 working days of the AHWG before COP 5. This was seen to be a necessary arrangement for processing the backlog of reports through an equitable review of all country reports submitted to the secretariat at COP 3 and COP 4. The decision on procedures stipulated that the AHWG would review all national reports individually prior to COP 5 and analyze reports by adopting thematic approaches without neglecting other issues contained in the reports. The

ad hoc working group invited the CST and the Global Mechanism to provide advice and information to be used for the review of the implementation of the Convention.

2. Election of the Bureau

The following Bureau was elected:

Co-Chairmen: Mr. Mohamed Mahmoud El-Ghaouth (Mauritania) and Mr. Willem R. J. Van Cotthem (Belgium)

Vice Chairmen: Mr. Octavio Perez Pardo (Argentina), Mr. Mohammad Reza Jabbari (Iran), (Rapporteur) Mr. Ogtay Jafarov (Azerbaijan)

3. Preparation for the review of national reports

The Group had to review the reports of 10 African, 6 Asian and 4 Latin American countries, plus those of 2 countries from the regional Annex IV and one report from Eastern Europe. Regional and subregional activities for all annexes were to be discussed at the end of the review process for each regional annex, within the time frame available. In order to maintain the desired coherence of presentations for reasons of comparability, the secretariat had invited the listed countries and regional groups presenting their national reports to include the following points in their presentation:

- (a) assessment of measures taken;
- (b) analysis of the obstacles in implementing the Convention;
- (c) update on progress made since the submission of the report and assessment of the current status;
- (d) suggestion as how to solve identified problems and next course of action.

It was understood that this broad framework that was tentatively proposed would easily be enriched by the topics of priority interest contained in operative paragraph 2(b) of decision 1/COP.4. Comments by concerned international organizations, and, above all, comments from developed country partners were expected to bring added value to this exchange.

The Co-chairmen also were aware that, in the light of the late approval of this very process, it had not been possible, for those who presented their reports, to prepare for it as extensively as Parties might have wished. They consider the process to be in its initial learning phase, they intend to draw the lessons of experience gained and therefore they suggested that any constructive observation and criticism from all concerned Parties in the COP 4 segment of the AHWG review would help to fully meet Parties' expectations in the resumed phase of the exercise.

Hence, this interim report aims at extracting preliminary elements and observations from the COP 4 segment of the country report review in the understanding that full lessons and related recommendations will be presented in a final comprehensive report after the inter-sessional meeting.

B. ASPECTS OF THE PROCEEDINGS

1. Broad features of the proceedings

The national reports review provided a more specific complement to the brief review that took place in the COW on the overview and the synthetic aspects of the implementation of the Convention. The initial work of the AHWG was considered an iterative process aiming at maximizing the lessons from experience as distilled through the national reports.

The first session of the AHWG heard the following reports:

1. Cape Verde	12. Namibia	23. Bolivia
2. Senegal	13. United Republic of Tanzania	24. Argentina
3. Mali	14. Subregional - SADC	25. Chile
4. Burkina Faso	15. Subregional - IGAD	26. Cuba
5. Benin	16. Tajikistan	27. Regional Latin America and the Caribbean
6. Subregional - UMA	17. Uzbekistan	28. Portugal
7. Subregional - CILSS/CEDEAO	18. Turkmenistan	29. Italy
8. Tunisia	19. Mongolia	30. Regional Northern Mediterranean
9. Lesotho	20. Lao People's Democratic Republic	31. Republic of Moldova
10. Swaziland	21. China	
11. Regional Africa	22. Regional Asia	

The Co-chairmen are pleased with the high quality of presentations and the rich content of the exchanges. They commend affected country Parties for their thorough preparation and excellent delivery. Likewise, participants expressed their appreciation for the comprehensive extent of the reports' coverage, the substantive information content, the candid assessment of obstacles and constraints and the useful summary of lessons learnt.

Comments and exchanges following the presentations of the national reports aimed at seeking or providing complementary clarifications, offering advice or highlighting areas of common interest. Affected countries from the same region often focused on shared areas of concern. Developed country Parties emphasized relevant methodologies and approaches. On the whole, these exchanges did not draw well defined conclusions from the analysis of the reports and thus did not provide sufficient elements to chart the path forward for the implementation process. Hence, many participants called for more concrete and constructive feedback.

The Chairman of the CST noted the consistently weak reference made to the scientific and technical work of the CST in the national reports in fields such as benchmark and indicators, traditional knowledge or early warning systems. The CST

proposed to the COP a number of pertinent decisions to address these shortcomings and suggested, inter alia, the revision of the secretariat Help Guide. The CST and the Global Mechanism are invited to bring their contribution to the review of implementation at the resumed session of the AHWG in conformity with the COP's decision on its procedures. It is expected that the Global Mechanism would provide information, in particular on support it can provide to countries in the light of its mandate.

The Co-chairmen suggest that no focus should be put on physical data and welcome more emphasis on success stories. A synthesis of issues drawn from the substantive exchanges, including the identification of best practices and of common difficulties and challenges and regional aspects as appropriate, be contained in the final comprehensive report to allow readers to benefit from the accumulated experience of all Parties having submitted a report at COP 3 and COP 4.

2. Presentation of affected country Parties

Given the number of presentations, participants greatly appreciated the use of visual support instruments. National reports usually covered such matters as institutional development, legislative, policy and enabling frameworks, national coordination, participatory mechanisms and partnership networking, awareness raising and capacity building, funding issues and, many times, benchmarks and indicators. In doing so they also covered questions pertaining to inter ministerial cooperation, the field level consultative process and the mobilization of the civil society. They called for a better integration of longer term environmental measures into economic policies, instruments and practices.

The need for predictable financial support was consistently identified as a pressing constraint at a time when national coordination bodies in charge of the UNCCD plan to move from NAP-preparation to the operational phase of field activities. The role of the Global Mechanism in facilitating and securing funding was acknowledged.

3. Presentation of subregional and regional programmes

Subregional and regional institutions presented their respective programmes. They reported on institutional developments such as the establishment of ministerial consultations, integrated planning frameworks, Coordination Committees and Thematic Groups and the use of Internet exchange forums. It was highlighted that SRAPs have the potential to turn into a cost effective channel for providing support to the NAPs in the concerned subregions. Regional and subregional institutions assisted member states in the preparation of the COPs and some delegations stated that their useful role deserved enhanced support.

Emphasis was put on South-South cooperation, finding responses to challenges in areas of common interest, notably in relationship with the work of the Committee on Science and Technology. Transboundary pilot projects have been launched between neighboring countries in some subregions. Support was provided to member states for the preparation of NAPs. Technical difficulties relate notably to the harmonization of evaluation parameters, benchmarks and indicators. The transaction cost of coordination and networking was recalled.

C. TENTATIVE HIGHLIGHTS ON KEY THEMATIC TOPICS

(to be completed after the resumed session of the AHWG)

1. Identification of best practices and successes

At the institutional level some progress was registered in putting into place or reactivating the necessary normative framework to encourage decentralization for natural resources management under the UNCCD.

Progress was also achieved in improving the conditions for partnership, through the identification and coordination of complementary initiatives through sectoral or thematic planning instruments.

The decentralization process in many instances was supported by consultative mechanisms at regional and local levels that can serve the development process far and beyond the Convention. Communication strategies to this effect integrated traditional and recent technologies in support of participatory development.

Countries and NGOs reported positive results in the strengthening of capacities for key actors of the civil society to identify and address challenges linked to sustainable development. In this respect measures in support of participatory development could be better reflected in the Help Guide.

Affected developed country Parties reported success in their awareness-raising efforts and were impressed with a strong response from the population, municipalities and academic institutions which demonstrated a growing interest in UNCCD related issues.

It was noted that considerable progress was being made on critical issues such as improved natural resources governance, land tenure or the promotion of women's role in rural development.

The point was made, notably in the African context, that there was a wealth of successful experiences at micro-level in relevant areas such as efficient use of water, land reclamation, range management or protection of the vegetal cover. Initiatives under the UNCCD framework to gather resources to multiply and replicate these successful experiences at field level are strongly recommended.

2. Identification of main difficulties, obstacles and challenges

At the institutional level, the national coordination bodies are not always anchored at the required level of decision making to bring coherence to the interventions of the concerned ministries. Nor are they always well equipped to mainstream experience gained under the NAP exercise into other strategic frameworks such as poverty reduction strategies. The Co-chairs recognize the considerable challenge the countries face in coordinating a multiplicity of agreements and strategies for environment and development, which often complicates the task of national implementation authorities.

It was recognized that developed country Parties, as cooperation partners, are facing initial difficulties to internalize the Convention in their own aid delivery process and must adjust their own procedures for the delivery of programme resources in a manner deemed adequate to deliver their commitment as Party to this instrument.

Inappropriate policy frameworks at the macro level in areas such as, for instance, trade practices or agricultural subsidies can hamper progress into the fight against desertification. This points out in many cases to an insufficient integration of environmental and economic policies.

The mobilization of financial resources from member countries and international partners remain a core challenge, notably as the process moves from the phase of NAP preparation to the phase of NAP implementation. In that context, a lack of response to push forward the forthcoming phase could demobilize key stakeholders. It must be noted that the challenge for establishing mechanisms for partnership arrangements is also acute at the subregional and regional level. Several interventions thus called for GEF support for UNCCD enabling activities. Coordination of external financial flows was also perceived as a difficult challenge. Affected developing countries were invited to bring forward priority projects or programmes from the NAPs in their regular discussions with developed country Parties.

Beyond anthropogenic factors, climate change with its context of worsening drought and unreliable rainfall patterns is perceived as a growing threat.

3. Level of participation of all actors, including financial and technical support from developed countries

3.1 Manifestation of political will through the national decision making and the budget allocation process

(to be elaborated after the resumed session of the AHWG)

3.2 Participatory development process involving the civil society, NGOs and CBOs

(to be elaborated after the resumed session of the AHWG)

3.3 Establishment of consultative mechanisms for the conclusion of partnership agreements

(to be elaborated after the resumed session of the AHWG)

4. Linkages and synergies with other conventions on the environment and development

Linkages and synergies with other Multilateral Environment Agreements and/or strategic frameworks on environment and development were encouraged. Synergistic programmes should benefit, at field level, from efforts under the UNCCD to promote capacity building initiatives such as participatory farming systems and farmer friendly networking structures that take into account biodiversity protection, carbon sequestration and other topics of interest in the combat of desertification.

Some studies are under way, at national level, to assess implications of and potential for synergistic measures between the UNCCD, UNFCCC and CBD. It was observed that the upcoming initiatives under the International Forest Forum should

also be integrated. Support through the Joint Programme CBD/UNCCD could assist affected countries in their assessment efforts.

5. Strategies established within the framework of sustainable development plans and/or policies

For the UNCCD issues to be fully represented in the process of the coordination of policies and strategic frameworks for sustainable development, it is necessary that the expression of national political will, domestic investments and the commitment of international partners be expressed through concrete mechanisms at national level.

It was agreed that a critical level of NAP development should be achieved for successful linkages with other policies or strategies, notably those aiming at poverty reduction because the consideration of such relationships remains theoretical as long as the NAP implementation has not effectively started.

The constitution of national think tanks, steering groups and /or the production of studies on synergistic programmes development should be encouraged.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CO-CHAIRMEN ON THE BASIS OF THE COP 4 SESSION OF THE AHWG

1. Recommendations for the resumed session of the AHWG

- 1.1 Affected country Parties presenting their reports during the inter-session of the AHWG are invited to take fully into account the procedures to review reports submitted at the third and fourth sessions of the COP contained in decision 1/COP.4, notably its operative paragraph 2. In the light of the important number of reports to be submitted during the resumed session of the AHWG, the affected country Parties are, to the extent possible, invited to make use of multi-media equipment.
- 1.2 Developed country Parties participating in the review of these reports are invited to provide specific feedback on the conclusions they reach and the steps they intend to take in the light of the submission of reports from affected country Parties.
- 1.3 As demonstrated at the COP 4 session of the AHWG, developed country Parties should continue to use the learning opportunity offered by the review process to further educate their ongoing bilateral and multilateral aid efforts to assist developing country Parties. Developed country Parties are encouraged to actively incorporate their response to the reports into their consideration of future assistance measures.
- 1.4 Relevant international organizations are requested to contribute more actively to the review process through a presentation of measures they are taking in response to the issues and concerns expressed in the national reports.

- 1.5 Presentations and exchanges during the resumed session should facilitate forward looking conclusions on the substance of the matters under review and the next steps to be taken in order to foster the implementation process.
- 1.6 If time permits, presentations from countries of a given region could be concluded by an informal wrap up of main lessons learnt and priority themes to be addressed. There would thus be opportunities for such exchanges for each of the regional implementation annexes.
- 1.7 Likewise it is suggested to accommodate, to the extent possible, a review of the reports of developed country Parties and relevant international organizations.

2. With regard to the NAP preparation process, the Co-chairmen also would like to launch an appeal to the countries in position to do so, to complete and adopt their NAP instruments so as to be in a position to report on new developments at the inter-session of the AHWG. They also invite partner countries and international organizations to provide early support to these effort.

3. The resumed session should take place at a location that facilitates maximum participation.

The Co-Chairmen:

Mr. Mohamed Mahmoud El-Ghaouth :

Mr. Willem R. J. Van Cotthem :

Bonn, 21 December 2000