



Convention to Combat
Desertification

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PROGRAMME AND BUDGET

NEED FOR, MODALITIES FOR, COSTS INVOLVED AND FEASIBILITY
OF THE REGIONAL COORDINATION UNITS

Note by the secretariat

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. By decision 4/COP.4, the Conference of the Parties (COP) noted that there has been insufficient time to consider document ICCD/COP(4)/2/Add.1 on regional coordination units (RCUs). The Executive Secretary was therefore requested to submit a new report providing a more detailed and thorough evaluation of the need for, modalities for, costs involved and feasibility of the regional coordination units, as well as an evaluation to address the approach to regional level activities within the United Nations system, taking into account the need to avoid duplication of the mandates of existing organizations, with a view to enabling the Conference of the Parties to take a decision at its fifth session.

2. In accordance with article 11 of the Convention and the relevant provisions of the regional implementation annexes, country Parties from Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) started consultations on the elaboration of their regional action programmes (RAPs) to combat desertification. These consultations recognized the added value of regional facilitation units to strengthen the capacity of the Parties, and to promote cooperation amongst them within each of the respective regions.

II. NEED FOR REGIONAL COORDINATION UNITS

3. The trend in the United Nations system is to decentralize its developmental and technical assistance programmes to the regions, based on a framework of political collaboration departing from common needs and similar cultural and geographic situations, which allows for a more effective implementation of its programmes. In this regard, regional coordination is essential for the implementation of the UNCCD to enable cost-effective integration of cross-sectoral issues and collaborative efforts between countries addressing similar problems at regional or subregional levels.

4. The regional implementation annexes are a unique feature and an integral part of the UNCCD, which provide the framework for institutional set-ups, decision-making processes and the subsequent implementation of UNCCD-related activities. The UNCCD review process, which was initiated by the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) of the COP, has revealed and emphasized common challenges and opportunities faced by the various regions. Guided by the Convention text, the affected country Parties of the regions concerned agreed that those challenges and opportunities are best addressed within the institutional regional frameworks. The arrangements with the existing decentralized offices of international organizations provide the RCUs with the opportunity to mainstream UNCCD into regional activities and to contribute to strengthening synergy among the relevant agencies involved in the implementation of complementary multilateral environmental agreements.

5. Furthermore, the successful implementation of the Convention depends largely on the integration and coordination of a range of social, economic and environmental activities that influence the causal processes of desertification. It calls, more than any other sustainable development process, for the enhancement of cooperation and coordination at national, subregional, regional and international levels.

6. Therefore, the complexity of the UNCCD processes favours specific institutional arrangements, which lead to intensive and broad coordination at all levels. This coordination can be more effectively undertaken within existing regional institutions. The establishment of a RCU of the UNCCD within an existing decentralized organization brings about necessary institutional linkages that can better address the various aspects relating to the UNCCD implementation. The RCUs have already shown their ability to link UNCCD activities to those of other regional frameworks relating to sustainable development issues.

7. The RCUs have been instrumental in promoting the political and technical networks which are essential to implement the RAPs. Their location within regional bodies with specific work on subjects relating to Convention implementation creates an important added value by allowing the facility to influence and to interlink those activities germane to the RAPs which are being undertaken by these organizations. This is the case for Africa, where opportunities that can be synergistic with the goals of the respective national action programmes (NAPs) can be identified within the African Development Bank's rural development portfolio, as well as those activities which the World Bank carries out in collaboration with the African Development Bank in this area. Likewise in Asia, where there is a linkage with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific's (ESCAP) socio-economic policy and assessment activities, and in Latin America where there is a link with the initiatives of the forum of Ministers of Environment of the Latin America and the Caribbean, to which the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) regional office serves as secretariat.

8. The AHWG of the Conference of the Parties emphasized the necessity for continuing exchange of information, the strengthening of regional thematic networks and for an effective communication and exploitation of best practices and lessons learned. The AHWG further recognized that problems created by human activities and climatic variations often call for common solutions in countries sharing the same ecosystems. The RCUs based within the regions bear the potential to improve and help the regional networks and country Parties in assuming their respective roles.

9. The main functions of the RCUs are to assist the secretariat of the Convention in facilitating the following:

(a) Promotion of the exchange of information and appropriate techniques, technical expertise and relevant experiences, while strengthening synergy with relevant multilateral environmental agreements, as well as with national strategies for sustainable development, including strategies for poverty reduction;

(b) The facilitation of comprehensive approaches for the development of national, subregional and regional action programmes, which integrate environmental and socio-economic actions;

(c) Participation in the coordination of activities among relevant sustainable development conventions and financial, subregional and regional organizations in carrying out priority activities in the context of the RAPs to combat desertification;

(d) The promotion of capacity-building for activities which are better implemented at the regional level;

(e) Support for the development of the RAPs as well as follow-up and evaluation of the implementation of national, subregional and regional action programmes in collaboration with relevant existing organizations, while paying due attention to the necessary relationships between the various levels;

(f) The following up of relevant decisions emanating from the Conference of the Parties, as well as of the outcomes of the regional meetings on the implementation of the Convention;

(g) The facilitation of consultative processes for the formulation of partnership agreements, the mobilization of development partners and the organization of regular consultations with them through their representatives in the region;

(h) Support for the setting up and development of Global Environment Facility (GEF) project proposals as well as new mechanisms, including desertification funds, to mobilize domestic and external financial resources for the implementation of the Convention;

(i) Coordination of thematic programme networks and of their contribution to interregional cooperation in order to enhance the coherence of the policy framework relating to the sustainable management of natural resources.

III. MODALITIES

10. Desertification can be effectively addressed only through concerted efforts on poverty reduction, sustainable use of land, integrated management of natural resources and rural productivity enhancement. A holistic approach is required in order to integrate all of these fundamental components.

11. Regional intergovernmental and expert consultations provide the political and technical frameworks for the establishment of collaborative action amongst the country Parties in the respective regions. These consultations have been taking place in all of the regions since the adoption of the Convention, as follows:

Asia

21-23 August 1996, New Delhi, India
13-15 May 1997, Beijing, China
26-28 May 1998, Ohtsu Shiga, Japan
24-25 July 1999, Beijing, China
7-8 November 2000, Bangkok, Thailand
26-27 June 2001, Ulan Bator, Mongolia

Latin America and the Caribbean

24-26 January 1996, Buenos Aires, Argentina
17-19 June 1996, Mexico City, Mexico
10-12 March 1997, Havana, Cuba
29 April - 1 May 1998, St. John, Antigua and Barbuda
9-12 August 1999, Lima, Peru
17-19 October 2000, San Salvador, El Salvador

Africa

18-21 March 1997, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
2-5 November 1998, Tunis, Tunisia
30 September - 1 October 1999, Nairobi, Kenya
22-24 October 2000, Algiers, Algeria

12. The above meetings led to decisions by the countries concerned of the above-mentioned regions to put in place adequate regional back-up coordination facilities, which would help them to develop further their information exchange and collaborative actions to implement their RAPs and thereby to meet their obligations under the Convention.

13. At the request of the countries of the regions, the secretariat assisted in putting these facilities in place by negotiating and concluding the institutional arrangements with the host organizations and, as appropriate, with the host countries, including the memoranda of understanding that govern the functioning of the RCUs.

14. These units are at present hosted as follows:

- Latin America and the Caribbean, by the Regional Office of the United Nations Environment Programme in Mexico City (since August 1998)
- Africa, by the African Development Bank in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire (since December 1999)
- Asia, by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok, Thailand (since September 2000)

15. The RCUs already contribute to the following:

(a) Mobilization of political will at the regional level and greater awareness on the part of policy makers of countries and relevant international institutions regarding the need to rationalize and coordinate their approaches in order to obtain the maximum benefit from UNCCD implementation;

(b) Reviews of existing programmes, projects and activities at the regional level with a view to harmonizing them in the light of the provisions of the Convention and to seek convergence in the process of elaborating and implementing the RAPs;

(c) Strengthening of the capacities of country Parties to the UNCCD and to regional and subregional organizations, in terms of formulating, managing and coordinating their policies, projects and programmes on combating desertification, including the design of projects eligible for GEF funding;

(d) Launching of the activities of the thematic programme networks and substantial contributions to the exchange of information between the networks;

(e) Implementation and appropriate follow-up of the Convention at regional level, and strengthening of the base for inter-institutional cooperation, notably with a view to achieving greater synergy in the implementation process of the three Rio conventions (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Convention

on Biological Diversity, UNCCD) and the relevant multilateral environmental agreements.

IV. COSTS INVOLVED

16. For the purposes of carrying out their mandates, each of the existing RCUs has been provided by the host institutions with office space, equipment and administrative facilities. The secretariat of the Convention has been requested by the country Parties concerned to support their efforts in strengthening the capacity of these units through the recruitment of the three regional coordinators.

17. Consequently, the secretariat has been able to mobilize, on an interim basis, supplementary funds from interested partners, including relevant subregional organizations, partially to support the functioning of the RCUs. So far UNEP, UNDP, the World Meteorological Organization, the Organization of African Unity as well as Argentina, Cuba, Mexico and the People's Republic of China have contributed towards the activities and functioning of the units.

18. However, the sustainability of the above scheme must be strengthened by a regular and predictable source of funding for the staff of the three RCUs. Only then would the required institutional continuity enable a consequent planning of the activities of the RCUs in the long term, thus improving their efficiency and efficacy.

19. It is estimated that an amount of US\$ 606,810 will be required for one year to cover the costs for the functioning of the RCUs, which include staff salaries of the three units (see table below).

**Estimated yearly costs for the functioning of the RCUs
(US dollars)**

Item	Africa	Asia	LAC	Total
Salary (one coordinator per RCU)	124,800	124,800	124,800	374,400
Clerical cost (one GS staff per RCU)	54,200	54,200	54,200	162,600
Subtotal	179,000	179,000	179,000	537,000
Overhead costs	23,270	23,270	23,270	69,810
Grand total	202,270	202,270	202,270	606,810

20. The costs of the programme of work and other costs of the RCUs including, *inter alia*, communication, travel and supplies, would continue to be funded through voluntary contributions under the Supplementary Fund.

V. FEASIBILITY

21. The RCUs have already played a significant role in orchestrating political and technical collaboration amongst Parties, in enabling the establishment of thematic programme networks, and in initiating a dialogue amongst different international agencies and governments in order to set in motion coordinated activities relating to UNCCD implementation.

22. Region-based facilities are essential in enabling the implementation of international agreements and technical cooperation programmes. Undertaking these catalytic functions from a global headquarters perspective is more costly and less effective, which is why most United Nations agencies and programmes have decentralized or are decentralizing their activities to the regions. On the other hand, to pursue a particular substantive agenda, such as combating desertification, it is necessary to have a full-time unit solely devoted to the issue, as this cannot be effectively dealt with as a partial task within a composite portfolio. The presence of a small and catalytic UNCCD regional implementing facility within an existing regional organization is therefore the optimal institutional arrangement in order to ensure the ownership of the implementation of the Convention by the countries concerned.

23. The cost-effectiveness and added value of the RCUs has been demonstrated through their proactive contributions for promoting the implementation of the Convention in the respective geographical areas, and the willingness of hosting organizations and affected country Parties to contribute to their running costs. The Conference of the Parties may wish to consider in the light of this report the provision of financial resources under the core budget for 2002-2003 in order to cover the salary costs of a coordinator and a secretary per RCU. It is anticipated that this arrangement will result in an improved efficiency of the RCUs, and their capacity to respond to the needs of the affected countries of the regions concerned.

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