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**REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES FOR THE PROMOTION AND STRENGTHENING OF
RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER RELEVANT CONVENTIONS AND RELEVANT
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, INSTITUTIONS AND AGENCIES, IN
ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 8 AND ARTICLE 22, PARAGRAPH 2(i)
OF THE CONVENTION**

Note by the secretariat

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The strategy adopted by the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) towards the promotion and strengthening of synergies among the conventions and other relevant organizations continued to rely on four main pillars:

(a) Strengthening institutional linkages. Towards this end, the UNCCD secretariat has endeavoured to explore ways and means of strengthening the partnership and cooperation agreements that have been concluded with the secretariats of the Rio conventions (Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)) and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. The secretariat continued to follow the meetings of the Conferences of the Parties (COPs) to these conventions closely, as well as those of their subsidiary bodies;

(b) Testing operational options, including capacity-building initiatives, as part of the joint work programme with other Rio conventions. In this respect, draft terms of reference that will form the basis for future collaboration with the CBD have been drawn up for discussion;

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(c) Developing common policies and strategies. In this regard, the Joint Liaison Group (JLG) that was established at the secretariats' Executive Direction and Management level in order to promote synergistic cooperation among the secretariats has inspired much of the effort reflected under item (d) below;

(d) Supporting country-driven initiatives: in this regard, a programme of national workshops on synergy approaches at the local level, which was launched at the end of 2000, continued to be implemented.

2. Furthermore, under this item, facilitation in the design of synergy projects has emerged as an important aspect in the promotion of synergies.

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I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. By its decision 12/COP.6, the COP requested the secretariat to continue its efforts to promote and strengthen relationships with other relevant conventions and to report on its activities at the seventh session of the COP, and that this report should include ways to prioritize follow-up action (ICCD/COP(6)/11/Add.1).
2. The present report contains the latest developments in this regard. It should be noted that only those activities in which the secretariat had an active role are reported. The report also covers other joint activities undertaken in the realm of forests and forest ecosystems, as well as activities that advance biodiversity, with particular reference to the progress made on the Joint Work Programme with the CBD and the Joint Approach on Low Forest Cover Countries (LFCCs). The document also reports on synergies in the promotion of new collaborative opportunities with the Common Fund for Commodities (CFC).
3. The report also gives an overview of specific activities undertaken by the secretariat to facilitate implementation of synergies at the local level in affected country Parties.
4. Exploring opportunities to promote synergistic approaches and initiatives, on the part of other relevant international organizations and agencies, including the Global Environment Facility (GEF), with a view to fostering their collaboration with the secretariat, as encouraged by decision 12/COP.6, is the subject of separate reports (ICCD/CRIC(4)/2, ICCD/CRIC(4)/5).

II. COLLABORATION WITH OTHER RELEVANT CONVENTIONS AND STRENGTHENING OF RELATIONSHIPS

A. Convention on Biological Diversity

5. The last sessions of the COP of CBD adopted a number of decisions with the aim of promoting and facilitating the implementation of UNCCD programmes relevant to the rehabilitation of degraded lands (renewable sources of energy, integrated water resources management, mountain ecosystem preservation).
6. Decision VII/2, on the biological diversity of dry and sub-humid lands, requested the collaboration of the Executive Secretaries of the three Rio conventions to develop mechanisms for facilitating the synergistic implementation of the conventions through the organization of regional synergy workshops, and to review the action plans under the CBD so as to harmonize them with the UNCCD national action programmes (NAPs) and the national adaptation programmes of action (NAPAs) under the UNFCCC.
7. Three work programmes were adopted at CBD COP 7 to promote and facilitate sustainable use and conservation of biological resources supporting the objectives of the UNCCD. These programmes focused on technology transfer and technology cooperation as well as mountain and inland water ecosystems biological diversity.

8. The secretariat of the CBD, in close collaboration with the secretariats of the UNCCD and the UNFCCC and in consultation with the secretariat of the GEF, convened a Regional Workshop for Africa on Synergies in Implementing the Programmes of Work on Dry and Sub-humid Lands and Agricultural Biodiversity (Gaborone, Botswana, 13-14 September 2004). Government experts attending the workshop identified the constraints and lessons learned in order to maximize synergies between the conventions; they discussed proposals for the integration of harmonized strategies of the CBD and the UNCCD into national development programmes and developed project concept notes, in order to maximize the synergy between biodiversity-related conventions while addressing national priorities.

9. Of particular relevance to the UNCCD is the adoption by CBD COP 7 of the Kon Voluntary Guidelines for the conduct of cultural, environmental and social impact assessment regarding developments proposed to take place on sacred sites, lands and waters traditionally occupied by local and indigenous communities. Such assessment is required in order to prepare a plan of action for the retention of traditional knowledge.

10. Pursuant to decision 12/COP.6, by which the COP welcomed the UNCCD-CBD Joint Work Programme (JWP) on the biological diversity of dry and sub-humid lands, and invited Parties to take the necessary measures to ensure its effective implementation, particularly at the local level, the two secretariats organized side events on the JWP during the last sessions of the COPs to both conventions. Several preliminary discussions have since taken place between the two secretariats and these have led to the identification of a number of items considered as priorities for the JWP for 2005.

11. An Action Plan for the JWP 2005 has been outlined and the secretariats of the two conventions are currently reviewing the terms of reference for the two main activities of the JWP, which are:

(a) Activity A1.2 – To compile from national reports, National Biodiversity Strategy and Actions Plans (NBSAPs), NAPAs and NAPs, information on the status and trends of biodiversity in dry and sub-humid lands; and

(b) Activity A2.1a – To develop criteria to facilitate the identification of lands of particular value and/or under threat.

These terms of reference will form the basis of future collaboration.

12. The CBD and UNCCD secretariats, in cooperation with the UNFCCC secretariat, organized a workshop on forests and forest ecosystems, as described further in section C of this chapter.

B. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

13. The UNCCD and UNFCCC secretariats have continued to be actively engaged in consultations in order to better articulate the key areas of possible joint activities for the benefit of their respective conventions.

14. The Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) of the UNFCCC considered a scoping paper, which identified cross-cutting thematic areas and activities under the Rio conventions, which had been prepared in cooperation by the three secretariats. The SBSTA recommended that the paper be considered at future sessions after the JLG has reviewed it. The SBSTA also emphasized the need to strengthen coordination between national focal points of the three Rio conventions.

15. At the request of the SBSTA and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) of the UNFCCC, acting in response to the mandate contained in decision 5/CP.7 of the UNFCCC COP, and the mandate by the SBSTA at its seventeenth session, the UNFCCC secretariat organized a workshop aiming at examining synergy among the Rio conventions, in cooperation with the secretariats of the other two conventions (Espoo, Finland, July 2003). Participants included national focal points from all three conventions. The workshop identified a number of options for cooperation on exchange of information, technology transfer, education and outreach, research and systematic observation, capacity building, reporting and climate change impacts and adaptation. The workshop also examined the interlinkages between biodiversity and climate change and in this context highlighted other options, e.g. the use of the CBD's ecosystem approach as a framework for activities contributing to the objectives of the three Rio conventions.

16. Furthermore, the secretariat has proposed a number of areas where collaboration with the UNFCCC could be beneficial, including the identification of how the process of the development of NAPAs could take place in close collaboration with the development of NAPs. It was stressed then that NAPAs should be based on existing plans, programmes of action and studies. It was suggested that the NAPs could be used as a basis for prioritizing adaptive measures within the NAPAs, where relevant, given that many NAPs had been providing an opportunity for various stakeholders to identify their priorities during public consultations. A consideration of the NAPAs now shows that a major section describing links and synergy opportunities between national action plans on sustainable development, land degradation and droughts and NAPs, as well as biodiversity conservation in the NBSAPs, are usually included in NAPAs.

17. At the request of country Parties, the secretariat has continued the process of testing pilot initiatives for integrating the climate change dimension, in particular as it relates to carbon sequestration activities, in UNCCD sustainable development projects through afforestation and reforestation schemes. The secretariat has also entered into consultations with possible donors and recipient countries in order to facilitate this process.

18. Furthermore, the fact that the Kyoto Protocol Adaptation Fund is now operational opens up wider opportunities for collaboration, as programmes of adaptation to climate change now have to be developed and implemented in the most vulnerable affected countries, in a synergistic manner.

C. UNCCD/CBD/UNFCCC Joint Liaison Group

19. The Executive Secretaries of the three conventions met for the fourth meeting of the JLG in January 2004 in Bonn, Germany. The issues of adaptation, capacity building and technology transfer were identified as priority topics for this meeting.

20. As a result of the JLG meeting, a number of potential pilot activities are expected to receive attention. These include:

(a) Promoting the most effective use of limited resources and the use of the ecosystem approach as a useful framework for realizing synergy among the objectives of the three conventions;

(b) Pilot activities carried out under the GEF programme of “piloting an operational approach to adaptation” provide an important opportunity to demonstrate synergies among the conventions, drawing upon, *inter alia*, the examples of synergy identified in the CBD Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) report;

(c) Pilot activities as well as work programme of the Group of Experts of the Committee on Science and Technology (GoE/CST) of UNCCD. These pilot activities, as well as the recommendation of guidelines for short-term and long-term early warning systems, represent a fundamental opportunity to propose effective methodologies for the evaluation of a common benchmark and indicator system for monitoring and assessing desertification and land degradation.

Technology transfer

21. The development of the CBD programme of work on technology transfer with a similar structure to the UNFCCC framework for technology transfer is an early result of JLG-facilitated cooperation.

22. The elaboration of the work programme of the GoE/CST and the discussions at the third session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) of the UNCCD have led to the identification of a number of important areas fundamental to technology transfer, including the following:

(a) The assessment of methodologies for poverty and land degradation;

(b) Perceived gaps between biophysical, socio-economic and cultural knowledge and activities to combat desertification;

(c) Evaluation of common benchmarks and indicators for monitoring and assessment of desertification;

(d) Recommendations for guidelines for both short-term and long-term early warning systems.

23. UNFCCC is starting to undertake work on adaptation technologies. Potential synergy with the other Rio conventions in this area is higher than that for mitigation technologies. The extent of this synergy should be further explored. Decision 12/COP.6 of the UNCCD COP relating to LFCCs invites a joint approach in the promotion of activities to strengthen the capacity of LFCCs to combat desertification, land degradation and deforestation.

Forests and forest ecosystems

24. The secretariats of the UNCCD and CBD, in cooperation with the UNFCCC secretariat, organized a workshop on forests and forest ecosystems (Viterbo, Italy, April 2004), which has been identified as an area where synergistic actions could be particularly effective. The specific objectives of the Viterbo workshop relate directly to the interactions among the target group of focal points of the three Rio conventions and other participants. The workshop encouraged participants to identify options for the implementation of specific synergy actions at the local level, relating to forests and forest ecosystems and their use and conservation, derived from the mandates and commitments under each of the Rio conventions. The workshop contributed to the identification of synergistic processes between sectoral policies relating to forests, as well as between organizations dealing with forests. The workshop provided an opportunity for an exchange of views among different focal points, agencies and ongoing international processes and partnerships such as United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF).

25. A number of follow-up initiatives to the Viterbo workshop are being considered. Notably, a United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR) task force on traditional knowledge has been formed, led by the Forest Service of the United States of America. Recommendations relating to forest fire prevention and management have assisted the Rio conventions in collaborating within the Global Advisory Board of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction/Wildland Fire Network. Viterbo recommendations on sustainable forest management have carried over to support preliminary work on the joint approach to LFCCs under the aforementioned decision 12/COP.6 of the UNCCD COP.

D. Convention on Migratory Species

26. By its decision 17/COP.3, the COP requested the secretariat to continue to take steps to implement the Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) signed with other secretariats and institutions, and to develop similar MoUs with other institutional partners.

27. Pursuant to this decision, the UNCCD secretariat and the secretariat of Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) signed, on 2 September 2003, an MoU that outlines modalities for their cooperation, and highlights key areas for developing joint initiatives, a development welcomed by decision 12/COP.6.

28. Cooperation will focus on the organization of collaborative joint activities, as specified in the MoU, as well as fostering collaboration at the national level, among the focal points of the conventions and agreements. In this context, pilot projects, at the regional and national levels, were identified as the best means to define, at a practical level, the type of collaboration and interactions that Parties should have.

E. Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

29. The secretariat participated in the 5th European Regional Meeting on the implementation and effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands organized in Yerevan, Armenia in December 2004. Some of its conclusions and recommendations might have significant synergy potential.

III. NATIONAL SYNERGIES WORKSHOPS PROGRAMME

A. Background

30. Decision 12/COP.6 highlights the need to develop and promote synergies among the Rio conventions as a means of fostering their implementation, in particular at the national level. It complements the emphasis made by country Parties on many occasions on the need to integrate action programmes of environmental conventions with national sustainable development strategies, in particular in such areas as poverty reduction, science and education, agriculture, forestry, energy and water supply.

31. The secretariat, at the request of a number of Parties, continued to facilitate the organization of national workshops in selected developing country Parties in order to stimulate the discussion of modalities of collaboration by various stakeholders in the implementation of the three conventions.

B. Rationale and objectives of the programme

32. As stated in earlier COP documents under this agenda item, the main rationale behind this exercise is to integrate the UNCCD process into national development strategies through linkages between existing relevant sustainable development policies. The programme also assists the secretariats of the three conventions in preparing and/or updating joint work plans to meet the expectations of countries, particularly in capacity building, information systems and innovative options for cooperation and assistance. Among the broad objectives of the programme are the following:

- (a) To strengthen current coordination at local level;
- (b) To facilitate policy dialogue with the key stakeholders; and
- (c) To catalyze local level approaches to synergy among the stakeholders, and to help in identifying the common threads in the issue areas covered under the environment-related treaties to which the individual country is a signatory.

C. Progress made in the programme

33. Since the national synergy workshop programme was launched (late 2000), national synergy workshops have been held in some 20 country Parties with a balanced coverage of affected country Parties. The general outcome of the workshops is that there is consensus regarding the importance of synergy at both the administrative and operational levels in the affected countries. What remains to be done is for the various United Nations agencies and intergovernmental institutions to put the conclusions and recommendations of these workshops into practice through joint programmes. The subsequent chapter shows that there is some movement in this direction.

IV. COLLABORATION WITH OTHER RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS AND STRENGTHENING OF RELATIONSHIPS

A. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

34. The secretariat has taken part in the Steering Committee for the International Conference “Biodiversity: Science and Governance” (Paris Conference) which met from 24 to 28 January 2005 at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in Paris. The Conference was convened as part of the ongoing global effort to reverse the current rate of biodiversity loss by 2010, ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from genetic resources, as well as to examine public and private approaches to biodiversity conservation and management and the interactions between science and governance.

35. After the Conference, the Steering Committee has formed the basis of an emerging consultative forum for discussion, exchange of views and experiences between scientists, local, national and international policy makers and representatives of corporations and NGOs. The collaboration is being designed to strengthen all ecosystem-related conventions, especially the CBD, the UNCCD, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the CMS in identifying priorities and filling gaps in future assessment work.

B. United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF)

36. As a member of the CPF, the secretariat attended both the UNFF-4 (Geneva, Switzerland, May 2004) and UNFF-5 (New York, United States of America, May 2005) meetings and contributed to the deliberations on the effects of desertification, degraded forests and LFCCs.

Low Forest Cover Countries (LFCCs)

37. Pursuant to decision 12/COP.6, the global context and the main principles of the joint approach to promote activities with low forest cover countries (LFCCs) are hereby presented. Due consideration is given to the importance of defining the concept of LFCC. The mutual acceptance and use of terms is critical to the success of the joint approach. The priority policy item for the proposed action plan of the Joint Approach (JA) is the enhancement of cooperation and consultation among LFCCs, establishing partnerships with multilateral organization and instruments, and creating linkages to the donor community. To achieve this priority item, placing the issue of low forest cover countries on the agenda of international deliberations on forests and other development issues is an important first step.

38. There are six components to the proposed action plan under the Joint Approach. These are based on further developing the consultation with the Tehran Process Secretariat; ensuring data collection and reporting under international processes; biodiversity actions; promoting participatory processes; facilitating field projects; and funding.

39. In this regard, the UNCCD secretariat prepared a draft document, entitled “The Joint Approach on Forests: An Initiative for Low Forests Cover Countries“, which was circulated for comments to the Tehran Process, the CBD, the UNFCCC and the UNFF secretariats. Upon the receipt of feedback, the UNCCD secretariat revised the draft, which is contained in annex to this document.

Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF)

40. As already stated, the secretariat is a member of CPF, which is an innovative partnership of 14 major forest-related international organizations, institutions and convention secretariats. CPF was established in April 2001, following the recommendation of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Its objectives are to support the work of UNFF and its member countries; and to enhance cooperation and coordination on forest issues.

41. The secretariat has made contributions to the CPF Sourcebook on Funding for Sustainable Forest Management, the CPF Task Force on Streamlining Forest-Related Reporting, the CPF initiative on forest-related definitions and the CPF website, which provides information on the Partnership and its activities.

42. A joint initiative between the UNCCD secretariat and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) has resulted in the focal points of both organizations in Peru jointly requesting and receiving assessment and project formulation assistance from the ITTO (2005) in the evaluation of Peru’s forest fire impacts on ecosystem changes and in the identification of strategies and actions that will assist in the development of a project proposal to prevent, mitigate and revert desertification along the Piura River basin through a Contingency Plan.

C. Common Fund for Commodities

43. Decision 1/COP.6 requested the secretariat to liaise with those concerned institutions which are exploring measures to facilitate opportunities for dryland products to access international markets. Recognizing the importance of commodity development in drylands, the UNCCD secretariat and the Common Fund for Commodities (CFC) formalized a MoU in February 2005. The areas of collaboration under the MoU include promotion of and information exchange on projects of mutual interest, and joint workshops, publications and studies on commodity development in drylands.

44. To-date, the cooperation under the MoU has resulted in a preparation of a joint publication entitled Atlas of Dryland Commodities, to be published in support of the 2006 International Year of Deserts and Desertification (IYDD). The publication will be directed at commodity awareness-raising, with special emphasis on those crops that are traded as commodities and serve as tools to combat desertification. Furthermore, the secretariat has been invited as a member to the steering committee for a CFC project on shea butter production in Sub-Saharan Africa. The two entities have also exchanged information and consulted on the development of a CFC project on developing gum arabic production and a UNCCD project on using gum-producing acacias in dryland rehabilitation, with the aim to build linkages and complementarity between the two projects.

D. International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics

45. In the context of continuing and expanding collaboration with the members of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the secretariat completed a MoU with the International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in October 2004. In line with the MoU, the two entities seek to promote activities and projects of mutual interest; organize joint activities with the aim to supported countries affected by desertification and particularly rural communities; and promote the strengthening of linkages between the programmes under the UNCCD and those of the ICRISAT. Among the main collaborative initiatives is the strengthening of capacity building targeted to African stakeholders working on the combat against desertification.

E. United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

46. Following the recommendations of the Viterbo workshop relating to wildland fire, the secretariat has begun to participate as a cooperating member in the Global Wildland Fire Advisory Group (WFAG) under the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR). The objective of the Advisory Group is to evaluate the current status of wildland fires globally, to review the consultations of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks, together with the Forestry Department of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and the secretariats of UNFF, UN-ISDR, the UN-ISDR Platform for the Promotion of Early Warning, the United Nations University (UNU) and the Global Wildland Fire Monitoring Centre at the University of Freiburg, Germany. The WFAG expressed encouragement for UNCCD participation in the future development of a West Africa node for the global regional fire network and the facilitation of opportunities for in-country training on community-based fire management.

E. Cooperation with other organizations

47. The secretariat has initiated collaborative activities with other organizations and research institutions in the implementation of the UNCCD mandate, with the aim of giving further impetus to the promotion of synergies.

48. In this regard, a technical workshop on drought preparedness in the Balkans within the context of the UNCCD was organized in October 2004 in Bucharest, Romania in cooperation with the World Meteorological Organization. The main objective of the workshop was to bring together the NAP implementation process and the process of scientific research and meteorological monitoring at the national and subregional levels. The meeting agreed on the need for the establishment of a Balkan subregional drought management centre. The terms of reference will be proposed and discussed in a forthcoming workshop.

49. Furthermore, the secretariat participated in, and made a presentation at, a conference organized by the German Competence Network for Research to Combat Desertification (Desert*Net) (Bonn, Germany, December 2004). Desert*Net is preparing a scientific work plan, outlining the priority research topics to which the secretariat is contributing by providing information on priority scientific topics, as contained in the programme of work of the GoE/CST, in order to facilitate preparation of a collaborative scientific work plan with Desert*Net.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

50. The COP may wish to take note of this report prepared by the secretariat, and:

(a) To reiterate that institutional linkages continue to be strengthened among the multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), thereby ensuring synergy in the implementation of their mandates;

(b) To endorse the effort undertaken so far and encourage Parties to render their support to the JWP with the CBD, as it results in successful compilation of information on the status and trends of biodiversity in dry and sub-humid lands, and identification of lands of particular value and/or under threat;

(c) To encourage further efforts in capacity building, including through national synergy workshops and GEF training workshops;

(d) To recognize that carbon sequestration, watershed protection and biodiversity conservation are emerging as a viable option to protect and restore ecosystems, while rewarding resource stewards and landowners for good land management practices, and therefore encourage affected countries to engage in these activities in the context of sustainable land management;

(e) To recognize that the operationalization of the Kyoto Protocol Adaptation Fund offers more opportunities to advance synergy between the Rio conventions, as they now all have to collaborate in developing programmes of adaptation to climate change in the most vulnerable affected countries and, in view of the foregoing, encourage vigorous exploration of these opportunities;

(f) To take note of, and advise on, the Joint Approach for LFCCs and to request the Executive Secretary to pursue consultations with interested agencies in order to foster joint activities. Furthermore, the COP may wish to invite country Parties and interested organizations to provide the required financial and technical support to this joint initiative.

Annex

DRAFT TEXT

The Joint Approach on Forests: An Initiative for Low Forest Cover Countries

1. This document is a draft discussion paper for a Joint Approach to enhance forestry issues in LFCCs, prepared pursuant to the UNCCD COP decision 12/COP.6. It presents the global context and the main principles of the joint approach and to provide groundwork to implement the Bamako Resolution (Bamako, Mali, January 2004) that has been endorsed by many LFCCs. In the discussion paper due consideration is given to the importance of the endorsement of the unique term (LFCC), its definition and concept. At the moment, the definition speaks about less than 10 per cent of forest cover compared to the total land area. The mutual acceptance and use of the term is critical to the success of the Joint Approach.
2. The priority policy item for the proposed action plan of the Joint Approach is the enhancement of cooperation and consultation among LFCCs, establishing partnerships with multilateral organizations and instruments, and creating linkages to the donor community. To achieve this priority item, placing the LFCC issue on the agenda of international deliberations on forests and other development issues is an important first step.
3. The consultation on the action plan will consider the implementation activities relating to forestry in the NAPs under the UNCCD, NBSAPs under the CBD and NAPAs under the UNFCCC. The recommendations of UNFF, the CPF as well as the FAO regarding the restoration of degraded forest ecosystems and forest-related initiatives in countries of low forest cover shall be equally considered.
4. There are six components to the proposed action plan under the Joint Approach. These are based on further developing the consultation with the Tehran Process secretariat for LFCCs; ensuring data collection and reporting under international processes; dryland biodiversity conservation and sustainable use actions; promoting participatory processes; facilitating field projects; and funding.

I. BACKGROUND

5. By its decision 12/COP.6, taken in Havana in September 2003, the UNCCD COP requested the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD to collaborate with the UNFF and the secretariats of the UNFCCC and the CBD to promote activities with LFCCs, for a joint approach on forests and, *inter alia*, to cooperate with the Tehran Process secretariat in order to strengthen the capacity of LFCCs to combat desertification, land degradation and deforestation.
6. Prior to the afore-mentioned decision, the international meeting of experts on 'Special Needs and Requirements of Developing Countries with Low Forest Cover and Unique Types of Forest', a government-led initiative in support of the programme of work of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), was held in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, from 4 to 8 October 1999. The Tehran meeting noted that there were more than 70 developing countries categorized as low forest cover, involving about 400 million people out of a population of more

than 700 million living in and or around forested land areas. The FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO), at its fifteenth session in March 2001, welcomed the establishment of the Tehran Process on LFCCs, and requested FAO to continue its support to the process. The UNFF, at its first session in June 2001, in its deliberations on the development of a plan of action for the implementation of the proposals for action of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests decided *inter alia* that "initiatives are encouraged which address the special concerns and needs of least developed countries as well as low forest cover countries and other countries with fragile ecosystems, for example, through follow-up to the Tehran Process and the third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries". The UNFF also decided to include in its multi-year programme of work a topic on "rehabilitation and conservation strategies for countries with low forest cover."

7. This draft discussion paper describes the elements of a joint approach, a consultative mechanism, and an action plan directed towards facilitating field projects. Key to the strategy of the Joint Approach is to place the issue of low forest cover on the agenda of international forest policy deliberations and to underline key components that address common concerns, including desertification and specific LFCC concerns, in order to find areas of collaborative partnership within identified projects.

II. CONSULTATION AMONG KEY PLAYERS

8. The LFCC issue needs to be placed on the political and policy agenda of future international deliberations on forests and other development issues, including combating desertification, and formulating long-term approaches and strategies. A partnership among the key players that have been identified by the UNCCD COP is necessary in order to develop a strategic, inter-agency joint approach to consultation on issues related to LFCCs. The focus of the Joint Approach should be on implementation of internationally agreed actions related to the special needs of LFCCs, particularly those contained in the Proposals for Action, and those called for by UNCCD, CBD, UNFCCC and UNFF, as well as by the governing bodies of other CPF members. The partnership should seek the involvement of local people *via* a bottom-up approach as promoted by the UNCCD, as this is essential for the effective development and delivery of projects for LFCCs. As well as having a stake in the area, by virtue of living, working or carrying out forest-related activities, local communities have a wealth of local knowledge and expertise. Partnerships formed under the Joint Approach should also include the FAO and other members of the CPF. Implementation of the recommendations of the Bamako Resolution which were developed by participating governments, the FAO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Tehran Process secretariat could be achieved through the Joint Approach.

9. It is essential to establish a consultative forum of all the organizations concerned, and to form a partnership on an ongoing basis. The aim is to make the best use of resources by building on existing joint consultations. This document sets the standard, strategic objective, definition and use of the LFCC term. It also provides a preliminary action plan (see section IX below) for the Joint Approach integrating preliminary recommendations on synergies among the three Rio conventions and UNFF and more specifically those made during the Viterbo workshop on synergies through forests and forest ecosystems, 5-7 April 2004, Viterbo, Italy (organized by the secretariats of the UNCCD and the CBD in collaboration with the secretariat of the UNFCCC);

those made during the Gaborone workshop, 13-17 September 2004, Gaborone, Botswana; and those promoted in the Joint Work Programme established between UNCCD and CBD.

III. THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

10. While the particular issues of forest-rich countries, their biodiversity and their wildlife have been in the forefront of deliberations in international forums, the concerns of LFCCs, the overwhelming majority of which are developing countries, have so far not been adequately covered in the international dialogue on forests. Forests in LFCCs are poorly known and poorly protected and may require different strategies for forest conservation and protected area management from countries with a large forest estate.

11. The principal constraints to the establishment of sustainable forest management and soil conservation in the arid and semi-arid zones include: limited precipitation; the high cost of (re)afforestation; and financial losses incurred by landowners during the years between planting and before trees reach full productivity. Moreover, interdisciplinary skills and the institutional capacity required for forest management are yet to be fully developed in the LFCCs and some land tenure systems and rights to utilize forest resources do not allow for sustainable forest management.

12. Typically, forests in countries with low forest cover have scarce resources and are therefore likely to be under disproportionate pressure compared with forests elsewhere. It is unlikely therefore that large areas will be able to be set aside solely for the purpose of biodiversity conservation. Integrated land-use planning, the ecosystem approach, sustainable resource use within forests and (re)afforestation to alleviate pressure on natural forests are all particularly important components of forest conservation planning in these countries.

IV. AIMS AND STRATEGY OF THE JOINT APPROACH

13. The strategic goal of the Joint Approach is to provide financial and technical supports to the Tehran process secretariat in order to improve the participatory, bottom-up approach policies to forest management in LFCCs. The objective of the partnerships developed under the Joint Approach is to promote the environmental, social and human aspects of forest and rangelands, including areas under agroforestry, which secure the livelihoods of people in rural areas. To achieve this objective, forest policies, and national forest programmes, in many LFCCs need to take into account broader perspectives and the wide variety of needs and demands from society, which can be fulfilled by the forestry sector.

14. The key role for the partnership created under the Joint Approach is to develop and establish consultation procedures among the partners with the objective of achieving sustainability in the forestry sector in the LFCCs and the means to achieve it. The consultation under the Joint Approach is an important prerequisite to make this possible, as the formal consultation process needs to be turned into a practical action. In keeping with the proposed principles of the initiative (see below), it is necessary to ensure that the consultation is not an isolated exercise, but one that helps to build the capacity of the organizations to assist and report on activities of the LFCCs, and those agencies being consulted in the LFCCs, on an ongoing basis. To ensure their sustainability, these consultations should be based on ongoing activities and existing structures such as the thematic programme networks (TPNs) developed by UNCCD,

the CBD Programme of Work on Forest Biological Diversity, poverty reduction strategies and the national, and/or subregional and/or regional action programmes developed by the Parties to the three Rio conventions. The IPCC Good Practice Guidance for Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) should also be taken into account in these consultations, where relevant.

V. EXPECTED KEY OUTCOMES FROM THE JOINT APPROACH

15. It is expected that the consultations and action plan proposed under the Joint Approach to LFCCs will further integrate forest activities into desertification control, strengthen synergy between the Rio conventions and enhance the UNFF dialogue. The initiative will serve to reinforce the existing links among intergovernmental agencies dealing with natural resource management in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas.

VI. DEFINING THE LFCCs

16. In its earliest discussions (1998), the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) identified LFCCs as being of special concern. Thereafter, the Tehran Process initiated in 1999 promoted the development of appropriate relevant definitions. In response to these discussions, the UNEP and the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) carried out an analysis on options to define low forest cover, which suggested that the most applicable alternatives in the classification of countries are based upon a combination of variables. These include ratios of:

- forest/total land area
- forest and other wooded/total land area
- existing/original forest area
- actual/potential forest area
- forest per capita

17. The Tehran meeting (1999) reported that existing definitions of LFCCs, notably those provisionally used by FAO for the purpose of the meeting (i.e. countries with less than 10 per cent of their land area covered by forests and which was adopted at the meeting), do not reflect the range of conditions and needs of LFCCs; however they may be defined. The meeting concluded that a working definition should take into account both low forest cover in a country as a whole, and low forest conditions in locations in certain parts of a country.

18. Under the Joint Approach, CBD, UNCCD, UNFCCC, UNFF and the Teheran Process secretariat should jointly explore the possibility of adopting one common definition, by considering contributions from other international/regional organizations and/or bodies such as the SBSTTA, the SBSTA, the CST and the FAO, as well as by noting the CPF's work on harmonizing forest-related definitions. To expedite this work, UNCCD has put forward a definition based on its country profiles as part of a concerted, comprehensive effort to provide the most useable and informative definition. A working definition for LFCC that meets the expected outcomes from the Joint Approach is needed.

19. At the international level, the main purpose of the LFCC issue is to identify countries with problems in common in order to most usefully seek solutions and share experiences. The application of the term and its definition should be useful for international policy-makers and donors in order to know whether particular kinds of decisions and projects are appropriate to particular countries.

20. The primary interest in the definition and terminology related to LFCCs is to distinguish between causes of low forest cover – decision-makers/stakeholders want to be able distinguish between countries and their ability, or lack thereof, to sustainably manage their forest resources and those countries that never had any forest resources to start with. This has significant policy implications in terms of options for supplying additional forest goods and services. High populations make higher demands on forest resources and exert greater pressures on them.

21. Critical to the success of the Joint Approach is the mutual acceptance and use of a definition of a ‘low forest cover country’. The current state of the international discussion on streamlining forest definitions under the FAO has considered the definition of LFCCs and its use. This discussion has centred on a choice between straight land area vs. population-based ratios. The UNCCD secretariat has compiled a preliminary data set on forests in the African region based on the UNCCD country profiles submitted to CRIC 3 in May 2005 and which forms the basis for the proposed definition of LFCCs. UNCCD (as a key player under the Joint Approach) is proposing a definition based on (i) an expanded population ratio (forest and other wooded land/population), which also considers (ii) the reported ratio of rehabilitated/degraded lands, and (iii) the poverty rate within the country. This is considered to be more informative especially in relation to development issues. If the difficulties surrounding a natural forest cover baseline can be resolved, then this ‘original forest baseline’ would add valuable information to the proposed definition.

VII. THE PROPOSED ACTION PLAN UNDER THE JOINT APPROACH

22. The priority item for the action plan of the Joint Approach is the enhancement of cooperation and consultation among LFCCs, establishing partnerships with multilateral organizations and instruments, and creating linkages to the donor community. To achieve this priority item, placing the LFCC issue on the political and policy agenda of international deliberations on forests and other development issues, including combating desertification, and formulating long-term approaches and strategies for the forest sector in LFCCs, is an important first step.

23. Following recommendations from the Viterbo workshop related to the potential for synergies through forest landscape management and soil conservation, the consultation on the action plan will consider the implementation activities related to forestry in the NAPs under the UNCCD, NBSAPs under the CBD and NAPAs under the UNFCCC. The latter however concerns only least developed countries, whereas the Joint Approach would be concerned with all LFCCs. The recommendations of UNFF, FAO and CPF regarding the restoration of degraded forest ecosystems and forest-related initiatives in countries of low forest cover shall be equally considered.

24. There are six components to the proposed action plan under the Joint Approach. These are based on further developing the consultation with the Tehran Process; ensuring data collection and reporting under international processes; biodiversity actions; promoting participatory processes; facilitating field projects; and funding.

A. Relationship to the Tehran Process

25. The Joint Approach, as a supportive mechanism, will actively engage the Tehran Process and its secretariat which intends to provide a forum to address the specific needs of developing countries with low forest cover. The Tehran Process secretariat is expected to be action oriented, securing political support and guidance, and serve as the focus for:

- coordination of forestry issues in LFCCs and related work between regional and international organization and potential donors
- collection, analysis and dissemination of data and information
- exchange of information and experience
- capacity building, especially related to the collection of timely and reliable data and its processing into information and knowledge
- quantification of non-marketed goods and services and their reflection in national accounts, including the contribution of trees, forests and woodlands in LFCC to food security
- development of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management for LFCCs, benefiting from the existing processes
- joint research projects on issues affecting LFCCs, particularly the development of models for the management and rehabilitation of natural forests, woodlands, community forestry and participatory forestry
- development of a definition of low forest cover that more precisely identifies countries falling within this category

B. Facilitating field projects

26. In addition to activities outlined under the Tehran Process (see above), the Joint Approach will advocate measures for LFCC governments to apply or develop suitable proposals for field projects related to:

- management and rehabilitation of natural forest, woodland, trees and rangeland resources, taking into account ecosystem management, the needs of the communities (including herders) and their effective involvement in planning and decision-making
- recognition of the importance of non-wood forest products in the rural economy, and the need to make provisions for the improvement of their quality and for adding local value in their processing, as well as their potential for genetic improvement and development
- development of small-scale industries based on wood and non-wood forest products
- conservation of natural ecosystems and unique types of forest in the arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid zones

- the establishment of plantations and planted trees, taking into account the matching of species to site and to objectives and the use of indigenous species where possible, as well as the potential of trees and woodlands to ameliorate the urban environment and provide multiple goods and services
- renewable energy programmes, based on wood, which should include the application of technology to increase efficiency in the utilization of wood energy

C. Data collection activities

27. Internationally agreed forest classifications, and relevant discussions on harmonization of forest-related definitions (FAO, 2004), according to ecological domain, ecological zones and forest types are valid also for LFCCs. However, because in many cases there will be very little forest left to actually manage, data should also be collected on the cause of the change process from forest to other land classes, such as desertification, urbanization, overuse, regeneration and migration. In addition, there is the need to consider fragile ecosystems (e.g., arid lands, mountains) and unique types of forests found in LFCCs. The efforts by the country to rehabilitate these lands should also be documented and reported under the Joint Approach.

28. The development and maintenance of a shared database containing basic information on the status and management of forest resources in LFCCs is an important consideration. Special attention should be given to the inclusion of trees outside forest in national forest assessments in LFCCs and countries that have significant areas of land with low forest cover conditions. Trees outside forest are an important source of woody vegetation in terms of energy, biological diversity, carbon sequestration and its contribution to sustainable livelihoods.

29. Data collection activities could build on the CBD-UNCCD JWP which includes several activities that could enhance the Joint Approach, such as compilation of information on status and trends of dry and sub-humid land biodiversity; best management practices including innovation, knowledge and practices of indigenous and local communities; the development of a joint CBD-CCD website; and the creation of information exchange mechanisms.

D. Dryland biodiversity conservation and sustainable use actions

30. Though small, forests in countries with low forest cover may be of global and national significance for biodiversity. In countries that have undergone extensive forest clearance, remaining forest fragments are likely to act as island refuges for species once widespread but now severely reduced in range and vulnerable to extinction. Nationally, remaining natural forests in LFCCs will almost always be high priorities for conservation as they will hold significant biodiversity not present elsewhere in the country. An even representation of all habitats in national protected area networks is desirable.

31. Under the Joint Approach, and considering the activities under the UNCCD-CBD JWP between the CBD and UNCCD, the partnership for consultation will provide assistance that will:

- help identify priority regions, specific areas of value, countries and forest areas for conservation
- identify common biodiversity challenges in countries with low forest cover

- assist in the development of national biodiversity information management capacities
- support the development of appropriate forest/land/ecosystem management strategies

E. Promoting participatory processes

32. Rehabilitation of forest, woodland, tree and rangeland resources will require the active participation of rural communities. Programmes aiming at reversing deforestation and forest degradation must be formulated and implemented with the effective participation of the concerned population, including local, as well as, indigenous communities. Special consideration should be given to nomadic and transhumant peoples, to forest dwellers and to the role of women and youth. Full use should be made of traditional forest-related knowledge.

33. The Joint Approach will actively encourage the formulation of field projects by LFCCs which support and facilitate an increased role for NGOs, including providing assistance that will:

- strengthen and improve the organization of rural communities and strengthen their capacity for planning and decision-making
- provide technical information and training
- formulate and develop national forest programmes

34. In many LFCCs the institutions concerned with forest and rangelands should be restructured and/or strengthened. Institutional capacity in rural areas needs to support the implementation of policies related to (re)afforestation.

F. Funding and investment

35. The UNCCD COP, by its decision 12/COP.6 (paragraph 5), and noting the recommendations made by participating countries in the Bamako Resolution, has invited the GEF, and called upon the CRIC, the CST and the GM to give, in accordance with their respective mandates, due consideration to the special needs and requirements of LFCCs. Based upon expected consultations under the Joint Approach, the LFCCs are encouraged to seek funds from the existing provisions of the Rio conventions to meet the needs defined in the proposed action plan of the Joint Approach. Donor countries are encouraged to increase their official development assistance to LFCCs for these purposes, with due consideration to avoiding the fragmentation of funding efforts.

36. The LFCCs, with the support of the partners under the Joint Approach and the assistance of other relevant partners such as the World Bank, FAO, UNEP, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), should be encouraged to explore opportunities for further investment in the forest sector of the LFCCs. This support would include making the fullest use of possible investment opportunities in forest-related areas arising from future consultations by the partnership under the Joint Approach.
